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### Corrected Works

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# Corrected Works

Kurt Strahm

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*All slightly corrected 2015-2016.*

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## Introduction

Despondent at the state of the world, I beseeched God for answers, but got nothing.

Since I kept hearing how "God is in the White House" nowadays, I made a pilgrimage to Washington, D.C. The trip began well, on a Peter Pan Express bus playing a bleeped-out TV movie version of Al Pacino in *Scarface*

(you know, I've always thought Michelle what's-her-name is extremely attractive, even when she plays a sweaty "coke head"), then ended badly when Lucifer's last line of defense, the so-called Secret Service, attacked me with stun guns on the sidewalk in front of the White House.

But the joke is on them, because ever since then The Answers just pop into my head.

## How Did Cain and Abel Acquire Their Wives?

Dear Oracle:

When I was 11, my 9 year old brother and I were kicked out of temple Bible Study class after I asked "If Adam and Eve were the first people, where did their sons' wives come from?" Can you tell me where Cain and Abel acquired their wives?

- Fern Fraser, Billabong Beach, Australia

Dear Fern:

"Acquired" is the right word: Cain and Abel ordered their brides from a Sears catalog from a parallel universe, where God created Ed from one of Ava's ribs, and Ava begat Betty and Connie. Both the catalog and brides (and a candy-apple red 1959 Cadillac Coupe de Ville with fins like a whale) were delivered through a wormhole created in the chaos a few seconds after the Creation. The entrance to the wormhole was disguised by bushes and a big rock you had to push out of the way, like Zorro's

hideout or the cave where Jesus resurrected himself. Anyway, Cain, Abel, Betty and Connie all lived happily ever after. I think. I've never actually read the Bible, but it's so popular it must have a happy ending, right?

- A. O.

## Craunch the Marmoset?

Dear Oracle:

The textbooks are very old at my son's grade school. He came across the phrase "craunch the marmoset" in a history book, and the porn alarm went off when he tried to look it up on the school's Internet computer. Can you please tell us what it means before he gets into more trouble?

- Harvey Klum, Festus, Missouri

Dear Harvey:

A "frontier entrepreneur" vocabulary grew out of centuries of contact between European entrepreneurs -- conquistadors, trappers, slavers, whalers, etc. -- and the peoples of the New World. While merchants to the aristocracy suffered minor discomforts scouring the corners of the civilized world for rare delicacies, frontier entrepreneurs were forced to communicate with one primitive culture after another for their very survival, all of them ignorant of the most basic principles of modern real estate, theology and hygiene -- e.g., that only "the thickest slathers of perfume" and "blankets on which the

Holy Spirit has coughed" offered protection against disease and the everlasting flames of hell.

The phrase "craunch the marmoset" is believed to be a 19th century Jamaican variation of the trapper expression "scrunch the marmot." Marmot trappers in the Canadian Rockies would dig up hibernating colonies of the docile rodents, then slaughter and skin them. Nearing the end of a hard winter, during which they'd likely been forced to eat their sled dogs (trappers discarded marmot meat, claiming its odor to be "more stenchful than moose rutting in a wallow"), they would stow the pelts under a tarp and drag their sled hundreds of miles to a trading post. After a long day of dragging, with nothing but rotgut whiskey and snow buzzards for company, they would crawl under the pelts and call out until a friendly native arrived to tighten the tarp. Over time -- after much gesturing, confusion, and more than one accidental choking -- the onomatopoeic term "scrunch" emerged as the universal description for the desired action, and "scrunch the marmot" came into common use.

While the phrase never reached the anthem-like heights of other colonial odes to bondage like Australia's *Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport*, marmot-pelt stoles were all the rage in London for a time, and their price climbed so high that entrepreneurs began substituting the thick winter fur of sewer rats. Flooded by fakes, the market collapsed. It wasn't long before ladies of easy virtue were sashaying up and down the foggy banks of the Thames draped in rat-pelt stoles, and the phrase "scrunch the marmot" took on a whole new meaning.

- A. O.

## How Many Men Are in a Military Division?

Dear Oracle:

My roommate Colonel Lamprey retired from the Connecticut National Guard when he turned 80, six years ago. We had a terrible argument last week, just before he was recalled to serve in Iraq. I feel terrible, and hope you can give me an answer I can include in my next Red Cross letter to the Colonel. How many men are in a military division?

- Amelia Leister-Phizer, Bullet Hill Retirement Village, Southbury, Connecticut

Dear Amelia:

(I hope the Colonel knows how lucky he is. I would gladly sacrifice my life for my president if I could, but I've already signed my cadaver over to the Mayo Clinic -- so they can slice me up like deli meat and find the source of my oracular ability -- and they've made it clear they expect me to be in one piece when I arrive.)

The number of troops in a division depends on the number system employed by the military force. For instance, most branches of the ancient Babylonian military used the sexagesimal number system, based on the number 60: the average number of stones a crowd had to throw to drive the demons from a person whose sex was hard to guess (not an uncommon incident in those days, when everyone wore skirts). A division in the regular Babylonian army consisted of  $60 * 60$ -man companies, or 3600 soldiers

total, not including assorted wives, acrobats, young boys, goats and other morale-boosting camp followers. But the Babylonian special forces known as the Green Skirts employed a system based on the number 53: the number of enemy skulls that could be stowed in a pouch made from a single ox hide. (Note that this unit of measure was called a "skull-full," even though "hide-full" or "full-o-skulls" would have made more sense.)

A division of Green Skirts consisted of  $2371 * 53$ -man companies, 2371 being the number of ox hides it took to cover the central ziggurat of Babylon when it rained, for a total of 125,663 men. Though it may seem strange that special forces would travel in such massive armies, their commanders believed in a policy of "overwhelming force."

The most successful tactic of the Green Skirts, used in their decisive battle with the ur-Persians, was to dip their skirts in a vat of mercury and, once in position under the blazing noonday sun, moon their enemies en masse. Needless to say, the focused light thrown from the massive reflector formed by all those mirrored asses burned through the ur-Persians like butter, and the Green Skirts claimed victory before dinner time. Unfortunately, the mercury had a ruinous effect on the Green Skirts' genitals, and they collectively fathered but three children, each with three eyes, not one of them usefully placed.

- A. O.

## How Did George Bush Jr. Get To Be King of the World?

Dear Oracle:

How did Bush get to be King of the World?

I just read on some web site that he's a "purposefully ignorant, bitter little idiot." How can U.S. voters trust the world to such a "reckless adolescent" while my parents ground me just for going to the mall with Amber? I ask because I figure if he can be the president, someday I can too.

(And when I do, my parents are gonna be really, really sorry, and find out it's not so much fun when THEY'RE the ones locked in their room with nothing to do but beg every nerd they meet on the Internet for a ride to Canada so they can be free!)

- Tiffany Marx, 16 years old, Sparks, Nevada

Dear Tiffany:

(I'm going to ask you to promise me: if you do get a ride to Canada, do not even think about buying any cheap prescription drugs when you get there -- they've all been watered down to keep the highly strung Canadians from going off like Jack in *The Shining*. And that reminds me: whatever you do, don't stay at one of those quaint log cabin motels on the way. I stayed in one once, and it was "redrum" and cold sweat nightmares with strangling vines

from the second the sun went down. Maybe it was spores from the mold that grows in every shady nook and cranny up there, but whatever it was, it took a few weeks before I could close my eyes again.)

I'm sorry Tiffany, but precocious as you obviously are, your chances of becoming president are slim. Few know it, but George W. Bush was destined to become president. He is the 15th reincarnation of the Grand Annihilator of Jerusalem (previous G.A.J.s include Vlad the Impaler and Jeru the Damager). Like the Dalai Lama, Bush was removed from the world for training after he was identified by religious talent scouts. He wasn't doing drugs and chasing skirts to avoid Vietnam way back then, as the liberal media would have you believe. The so-called "holes in his resume" were filled with religious instruction, from the wisdom of the ancients encoded in the *Morals and Dogma* of the Masons to the simple folk wisdom of self-help best sellers like *Born Again, or Just Recycled?* According to his official biography (secret, like other Bush administration documents, until "a new age has dawned"):

...Thus He was literally touched by angels, and is uniquely qualified by Divine and Natural Law to guide America to its ultimate destiny as the Promised Land. When the final battle is launched there will be just two sides to choose from: (1) the righteous, who realize that this world is a filthy mirage that deserves to be cauterized like a boil, or (2) the heathens who deny the obvious Truth of Scripture and are more attached to their sunlight, skin and iPod than to God. And if God's gift of science has taught us anything, it's that two things can't occupy the same place at the same time. Therefore, for the Kingdom of Heaven to emerge, the

United States of America must be erased. The President is firmly in charge and on track to deliver us unto the Lord! Say Hallelujah!

Sorry, I don't mean to scare you Tiffany, but it sounds like you're going to have to choose sides, or make sure you're over the border into frigid Canada, where the hot breath of Satan feels like a summer breeze.

- A. O.

### Condi Rice Is HOT!

Dear Oracle:

Me and my frat bro's think Condi Rice is HOT! I hear she went to Stanford, so I bet my bro's a keg of Bud Light she made Playboy's "Girls of the Pac 10" way back when.

Then my bro' Dwayne says she looks a little like George Bush (and both of them look like the "What, Me Worry?" guy), so he bet us a keg of Coors they're related.

Then my bro' Washington bet us a keg of Olde English 800 that George Jefferson -- he's the president who had the black girlfriend, right? -- is their great-great grand-daddy.

I can barely keep track of all the bets, and we already started drinking the kegs, and... can you settle the bets, dude? I think I'm gonna hurl...

- Bifford "The Biffer" Squalls, Jr., Lincoln, Nebraska

Dear Biffer:

First, let me state that I do NOT referee drunken trivia contests (especially when I'm not invited to the party), so you should direct your George Jefferson scholar-Playmate questions elsewhere.

As for your second question, though it may seem tasteless -- an insult to both President Bush and Secretary of State Rice -- it is anything but: America was built on the backs of slaves, and we owe their memory a frank and open discussion of the facts, not some whitewashed, virgin-*Birth of a Nation* fantasy.

And the sickening fact is that white slave masters did take carnal advantage of their black human property, producing children of mixed race who were taken in by black kinfolk and shunned by white relations.

Anyway, as far as I know, Bush and Rice are not related. While there are a lot of black people with the last name Bush, and Texas does grow a lot of cotton, and both George W. and his brother Jeb do seem unusually comfortable in the swampy climes of the unrepentant South, I have no idea if the Bush clan made its fortune from slavery.

Freed slaves -- robbed of their real names and ancestry -- could name themselves after someone they admired, or more likely in the case of "Bush," the lonely little tree they saw after escaping the plantation just before dawn, set aflame by the rising sun and still crowned by the North Star, lighting the way to Canada.

Where, after traveling hundreds of miles underground -- dodging upstanding citizens ready to ship them back to hell -- and finally crossing the border, the fugitives might emerge into the light and rejoice in their right, as free human beings, to freeze their ass off like anyone else!

- A. O.

### How Do They Keep Dick Cheney Alive?

Dear Oracle:

How do they keep Vice President Cheney alive? Isn't he like 500 years old, or something?

- Denzel Boone, Cooter, Missouri

Dear Denzel:

Your curiosity is not unusual -- I've received more letters on this topic in the past year than any other, asking about rumors linking the Vice President to ancient blood cults, and to prehistoric extinctions blamed in native legend on the Chay-uh-Nay, a malevolent wind spirit that "set upon the mammoth beasts and devoured them where they stood, so their bones shivered whitely for a moment amidst the meat bees, then rattled to the dirt."

The truth is, Vice President Cheney's exact age is unknown because his father never married his mother. Technically, this makes him a bastard -- though of course we all know him to be above reproach, the sober Wally Cleaver to President Bush's mischievous Eddie Haskell --

and in the unforgiving frontier days when he was born, bastard births were not recorded. (Estimates of the Vice President's age, by an informal panel of experts assembled last night at Gurke's G Spot, a nearby lounge, ranged from 130 to 165.)

We do know that Mr. Cheney was born in what became the Wyoming Territory, to a woman called Deadeye Daisy Cheney, who rose from "varmint plinker" (exterminating prairie dogs with a slingshot) to run a chain of mixed-meat jerky stands along the route of the transcontinental railroad. It was only his mother's hard work and sacrifice that saved Mr. Cheney from the typical fate of a bastard, cleaning spittoons or geeking for medicine shows.

So how is the Vice President kept alive through all his heart attacks and other ailments?

With fresh organs from the War on Terror.

The organs are harvested from dying insurgents and terrorists, then flown fresh daily from the Middle East to a secret medical facility in Virginia. There, in a former intensive-care nursery, rows of cribs hold hearts, livers, spleens, etc., ready for implantation.

Though the transplant program runs with typical Bush administration efficiency, there have been a few screw-ups, like the time the janitor accidentally turned off power to the nursery, and surgeons had to implant the heart of a pig from a nearby farm in the Vice President -- alongside the leaking terrorist heart already there -- to get him through a televised campaign debate.

That is why the Vice President -- renowned for his charming but razor-sharp debating style -- was "bedah, bedah, bedahing" like Porky Pig during the debate: his Islamo-fascist heart was rejecting his pork heart.

Luckily, soon after the debate was over, sturdier organs became available when what may have been the last Euphrates crocodile on earth was run over by a speeding Humvee in the marshlands of southern Iraq. The Euphrates crocodile is an ancient creature, with 6 hearts, 7 stomachs and 3 livers, and the Vice President came out of surgery like his old self -- full of piss, vinegar and crocodile parts.

- A. O.

### Can You Help Me & Fatima Get Back on Track?

Dear Oracle:

My dear young wife Fatima and I had our hearts broken when our little dog Fester (like Lester, but with an F) died. We break down crying every time we see his hairs stuck to the sofa or look in his bedroom, where he lies "in state" in a beer cooler full of ice, with his stumpy little legs shot up in the air.

I was a sportswriter for a local paper until my legs went stiff (from inhaling all the steroids steaming off athletes in locker rooms?) and forced me to retire. Fester and his shenanigans were a constant comfort to me, and Fatima

takes his death even harder, what with him the only soul in the trailer park who could make out her native tongue.

(That tongue is why Fester is not Lester -- poor Fatima couldn't pronounce an L to save her life. It makes you wonder: what kind of culture produces a language so cold its speakers can't even pronounce the word Love? I drilled her for days before giving up, worried she might choke trying to pronounce "Leave me alone, Floyd!")

Some days Fatima and I just lay in our adjustable beds and listen to the farm report on the radio, the wind banging the screen door back and forth, and gravel trucks rumbling down the highway. The sink is full of dirty dishes, dust bunnies drift like clouds across the floor, and I nearly got stuck in a giant spider web on the way to the bathroom.

Oracle, I'm worried that if we don't get going soon we may come to a ghastly end. Can you suggest a way for us to pick ourselves up and get back on track?

- Floyd & Fatima Fatback, Lost World Trailer Park, Oroville, California

Dear Floyd & Fatima:

Floyd, it sounds like your life has lost its purpose since Fester died.

You could buy one of those "purpose driven life" bestsellers and adopt its strategies, but why bother when necessity is the most powerful purpose on earth, and you need to do a few things right away, like: dispose of Fester's



remains and clean your trailer before it's condemned and towed to the dump.

Like most people, I used to see cleaning as a dull and thankless task -- until I began to see it as physical exercise, another boring activity. Strangely enough, combining two unpleasant tasks makes it half as hard to get started.

But sometimes a clean home and healthy body are not purpose enough, and it helps to add a spiritual element to the process. My own wood-veneer floor is so sensitive that I have to get down on hands & knees and wipe it spot by spot with cleaning fluid, then buff the spots dry.

Though it takes a few minutes to get past the discomfort of being on all fours (something that God and the mop industry went out of their way to help us escape), you are soon rewarded with the pure physical elation of rhythmic movement, the same as that experienced by a pilgrim crawling to a remote shrine, or by a cleaning woman scrubbing the floors of a beautiful mansion.

In fact I just found a note in a drawer (the handwriting looks like mine but, oddly, leans back left-handed):

I have finally "come down" from an intense cleaning experience. I was a single bristle in a glorious cleaning machine, a joyous army of jumpsuited janitors mopping and buffing in unison like gymnasts at a fascist pageant, polishing every surface of the massive stadium to a shine so bright we had to rest our eyes high in the sky... where a formation of five cruise missiles, the chrome fingernails of a giant robotic hand reached over the horizon, raked the sky as they turned to approach, lost in

the blinding glare, so that we had to stand still as statues until the cold nails found our spine and a voice older than light itself hissed at the nape of our neck "Do you understand why we've come? Why the antelope's last look at the lion is full of love? No matter, you will know soon enough..."

I still don't know if it was the physical effort or the cleaning fluid that triggered this experience, but either way: always read the warning label before using solvents in a closed room!

Note that cleaning shiny surfaces like floors and tile makes a spiritual tripling of purpose easy: just as tree sap has produced more convincing images of the Virgin Mary than the whole history of art, rubbing a shiny surface -- like wiping a foggy window -- can open a portal into the spirit world. And since Fester has not been gone long, it should be easy to call his wet nosed spirit to the window.

I realize, Floyd, that your stiff legs might make cleaning floors difficult, but perhaps you could lay face-down on a towel and have Fatima push you across the floor like a mop?

- A. O.

## My Neighbors Are Inconsiderate Jerks!

Dear Oracle:

My next door neighbors are jerks -- they let their little psycho dog bark all the time, and it's about to drive me batty!

And they're suspicious, too: the guy must be 90, and the woman -- dressed in one of those big black foreign tent things, so nothing but her eyes and sneakers show -- must be young, and quite a specimen, because she runs to and from the supermarket every day, a good three miles down the road.

Her smoldering eyes remind me of my ex-girlfriend Carla -- and that's a good memory, even if she did leave me when her pastor called our love "an abomination" -- but I'm worried she's got a fertilizer bomb strapped on under that thing! I work security at the Cinema 6, so thinking about these things is not just a hobby for me.

Anyway, I heard there's a place in Iran, or one of those countries, where you can order a "religious edict" that makes it legal to exterminate an infidel.

If ever there was an infidel, this dog is it!

I have mail ordered pepper spray, nunchucks and sports bras before, but nothing like this. Can you help me find one of these places?

*(A.O.: I received an update from Pat a week later:)*

Thanks, but you can forget my question. The dog was on the loose a few days ago, and I guess it got in my garbage, because I found chicken bones and KFC bags scattered all over the driveway -- and I haven't heard a peep out of the little monster since then!

Hopefully, as what's-his-name used to say, "Problem solved."

- Pat Alvarez, Oroville, California

Dear Pat:

(You don't happen to live in Lost World Trailer Park, do you? Since I had my answer half done before your update, here it is.)

I'm sure you can buy a religious edict for just about anything. I'm an ordained minister myself, of a New York State-certified lottery cult, and as far as I know nothing prevents me from issuing edicts, performing weddings, and entertaining at bar and bat mitzvahs. But I'm not sure the edicts, especially ones obtained overseas, are recognized by U.S. courts yet.

And though I suppose I should scold you for your casual attitude toward accidental chicken bone choking, I have lived near jerks with obnoxious dogs, and I am overjoyed for you! In fact I'm going to issue a retroactive religious edict right now:

By the authority vested in me by the State of New York, I do hereby declare that it is clearly God's will that thou -- Pat Alvarez of Oroville, California -- shalt leave the lid off your garbage can, such that any and all infidel canines might choke on their vile appetites and be dispatched to hell!

Now that we've taken care of the moral niceties, Pat, we can look forward to the future: I've read that all domestic dogs are descended from a single Siberian wolf pack, so it should be a simple matter to start over and breed dogs without vocal cords.

If that works out, some day we can take the same approach with their owners and, God willing, prune jerks from the genome!

- A. O.

## How Should I Deal with Insolent Strangers?

Dear Oracle:

What should I do when an insolent stranger with a cellphone talks at me and acts like I'm not there? I want to kill them, but understand that is taboo here in America, even if the insolent stranger deserves it!

That is too bad, because I was president of the Women's Martial Arts Federation of Iran before I came to the USA and opened Farzy's Shaolin Kung Fu Academy here in Irvine. I have the ability to kill from a distance, so all I have to do is look at you, and you are dead!

(If you have room, can you announce that I am now also a certified feng shui consultant? All I have to do is look at furniture, and it arranges itself!)

- Farzaneh "Farzy" Hosseinkhan, Irvine, California

Dear Farzy:

Cellphones seem to give users the feeling they are isolated in some sort of "phone booth" or that the people around them are just cardboard props. In fact, as I stood in line for coffee this morning, a young woman barked into her phone inches from my head, apparently resuming a bitter argument that began long ago: "...well that's typical, Ma... you treat your son like a prince, but you treat me like garbage... like I don't exist!"

My only reward for this assault was imagining her mother at the other end...

...lipstick smeared in a snarl, sitting in a worn bathrobe at the kitchen table chain smoking, drinking scotch and taking less care each year to hide the harpy within, until there she sits slumped on the charred stump of an electrocuted tree: gurgling, flexing leather wings and bobbing side to side as wisps of smoke rise from her wig, singed by the cigarette parked near her ear so she can hear the tiny whine of its cancerous soul, burning back to life...

What you should do, Farzy, is look the offending stranger in the eye (if you can do that without killing them) and

ask: "Since you are not talking TO me, could you quit talking AT me?"

If that doesn't work, send a donation to me. I've been working on a software "worm" that can crawl into a cellphone and, when given the order, short-circuit and melt it like cheese.

I've already tested the effect in my bathtub lab, and am happy to report that a melting cellphone makes an incredible stink that clings to everything it touches -- even worse than the sardine casserole that exploded in my kitchen lab!

It took me a week and three cans of air freshener to subdue the odor, so I can guarantee you that if those "insolent strangers" do not start displaying some common courtesy, it is just a matter of time before they find out why skunks have such a hard time making friends!

- A. O.

## How Can I Get Mean People to Leave Me Alone?

Dear Oracle:

Kids in school are always picking on me, even the girls. They call me "Timmy-wimmy" and say stuff like "you stink" and "your family stinks," then push me on the ground and laugh at me.

My mom puts garlic in everything we eat, and has me and my sister Winnie use garlic toothpaste and shampoo -- the kids at school call Winnie "the wampire" -- so I wonder if we really do smell. I want to stop the garlic, but I'm afraid to ask mom because she's been crying and chewing on her garlic necklace ever since dad left to live with Uncle Rodney in San Francisco.

So I have two questions: should I ask my mom to let us quit the garlic, and how can I get mean people to leave me alone?

- Timmy Zoroaster McNichols, Jr., 12, Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Timmy:

First of all, no matter what your mother's told you, "Timmy" is not a boy's name. "Tim" is alright, but since you already have a great nickname buried in your name -- the "Roaster" in Zoroaster -- you would be crazy not to use it instead. In fact, I'm going to call you Roaster here, and help you take that first step toward self esteem.

The answer to your first question is easy: Yes, do ask your mother to let go of the garlic. It's not fair of her to turn you kids into pariahs, and she might have more luck with relationships if she didn't smell like a pizza oven. You do want a new daddy, don't you Roaster? The sooner you can freshen up your mother, the sooner you'll have one.

As for mean people, you have three alternatives:

1) You can use your mom's credit card to order a semi-automatic rifle, ammo, and a duffel bag from Wal-Mart's

web site and have them delivered overnight. Then paint "Roaster" on your forehead when you get to school, so your tormentors can beg you for mercy by name while you trace their outline with barely controlled bursts from the rifle.

The problem with this approach is that you will have to relive those few minutes of satisfaction over and over for the rest of your life, as you are abused around the clock by hardened sociopaths at some cold and dreary state prison. Do you have good visualization skills, Roaster? Do you think you can picture a pretty field of flowers while someone stomps on your fingers? If so, this may be the alternative for you.

2) You can use prayer to enrich your suffering. When a bully starts picking on you, look them in the eye and say "I am going to pray for you, my friend..." with all the sad solemnity you can muster, then turn around and walk away. This technique may throw the bully off balance long enough to let you escape, so you'll have more time to pray he gets run over by a truck before you see him again.

Even if this does not save you, it can help you to feel you're "suffering for a reason" -- for bringing the Word of God to a sinner. That may seem like small satisfaction, but over time -- after enough humiliation, prayer and beatings -- the arrows will lose their sting, and you will enter the state of grace called "dementia," just a few cold miles short of heaven.

3) You can face reality. Roaster, it's just another "fact of life" -- I assume your father told you about those facts before he left? -- that some people are mean. Nature

abhors weakness, and like hyenas skulking at the edge of an antelope herd on the Serengeti, bullies exist to keep the rest of us from becoming too weak to fend for ourselves.

Sure, it would be nice to spend all day sitting around eating and watching TV, but pretty soon everyone would be too bloated and weak to get up. Cows would chew their cud in the middle of traffic, like you were in Calcutta. Viruses would infest computer chips on trucks and turn them into 18 wheeled killers, like you were in a bad horror movie. And people would hire migrants from poor countries to be servants and do all the dirty work, like you were in some kind of feudal... Well, maybe that's not a good example.

So you need to toughen up, Roaster, at least enough to avoid the bullies, so you can bide your time until that day in the near future when -- after all the rhinos, sharks and bears have been hunted to extinction -- bullies will be hunted for their organs, which contain massive amounts of hormones, to supply Asia's new millionaires with aphrodisiacs.

And if that thought doesn't warm you, geneticists say that at some point the Y (male) chromosome will come apart like a cheap tire on a hot freeway and men will become extinct, so the world can finally become the female utopia women have dreamed of since the first greasy haired caveman subjected a cavewoman to the humiliations women have endured ever since. I'll bet the bullies called you "a girl" along with their other taunts, didn't they, as though there's something shameful in being one?

When the female utopia arrives, womb-like appliances will free women from the slavery of pregnancy. Beauty and fashion magazines will disappear as women give up the eating disorders and tortured fashions forced on them by men. Broad avenues will be lined with massive statues of female shamans, soothsayers and suffragettes -- who had been maligned as witches and crones by cabals of withered old men jealous of their abilities. Mount Rushmore will be re-sculpted to depict Sacagawea, Eleanor Roosevelt, Oprah Winfrey, and Reese Witherspoon (as the young feminist Vanessa Lutz in the movie *Freeway*). The only men left will be war criminals and harassing packs of drunken frat boys and their corporate brethren, stuffed and mounted in natural history museums as evidence of how far we've come from the caves.

Just imagine that glorious day, Roaster, when open, loving and level headed women will finally be free to share each other's burdens, triumphs and dreams; when the human race will finally fulfill its potential; and when "Timmy" will finally be considered a masculine name!

- A. O.

## What Are the Isles of Pancreas?

Dear Oracle:

What are the "Isles of Pancreas?"

I have to write a report, but my computer died and my dad says we can't buy a new one until he talks Uncle Tim into signing over his life insurance. It's like we can't afford for

me to be smart any more! He says I can use the computers at school or go to the library...

As if!! Like I'm gonna sit with the poor nerds and catch their cooties? Hel-lo?!

- Latashanisha McNichols, 12, San Francisco, California

Dear Latashanisha:

Yes, of course I can locate the Isles of Pancreas for you. They are a chain of islands just off the Southern California coast known for their massive guano mines, worked by one eyed brutes spawned in a cloning lab from a genetic cocktail of the frozen essences of Britney Spears, Charlton Heston and a howler monkey.

Sorry, Latashanisha... just kidding! I know I shouldn't do that, but sometimes the weight of responsibility gets to me, and I have to let off steam. By the way, why do I get so many letters from kids like you? Are your parents and teachers so afraid of you that I'm the only adult with the nerve to contradict your reckless friends?

Seriously, I am worried about you kids. And though I naturally have more insight into the problems boys face, that may change soon: I was shocked to find that all the soy products I've been eating contain massive amounts of estrogen! I have no desire to find out what cramps and bloating feel like, so of course I'm going to quit, but I've heard such horror stories about "hot flashes" that I'm afraid to quit cold turkey (and besides, I still have \$15 worth of "tofurky" in the refrigerator).

I was going to scold you for picking on poor nerds, Latashanisha, but you will understand suffering soon enough, when you start barreling over the hormonal waterfalls all teenagers face.

Though you don't mention your mother, I hope you have a female role model, perhaps a gym teacher, who's explained the "facts of life" to you? Too many young women find out too late that boys will say anything to get what they want, then leave the girl holding the bag -- that is, the baby -- whose face will remind her every single day of the honey dripping weasel who wormed his way into her "baby cave" (they still use that term in health class, don't they?), then triggered a rockslide and left her to dig herself out.

And even the rare adolescent male who is ethical seems as unthinking as ever, happy to let life be something that just happens to him -- so all he has to worry about is putting one foot in front of the other like a mule moving rocks over a scorched desert mountain, maybe fixated on getting that next drink of water, but not once in its life considering what it means to be a mule, a long eared genetic dead end!

Excuse me, Latashanisha, I guess this is getting a little too philosophical for someone your age, but my point is that you kids -- with your brains stewing in hormones, fast food grease and acne medication -- can't think straight. And just when you should be deeply immersed in thought, preparing for adulthood, because there is no true experience of life without the awareness thought provides. (Of course you will have to short-circuit that paralyzing awareness just to function at some point, but that's what "substance abuse" and corporate careers are for.)

The truth, Latashanisha, is that the Isles of Pancreas are those bright specks you see after looking into the spotlight they shine in your mouth at the dentist's office. The Isles are named after Saint Pancreas, the leader of a scientifically inclined priestly order dispatched to Brazil in the 16th century, and the father of modern dentistry.

When the priest-scientists were not testing methods of salvation powerful enough to pierce the most savage native heart -- e.g., baptism by keelhauling; baptism by being towed across a piranha pool on a sinking slab of beef; baptism by burial to the neck in a red ant mound, with salt poured on the head to attract wild cattle with rough tongues -- they ran clinical trials to confirm the painkilling power of faith, by comparing the average number of times converts passed out while having all their teeth pulled (6), to the average for a control group of kidnapped heathens (7).

Thanks to Saint Pancreas, countless natives were Saved (and introduced to the soothing benefits of a gummable, meat-free diet) and dentistry emerged from its Dark Ages.

Also note that the drug novocaine is named after a Brazilian novitiate and dental assistant named Heather Caine. Some claim that the drug cocaine was named for her sister Coco, a Manaus Opera diva who fell in love with the son of a rubber baron and disappeared up the Amazon into the coca-rich foothills of Peru.

It's said that the couple soon went native, and that their cocaine-addicted descendants still dart through the jungle, buzzing like excited flies as they watch enormous

bulldozers groan through the steaming trees, scraping off everything but a few inches of mud -- ready to yield a few years of cattle grazing before it hardens to impermeable clay -- and raking the cut lawn that used to be the Amazon into a nice neat pile at the foot of the Andes.

So think of Saint Pancreas and the Amazon the next time you bite into a hamburger, Latashanisha -- both its beef, and your teeth, would not be the same without them. As for me, I'll think of your name every time I leave the dentist's office and need to work the novocaine out of my jaw!

- A. O.

### Please Help My Love Disorder!

Dear Mr. Oracle:

(Accidental is an unusual name. Were your parents hippies?)

You know that Doctor Philipe, PhD, who gives advice on Public TV? I have mailed him several letters asking for help, but he has not answered a single one. He is quite the handsome hunk, and acts all sensitive and concerned on TV, but he is nothing but a stuck-up phony! So I am turning to you, Mr. Oracle, for answers.

I have a love disorder that, if someone looks a certain way, makes me fall madly in love with them. It doesn't matter if they're meaner than Hannibal the cannibal inside, I would still love them -- like I still love Doctor Philipe!

Something about them makes me feel like I'm in heaven. I know it's stupid, because what would I do if we were together? Sit around and stare at him as the light falls just-so on his scars and razor stubble? Inhale deep lungfuls of his musky scent as he thrashes and screams in his sleep, reliving all the horrible things he's done in wars, business deals and football games?

So can you give me some answers about this painful condition? I have a good feeling about you, Accidental -- if I can call you that; I feel closer to you already -- and I just know you are not a stuck-up jerk like Doctor Philipe!

Oh God, please help me... I still love him!

- Estrella Weeks, Enid, Oklahoma

Dear Estrella:

(It hurts a little to be your backup guru. And no, my parents were not hippies, according to Headmistress Zympf at the orphanage, but "a sturdy couple overwhelmed by the prospect of raising such an unusual child.")

Yes I have seen "Doctor" Philipe on TV, and I'm always shocked to find him still on the air. I can only conclude that he's employed the same cheap charisma he uses to hypnotize viewers -- amplified by those blindingly white, horse-like teeth and the empty, soothing words that leave his lips like bubbles rising in a lava lamp -- to seduce some lonely member of the Public TV board of directors. He reminds me of a revival-tent faith healer, except that he



doesn't even bother to trot out crutch-dropping cripples to prove the efficacy of his New Age snake oil.

Your love disorder is not uncommon, Estrella; our DNA makes us all slaves to desire. The "love" you feel is actually a chemical reaction, no different than salivating in response to a sensuous food, say a pink T-bone steak dripping fat on charcoal with the sibilant hiss of lava flowing into the ocean, and the aroma of the steer's barbecued spirit returning to the delicious ether from whence it came.

And speaking of juicy steaks, scientists used to believe that love disorders could be treated with food, but "eating your way out" has proved a poor strategy, because all the steak, cheese and chocolate in the world, despite the insulation they add to your body, cannot shield you from desire.

So you should first try the standard treatments: aversion therapy, electroshock, and the so-called "love lobotomy," during which technicians place you in a brain scanner and play romantic music, then vaporize responsive lobes with a laser.

If they fail, I suggest you confront your demons directly, in the form of the great "Doctor" Philipe. I just happen to know that he leaves the Public TV soundstage on West 67th Street here in New York shortly before sunset each Tuesday and Friday evening. Contact me before you go, and I'll bring my video camera to record your meeting.

When the "Doctor" comes out of the building, grab him firmly by the arm and yell your questions so the camera

can pick them up. Ask him why he did not answer your letters, and if the school of dental cosmetology that bleaches his teeth also awarded his PhD.

I'm sure your intense interest in his personal life will win him over and, as the sun sets over Central Park, he will invite you into his limo and on to an elegant bistro, where you will nibble succulent legs of lobster and lamb, and share intimacies as you sip wine...

...wept from vines throbbing with the blood of knights lashed to horses blinded in battle, teetering six-legged monstrosities that brayed all the way from Jerusalem, then sheltered one night at a remote abbey run by an ancient order of assassins who served them, as morning's first light came burning across the Balkans, headfirst unto the cracked throat of the earth, to wet that very vineyard...

Either that, or you will see the "Doctor" for the transparent fraud he is, drown your sorrows with a few hot dogs from a sidewalk cart, and learn to resist the temptation that lurks in your genes.

- A. O.

## Can You Explain Our Anger to Joe Blow?

Dear Oracle:

Tensions between the West and the Muslim world remain high. (If you wanted more oil, why not just ask? We have so much here that it's a nuisance, bubbling up on tennis

courts and in the servants' quarters, dirtying the maids' uniforms. I am so happy Halliburton is moving to the UAE; as faithful viziers to the Bush and Cheney clans, I am sure they have experience with such problems.)

I have many friends in America, especially Texas! God willing, I will make the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders my wives, when I have enough goats for the outrageous bride price demanded by the Cowboys.

But Americans do not understand why we are so upset, and I'm tired of being labeled a "hot head" who's heated up for no good reason. Can you explain our anger in terms the average "Joe Blow" can understand?

- Sheik Djibouti, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Dear Sheik:

Yes, I think I can explain to the average American what's "put the bee in your bonnet":

Islam was born in the desert, where life is hard and unforgiving, and tempers are quick to flare. Here in America, look no further than the parched barrens of the west for a similar environment.

Imagine you're a cowboy in the Arizona Territory in the 19th century, and you and your horse -- your partner and confidante, who practically lives in between your legs -- spend all day chasing cattle through hot dusty hills full of cactus and rattlesnakes, and build up a powerful thirst. Then just as you pull up to a saloon in town, some whiskey soaked deadbeat calls your horse a "swayback, donkey

faced, mule-brain mutt." Do you think you'd take kindly to that, forget the feelings of your horse?

Or imagine you're a Mormon fundamentalist here in the 21st century. You have taken on every spare female in the county and spread your precious seed thin as a spider web to produce dozens of obedient Josephs and Josephines -- out of nothing but the goodness of your heart -- when some big city divorcée driving to California stops at the village laundromat and tells your wives all about the outside world, where women wear next to nothing, or police uniforms, or whatever they want, and give their kids names like Angelina, Leonardo, and even Lil' Bow Wow. Would you take kindly to that, when you know all it takes is one weed to start cracking the foundation of everything you've built?

Or for the most likely case, imagine yourself drifting from one miserable job to another all over the southwest, living out of an old pickup truck and dumpy motels full of noisy lowlifes and prostitutes, and so poor you can barely afford to drink yourself to sleep every night.

Then ask yourself: if you came across a haughty Danish couple in a luxury car, out of gas in the middle of the desert, wearing stuff worth more than everything you've ever owned, and barking at you in their arrogant foreign gobbledygook like they're the King & Queen of Wherever They Go, wouldn't you be tempted to rob and leave them for the buzzards if you could get away with it, or at least look the other way if you saw some biker gang do it?

So there you have it, Sheik: an explanation any "Joe Blow" can understand, no matter where they're from.

And by the way, if you are lucky enough to make the Cheerleaders your wives, I trust you understand they won't be content to sit around filing their nails while they wait for your next conjugal visit?

Because they are highly trained dance professionals, I suggest you hire an instructor to keep them busy working on routines. I understand MC Hammer has been living in a van behind a Las Vegas carwash for the past few years. I'm sure you could lure him to the UAE, and that he'd soon fall into the rhythm of life there, running dance classes in the morning and watching *I Dream of Jeannie* reruns in the afternoon with the rest of your male staff. That is, your eunuchs.

Hammer probably wouldn't be too happy about the traditional desert rite he'd have to undergo to work in your harem -- who in their right mind, after all, would enjoy choosing between a scimitar and a sand viper when it comes to that region of the anatomy? -- but he should be able to adapt. After all, his biggest hit was *U Can't Touch This*.

- A. O.

### Forget the Wife, Can I Get My Life Back?

Dear Oracle:

12 years ago I bought a computer, thinking it would improve my life. Soon after that my wife left me.

She was the woman of my dreams, perfect in every way. Her betrayal turned my heart to glass, then shattered it! I carried the splinters for years, making my flesh scream at the slightest touch, ruined for love. It was not until four years ago that I finally managed to crate her memory and ship it toward shores so distant it could not return to haunt me.

And I lost interest in all the things that used to bring me satisfaction, like breeding hedgehogs (you'd be surprised at how large they can get -- big enough to give a Brahman bull pause -- before their rib cage starts to buckle from the weight) and building microscopic models of the hedge maze where Marie Antoinette's head rolled from the guillotine.

Now I stare at a computer screen all day every day, working to make more money so I can buy more computers. I am stuck on a treadmill that moves faster and faster, but goes nowhere. My question is: can I get my life back?

- John Wilkins IV, Ross-on-Trent, England

Dear John:

How's the war going? Did you get the Burger King gift certificates I sent? The cashier said they were good in Iraq. I really hate to do this to you, but I've met someone new...

Sorry John, I couldn't resist the "Dear John letter" joke! Maybe I shouldn't kid you, since we've never met. But we

have so much in common, from our nations' wars to... well, you'll find out soon enough.

Unfortunately, your only choice is either to stay glued to your computer screen until your head explodes, or create a diversion and sneak away while the computers are busy reporting your actions to the British version of Homeland Security (the "Home Office of Homeland Security?" I haven't watched much Public TV lately).

If you do escape, disguise yourself and stick to back roads until you're off the "grid" controlled by the machines and their spy satellites. Continue until you find a tidy village in a green valley, then make love to every woman who will have you, so you can raise dozens of children -- with any luck one of them will become the messiah who can save us from the machines.

And if that bleak vision of the future makes you sad, have I got a surprise for you! In one of those little jokes life plays, your ex-wife is sitting across the room from me right now, reading a magazine in an easy chair!

You'll be happy to know that she is still beautiful -- I never cease to be amazed at the color of her eyes and luster of her hair. If she -- just listen to me... I can't bear to call her "it" -- did not have the artist's signature and "Mrs. John Wilkins IV Forever!" engraved on the bottom of her left foot, I would swear you'd had the genuine article stuffed then dipped in clear plastic! The sculptor did an incredible job, and even though it cost me a fortune to have her shipped from the curio shop in Trieste where I found her, I have never regretted it: she has become my muse, my light, my Venus!

Thank you, Dear John!

- A. O.

## Why Do They Pick On Tom Cruise's Faith?

Dear Oracle:

Why is everyone always picking on Tom Cruise and his faith? Why can't they admit that the airtight arguments and proven techniques of Scientology have helped Tom achieve a level of consciousness so superior to their own that he would have to get down on his hands and knees, like someone looking for ants in the weeds, to even notice them?

- Devendra Steele, Queens, New York

Dear Devendra:

*Note:* For those not familiar with Scientology: it is based on the writings of L. Ron Hubbard, who warned us of the need to exterminate alien beings called "thetans," who flew their microscopic spaceships up our nostrils eons ago and have infested us ever since. (If my theology is a little off, it's because I couldn't afford the church's seminars and had to get it from the Internet.)

You know that itch deep inside your forehead, Devendra? It's just the computer chip the Scientologists implanted to monitor thetan activity and summon you to the Celebrity Centre whenever Tom needs his shoes shined.

I'm jealous! The Scientology missionaries selling books in the subway said I was so infested that an implant would be wasted on me. I was depressed until I heard about Tom's bizarre outbursts, which made me wonder if, in severe cases, removing thetans can cause more damage than leaving them alone, like fumigating a house held together by termites can cause it to collapse?

The jackals of the media pick on Tom because they're jealous of his inevitable transformation into the Jesus Christ of Scientology. And some of them are still bitter about all the sleepless nights they spent, clutching a baseball bat under the covers, afraid the Scientology bogeymen of their paranoid fantasies would show up and murder them in their sleep. If they would just read L. Ron's *Dianetics*, and let Scientology's trained technicians attach electrodes to their genitals and start smoking the thetans from their diseased flesh, they might be able to stop chasing phantoms and make something of themselves!

The other reason reporters pick on Scientology is because they are timid. But then -- given the choice between Scientologists (too busy to defend themselves, as they work hand-in-hand with the IRS to become a "real" religion) and Muslim fundamentalists, with their knee-jerk death threats and beheadings, or equally thin-skinned Mormon fundamentalists, with the whole state-terror apparatus of Utah behind them -- which faith would you choose to take on?

But thetans and paranoid fantasies aside, another thing that L. Ron advocates is the need for competence -- his belief

that the modern world, with all its complicated technology, is no place for bumblers and nitwits. And of course competence is what makes Tom Cruise the #1 action star in the world, able to jump motorcycles over burning buses better than Jesus ever could.

Competence might be a costly ideal, however. Just imagine what could have happened if U.S. evangelicals had forced George W. Bush to take some silly competency test. I shudder to think what the world would be like now if he had flunked the test, and wound up just a mild mannered drunk, sleeping on a cot in the tool shed on his parents' estate, getting a beer allowance to stay out of the neighbors' garbage!

- A. O.

## Can My Computer Be Saved?

Dear Oracle:

I'm afraid my PC has turned into one of those "zombie computers" I read about. It's always up to something, beeping and grinding and popping up windows all over the screen with weird alphabets and the filthiest pictures you can imagine.

I'd turn it off, but I'm afraid it will blow up! How can I rescue my computer from the clutches of the zombie world?

- Louise Ling, Snakepocket, Georgia

Dear Louise:

The problem starts with what's called "spam" or junk email. I have a huge spam problem myself, with thousands of messages backed up in my computer like plastic bags in a cow.

(I hate it when movies follow plastic bags drifting on the wind -- it's not romantic at all. Those bags always end up in some innocent animal's gullet; I hear caribou in Alaska ram pipelines until they crack, then drink the oil to dissolve all the bags stuck in their digestive tract. No wonder we're running out of oil!)

And the spammers are incredibly lazy, sending emails from phony people like "Kallistrate Rozelle" or "Jisley McNish," with titles like "re: what you said" or random gibberish, like you should be thrilled to get whatever garbage leaks from their computers, probably sitting in a hut stinking of mutton and sour milk in some dumpy village in the middle of Asia that was leveled by Mongol hordes centuries ago, and has attracted nothing but criminals, wind-borne insects and plastic bags ever since.

Anyway, the spam carries viruses and worms that can eat your computer's brain, which is already full of stuff called "software" that's so wormy it brings to mind the Swiss Alps, which are ready to collapse from all the tunnels the Swiss dig to hide their fighter jets, gold bullion and anisette.

And oddly enough, the story of the Swiss suggests a solution to your problem.

Like isolated people everywhere, the Swiss are ornery and paranoid. Villagers used to wait along mountain trails for hikers, ply them with wine, cheese and rosy cheeked charm, then guide them to the scenic rim of the local "Hidey Hole" and shove them in.

These mile-deep chasms have served the Swiss since prehistoric times, when the Alps were first settled by itinerant fetish salesmen, moonshiners, and criminals banished to the wolves from barbarian outposts in surrounding forests.

(Note that "Hidey" is a modern sanitization of "Heidi," as the holes were originally named for the ancient expectation that widows promptly follow their husbands into the afterlife. Swiss widows would mourn for a day, then bid life a bacchanalian goodbye for a week or two. Once sufficiently cleansed and exhausted, they would dress in their wedding lederhosen and jump into the Hole, yodeling for their husband, e.g. "Yodel-ay he... Helmut!! I am coming!"

These oaths would echo across the Alps in late fall, after the husbands -- blinded and reeking of anisette from endless toasts to the harvest -- had attempted to leap across the local Hole in a test of courage, and fallen to their doom yodeling profanities.)

Such behavior may be deemed unacceptable now, but what could be expected from outcasts threatened by creaking glaciers and knife sharp peaks, with merciless armies rampaging through every summer -- from Rome, Gaul and who-knows-what dung worshiping, gull gut divining,

pickled pig snout eating heathenish lands -- to steal their herbs and womenfolk?

And even though today's Swiss are famously civilized, I understand their constitution still compels them to "accost and confine to a burlap sack" any stranger who approaches their property, then to "feed the Hole" with the sack. The anxiety produced by this rustic pre-emptive attitude is what makes people there so polite and the trains run on time.

So Louise, I suggest you take the Swiss approach to your computer. Pull its plug, drown it in the bathtub and drag it out to the curb, where garbage professionals can pick it up for disposal at your local Hidey Hole.

If you get lonely for email afterwards, just answer your phone and talk to the telemarketers. They get lonely down there in the boiler room stinking of oil and cigarettes, dialing number after number searching for someone who will listen. And if you get the urge to look up useless facts (i.e., "google"), visit your local librarian -- thanks to the Internet, they're all lonely too.

- A. O.

### How'd You Come To Orakulate So Good?

Dear Orakle:

I done worked my whole retchful life, nigh a hunnert-ten years, and cain't read nuthin' but the mule kicks on 'shine (X X). So my 8 year old, Teddy3, reads your writin' to me

(y'all near blinded the boy lookin' up words in The Dictionary!) and he's writin' this here letter.

Any-hoot, I has to ask: how in tarnation did'juh come to Orakulate so good?

- Hiram McGizzle, Heathens Holler, Ohio

Dear Hiram:

The story goes: I was invited to the White House for the Great Communicator Awards, where conservative foundations honor their favorite commentators. I was happy to attend, but I think they confused me with the Occidental Oracle, who specializes in criticizing "oriental culture," like accusing their rural populace of slurping noodles and spitting all over the place, while conveniently forgetting that, until very recently, our rural populace spent most of its time drunkenly yodeling odes to heroic hogs, like the following from my *American Idyll: Smithsonian Field Recordings from Tha 'Hood to Them-thar Hills* collection:

They calls him Homer  
but that's a Miss Nome-r  
'Cause he never stays nowhere  
and never has him no cares  
He just lives life fuller'n any man  
That is, like only a pig can

After shaking hands with a few sweaty functionaries in the reception line, I got to shake the First Lady's hand. I felt a prick in my palm as I admired the silver ring snaked

around her finger, and my hand was stinging before I reached the next person in line.

As I stood there staring at the tiny ball of blood in my palm, the room started spinning and the people began changing in hideous ways. Their eyes rolled up in their heads, foot-long centipedes crawled from their sleeves and wasps swarmed out their mouths. President Bush and Vice President Cheney were licking each other's face when Mr. Cheney morphed into a gelatinous blob, swallowed the Commander in Chief and leapt to the ceiling, dripping white goop that burned holes in the carpet and melted Ann Coulter's plastic shell to reveal a burnt cuckoo clock with a Hitler bird that popped out every few seconds shrieking bloody murder.

I turned to ask Mrs. Bush what was wrong, but she was cackling and drooling like a happy buzzard when her head split open and two new ones burst out her neck, with the left one's face alternating between Julia Roberts and cigarette mascot Joe Camel, and the right one's between Condoleezza Rice and a Chucky doll. Then bright foot-long tongues slithered from her mouths, one red and one blue, and licked each other in ways wicked enough to make the horniest of porn stars shrivel in revulsion.

In a duet of high-pitched, synthetic voices crackling with reverb, her heads chanted "WE HAVE YOU NOW. Soon we shall chew your eyeballs and stew your entrails, and make you ONE OF US! Ah... ha-ha-ha-ha! Ah... ha-ha-ha-hah!!! (And by the way, congratulations on your award -- that piece you did on Sony's 'So Sorry' ad campaign was genius!)"

Then just as quickly as it started, the room stopped spinning and Mrs. Bush returned to her normal, shiny self, a cluster bomb in a box of chocolates, and asked "Would you like to meet my daughters?" as she flicked her eyes down a long hallway, where the smiling twins stood beckoning in light blue milkmaid outfits.

The twins' telepathic, hypnotic chant -- something like "feed us leather" -- drew me down the hall, floating an inch off the floor. I passed out after the walls erupted in flames, so I'm not sure what they did to me. I felt a decade older afterwards, but strangely serene, and ever since then I've had a nagging desire to live in a whitewashed farmhouse in the middle of nowhere, inhale head-cracking fumes from a red NASCAR t-shirt soaked in ethanol, and listen to the wind whisper through the corn.

And ever since then "the answers" just pop into my head.

- A. O.



## VORX

Not long ago I decided to buy a computer, invent something, and get rich. Once started, I was so busy researching possible products that I didn't have time to keep up correspondence with old friends, and it occurred to me that success without witness is no success at all.

So I developed a system that automatically manages personal correspondence and named it the VORX™ System (because it's a product for the world market and VORX is the MUMPH\* acronym for Automatic Correspondence Management). I raised some money, formed a company -- VORXsys -- and hired the best programmers I could find. Our first live test follows this introduction.

\* MUMPH is, of course, the ANSI-2000 Standard *Merged Earth MetaLanguage (Phonetic Version)*, the language formed by merging all known natural languages.

### What is VORX?

"Mail merge" systems have been around for years, but it was not until 1995, following Dr. Victoria Smite's development of the Synthesized Intelligent Response system "Dear SIR," while she was a Publishers Clearing House Fellow at Princeton, that rudimentary Automatic Writing (AW) systems appeared.

There are now several AW systems on the market, used to generate everything from TV sitcom dialog to personal letters, but the VORX System is the first truly automatic Correspondence Management System. VORX relies on several cutting-edge technologies, including the latest phrase-generation software from RuSoft, the Russian company that's been reselling the former Soviet Union's top secret military and paranormal-research software. But these technologies would be useless without the revolutionary software at the heart of VORX, our own invention, the SentiMental™ Emotion Alternator. The alternator not only generates emotional cues to impart realistic tone to a letter, but also regulates that emotion -- in tandem with our MeFirst™ technology -- to guarantee that VORX letters represent the user as a superior, sympathetic and thoroughly likable individual.

### How Does VORX Work?

VORX comes with an extensive set of letter "themes" -- Impress, Obsess, Friendship Test, etc. -- that contain placeholders for specific data. Right after VORX is installed, it asks the user a series of questions, and enters their answers into the database tables it will use to fill in the placeholders, e.g.: recipient\_profiles, common\_acquaintances, substance\_abuse\_nostalgia, bitter\_recriminations, health\_complaints, etc. But this data is not static -- the tables are automatically extended during the lifetime of a correspondence.

An exclusive GossipCalc™ module allows for slow, calculated leakage of "secret" data from one recipient to

another. Our neural net ExtendaThought™ modules, used in tandem with the RuSoft phrase generators, have unlimited associative power, so that it takes only a few words of source data to generate ornate and expansive statements that might take a human correspondent hours to compose.

That's not all. VORX also offers optional IntelliWit™ filters, which can radically increase the sophistication and entertainment value of a letter by using live feeds from a multitude of data services, including Bloomberg, Fox, and NoseRingNet (with its HumorGenerator™ humor generator). Once VORX has all the raw data it needs, the user simply sets up an address book of recipients, then schedules the frequency, tone and complexity\* of letters to be sent to each recipient.

\* Note that we use only the finest Eastern European complexity amplifiers, including the acclaimed Trance-II-vanian™ set of fluid logic agitators, with the proven ability to produce logic turbulence with intractable levels of complexity.

That's not all. When a correspondent's reply is scanned into the optional RepliSponder™ interpreter/responder, VORX applies heuristics to extract its tone (e.g., subtle pseudo-sympathetic mockery) and counter with an appropriate response (e.g., guilt-inducing generosity and sincerity) without user intervention.

In fact the number of ways VORX can respond is practically unlimited. From the default "warm, casual"

tone, to a "slightly hurt, defensive" tone, to -- if the user selects both "aggressive" and "random" -- a frighteningly pathological tone. When the complexity of a reply is set to "infinite," VORX can generate a virtually infinite letter (and schedule it to be sent in chapters over a period of years). By setting complexity to "infinite" and tone to "infantile," the user can subject a correspondent to an endless stream of babbling.

Again, we've barely scratched the surface of VORX. With the optional RepliSniff™ add-on to RepliSponder, the system can detect a reply generated by a correspondent using VORX or any of several known AW systems (the latest profiles of AW systems can be automatically downloaded from our web site).

If an automated reply is detected, the VORX AutoPilotPen™ System can establish a link with the correspondent's system (assuming it is ANSI-2000 AW-SYNC compliant) to cooperate on 100% autonomous correspondence that needs no intervention from either human respondent, leaving them free to monitor the relationship at their own convenience without "getting their hands dirty." Our research has shown that there is no real upper bound on the generation of subject matter in these autonomous correspondences -- with a negligible repetition factor comparable to natural forgetfulness -- so that an eternal correspondence is theoretically possible.

And it should come as no surprise that VORX understands any natural language (for which there is a MUMPH translator), allowing personal correspondence with virtual strangers halfway around the world.

VORX System Release 1.0 is now in beta 2.5; it can be downloaded (373 GB) from our website. This initial release is designed for paper correspondence, but there is an optional VORXFax™ module that can be used to fax directly between your computer and an offshore service bureau that will handle all incoming and outgoing paper mail. For an additional fee, all correspondence (except that of infinite complexity) can be archived to optical disc. The next major release of VORX will allow for automatic email correspondence.

The first live test letter follows:

Dear L:

Summer's here with a vengeance, I'm boiling in my socks. When was the last time you heard about the White House cat, Socks? Did the Clintons' new dog chase it away? Maybe that's when everything started to unravel.

Remember <<\$enemy=GetEnemy(CurrentRecipients, Random())>>? I dreamed I ran into <<HimOrHer(\$enemy.gender)>> a few days ago; do you believe that <<MildObscenity(\$enemy.gender)>> had the nerve to ask about you? Please stand clear of the moving platform as trains enter and leave the station.

I agree with you that the I.M.F. shafted Russia. Ever since I found out Isaac Hayes is a Scientologist, I've been worried about being successful and becoming a celebrity. Tom Cruise was great in *Mission Impossible*,

but did you know he's only 5' 4"? I hear everyone else on the set had to stand in a trench!

How's your job? How about that Monica Lewinski? How about those puhzelwift... <<Error: SportsTabloidFeed.CorruptPacketHeader>>? I can't believe I ate the whole thing. Escalators are for passengers only. I can't believe... how's the family? I can't believe... you do that again and you are DEAD, <<OedipalObscenity()>>, you hear me?! DEAD!!

Hope all is OK -- K

## One Man's Plans

### Foreword

Carlos T. Nevada passed away last month with his fingers locked around an unopened jar of peanut butter. Mr. Nevada (called "Vegas" by the staff at the convalescent home where he spent his final year) was not known as a writer; his occupation was simply listed as "retired" in a brief obituary in the home's newsletter. But measured by the sheer volume of his output -- an average of over 100 tightly spaced pages a day since he began his first book after losing a long-held job -- Mr. Nevada certainly was a writer.

Mr. Nevada spent most of his creative energy on book and chapter titles, and chapter content is nearly always merely an exhaustive elaboration of an already highly descriptive title. Therefore only his titles are listed here, and chapter titles are stripped of the careful capitalization that made reading them feel like an endless bombing raid. The following chronological selection serves as an outline of Mr. Nevada's life from the point where his career plans went awry.

I'd like to thank Luther Smalls, director of the Shining Star Ship Convalescent Home, for his help in locating the storage lockers where Mr. Nevada kept his papers.

- Dalmatia Houghton-Jiminez, Editor, Navelnaut Editions

### How Science Repaid My Faith

My wonderful life as a respected scientist at the Mister Coffee Consumer Safety Research Lab, until the director, "Doctor Bill" Boucher, fired me -- even though the Mister Coffee staff psychologist attributed my erratic behavior to job-related stress aggravated by Doctor Bill's repeated refusals to clarify my long term status -- thus ruining my life and the lives of those around me, not to mention the untold millions now exposed to the possibility of accidental electrocution by their coffeemaker.

How I became the victim of a vicious police / phone company conspiracy after Doctor Bill (and his wife "Doctor Elizabeth") claimed I harassed them with obscene phone calls.

The untold truth about coffeemaker radiation and your brain.

### Heartless Scientists

How privileged scientists distort facts to further their careers and tilt the playing field so others fall off.

My irrefutable proof that scientists named Elizabeth are more likely to be frigid than those with any other name.

White coats / black hearts: scientists and the Third Reich.

### The Illusion of Scientific Truth

(That these monsters use to defend themselves.)

The secret objective embedded in the logic of so-called objective truth.

The truth is that science can't explain anything really important, and so seeks to destroy our faith in answers.

High technology: *vagina dentata* of the seductress called Science (includes diagrams).

### **How Science Doesn't Deserve to Kiss the Ass of God**

(Transcribed from notes written during my stay at the Saint Sybil Recovery Annex.)

How science trembles with desire as it looks into the clear complexioned face of God.

How science festers with envy as it dreams of licking the shimmering skull that contains the mind of God.

How science will forever have warts on its knees from being forced to kneel before the majesty of God.

### **Cleansed by the Light of God**

(While living in a trailer in the Mojave Desert, where nothing can hide from Him.)

Why I don't have time for eating or sleeping or anything but saying Hallelujah!

How prayer has helped me control the evaporation of my bodily fluids.

How flagellation has sharpened my mind and eyesight to the point where I can see vultures before they see me.

### **Weakened by Malnutrition and Whip Sores, My Intestines Become Bloated with Parasites**

Strapped to a plank in the county jail mental ward after the parasites invaded my brain and spread their hideous message with my tongue, I am unable to write, which is my only outlet, so I shrivel up and lay dormant for 70 days and nights watching the world oscillate until the drugs have flushed my system and I am released, whereupon I find a quiet room in a basement apartment with a fellow former inmate.

I spend three months decoding the advertisements in a popular weekly magazine, searching for clues to what God has planned for me.

Kicked out by my roommate for not returning his magazine, I wonder: where do you go when you're headed nowhere? I wander off...

### **I Keep a Close Watch on the Sky as it Changes With the Seasons, But See No Evidence of His Plan**

(I keep moving to stay warm, but don't notice the cold after a while, anyway.)

I walk clockwise around a single city block for months. It occurs to me that I could travel an infinite distance without going anywhere.

### **My Secret Plan**

(To be stapled to strategic phone poles.)

My secret plan to generate and copyright every possible image before Bill Gates does.

My secret plan to generate and copyright every possible idea, starting with this one.

My secret plan to make a fortune from the new wonder fungus growing in my socks.

My secret plan to escape this dying universe -- with my fortune, a few bionic frontier women, and my notes detailing an improved set of physical laws -- to populate a brand new universe.

### **Warts on the Face of St. John the Beheaded**

(My brain is still sputtering so I wander in from the cold for more treatment.)

Life is chemistry, drugs are chemicals, take some. (Side effects may include dryness of mouth and incontinence.)

How ya like me now? (How antidepressants melted the cheese from my mind, leaving the raw hamburger that *be me.*)

Full of confidence, I start up an enthusiastic conversation (really a monologue) with everyone I encounter.

For reasons of public safety, the doctors decide to put the raw version of me back in the bottle.

### **God's Secret Plan**

(Manifested in the details of my suffering as the drugs wear off once again.)

Why does God persist with His secret plan to destroy me?

How is it that God can laugh at me with impunity while I can't criticize Him without tempting His fanatical legions to shoot me down in the street like a rabid dog?

It's a good thing God lives forever, because that's how long it's going to take Him to fulfill His plan to destroy me!

### **A New Age Has Dawned**

(I calm down, but the judge orders me to take advantage of a one way bus ticket to Arizona. There I meet the Spirit Woman, and I know it's love when she laughs after I total her car. She even gets me a job at a resort.)

I can see clearly now: my new life as a pool attendant / inner-work guide at the Crystal Light Institute Resort (CLIR, pronounced "clear").

I can feel the vibrations now (the bottled water here is amazing, I feel ten years younger and don't need to sleep at all!): my new life as a CLIR time-travel security agent.

You must answer the ancient oracles whispering in your DNA: a CLIR 'response ability' audit for the whole family.

## **False Gods, Part II**

(Jolted back to reality after being evicted from the CLIR employee apartment complex for making unauthorized phone calls to the Spirit Woman and her cellmates in the Maricopa County jail, all of them victims of a system that penalizes those providing sex and drugs, while the consumers go free.)

When you're homeless, hungry and cold, and all you've got to your name is an energy crystal as powerful as a dead battery.

Cast out of the valley, freezing in the woods near the Interstate outside Flagstaff, I contemplate my next move: To the north, a huge canyon guards the Mormon badlands. To the east, angry ghosts look down from cliffs, then Route 666 and Los Alamos. To the west, bleached bones watch the sky from a dry desert lake bed... waiting for me on my way back to the trailer.

## **My Secret Plan II**

(Tests contingent on my release from the county jail in Las Vegas, where I'm held after being found asleep under a restaurant table at Caesars Palace.)

My secret plan for an agrarian utopia where cows are fed marijuana seeds and sow them in orderly rows with their dropped dung as they walk back and forth between the feed trough and the water trough.

## **Results of the Utopia Test at a Farm Somewhere in California**

(God conspires to destroy utopia.)

The cows, too lazy to walk to the feed trough, eat the marijuana then wander off..

## **The Ultimate Question**

(Is the fabric of reality smooth or chunky? Is the face of God smooth or lumpy?)

Who stole my peanut butter?

## **My Secret Plan III**

(To be implemented when adequate computing power is available.)

My secret plan to reverse-engineer the 6,000 year old virtual reality simulation that creationists claim this world to be.

My secret plan to merge every version of me from every possible universe into one being, for a purpose yet to be determined. (If I become God, will I control my own fate?)

## **My More Realistic Secret Plan**

(Enough planning, I have to get something done, now.)

My secret plan to manufacture automated nanotech (flea-sized) hair trimmers to combat relentless hair growth.

Such trimmers, released in sufficient numbers over a body, could permanently maintain hairstyles at their optimum length and eliminate unsightly body hair at the same time.

### **My Penultimate Plan**

(Exhausted from failed plans and out of money, the void looks warm and sunny. I tie up loose ends.)

My secret plan to make sure no one else will ever be able to carry out my secret plans. I'll vacuum my room and destroy all stray hair, nail clippings and detritus in the microwave so I can't be resurrected through preserved DNA at some future date and be forced to reveal my secret plans. (If I can't carry them out, no one else can either.)

### **I'm Sorry**

(Not really.)

The universe will be a sadder place, but if God had not thrown up so many roadblocks I would not be in the bitter frame of mind I am now, which makes me not care about the suffering that will ensue with the abortion of these plans.

### **My Final Plan**

(Not a secret, I want everyone to know!)

My plan to find out how good it feels to "go out like a man" -- in a movie, or John Wayne in real life -- with a gut full of bile and tumors, despised by God, laughing in His face.

### **I'm Sorry II**

(Really, this time -- I'm not laughing anymore -- my guts really hurt!)

And it's not just the pain and the infinite emptiness of annihilation that prompt me to seek Your forgiveness, O Lord, I swear to God. Please forgive me -- I promise to carry out nothing but Your plans from this moment forward!

(Even though, when all is said and done, aren't You the one who hatched that huge blunder they call science?)



## Dear Ms. Munch

To: Cynthia Munch  
Comptroller, Grants Division  
Ronald McDonald Foundation  
22278 Ronald Reagan Pacific Coast Hwy.  
Newport Beach, California 92663

From: Mitch Kakuski  
Helmsley/AMC Gitford Hotel  
737 Seventh Avenue  
New York, New York 10019

Dear Ms. Munch,

This is in reply to your response to my emergency request for more money.

First of all, let me remind you that I am down to my last few thousand dollars, which won't even cover the bill for last week here at the hotel. I know that by Third World (or even terrorized New York) standards, I'm not that bad off yet, but it makes me sick to think about having to go back to my old life. It would be like a genie giving you a magic carpet and flight lessons, then pulling out the rug when you got airborne.

Anyway, you asked me to "give a thorough accounting" of the money already sent to me, and though I've been too busy to keep track of every little thing, here is what happened, from the beginning...

## The Postal Service Delivers Hope

I received my Ronald McDonald Genius Grant by certified mail. Though I'd never applied for one, I wasn't too surprised when it came. I'd seen an infomercial on TV about thousands of grants, worth billions of dollars, that foundations are desperate to give away.

I did think it strange my name was misspelled on the envelope, and that the grant was for "Distinguished Work in the Flavor Dynamics of Recycled Fast Food Grease," but people make mistakes, even when large sums of money are involved. And sure, someone could question my credentials as a genius and say I should've known the grant wasn't meant for me. But just because I was a substitute clerk at RadioShack at the time doesn't make me an idiot.

It's true my mind can get lazy; I can't count the number of times it's spit out the command to "just *do* something!" when it got tired of thinking. And yes, I could barely put two words together on a page for the first few decades of my life. It took years of work, sending letters to the editors of local free weeklies, before I was able to write with my current coherency. But I did complete nearly two years of community college, and have always been an avid collector of information, sometimes so much that I don't know where to put it, so it just sits where I dropped it on the floor of my brain. I've also noticed that a lot of people have a hard time following my elaborate logic once I get rolling on a topic, and isn't that an indicator of genius?

I really was surprised when I saw the amount on the check. You people are incredibly generous. Of course I guess you can afford to be, what with all the billions of hamburgers you've sold, even after that "mad cow" brain disease scare a few years ago.

## Moving On Up

After getting the cash (minus the 8% fee) at one of those bulletproof check cashing places and putting it in an old backpack, I checked into a suite at a nice hotel near Times Square (almost \$300 a night). Spending money like that made me nervous at first, but it was just a drop in the bucket now that I was rich. I needed a quiet place where I could concentrate and make sure I didn't squander the chance to turn my life around.

My new home was sunny and spacious, with big TVs in both rooms. I ordered meals from room service (about \$120 a day including tips), and sent one of the bellhops out to The GAP for three of everything in my size when I ran out of clean clothes (another \$120 a day).

I spent a few days watching really interesting stuff on satellite TV and realized I was a sucker for living without it all those years. There's a world full of knowledge out there, with channels dedicated to every subject you can think of, from debutantes to dictators, being broadcast on invisible waves right through our bodies 24 hours a day from transmission towers, microwave dishes and satellites -- but we can't pick up any of it without the proper equipment. So I signed up for the hotel's premium TV

package (\$50 a day, with twice as many channels), and bought a few DVD recorders (\$1000 each) to record some of the stuff that was on when I was watching something else or asleep. You never know which nugget of information might turn out to be the missing piece of the puzzle. Did you know *Xena the Warrior Princess* is based on fact, according to the Amazon Network?

To top off the luxury, I didn't have to lift a finger to keep the place spotless. The maid would come through every day at 11:00 AM, when I was watching *History's Greatest Bloops and Blunders* on the What Happened Channel. I tipped her \$30 a day, spreading the wealth.

After a week at the hotel, it occurred to me that I could afford a nice apartment. But I found it didn't bother me at all to live in a place where I was always treated as an honored guest, and didn't have to fill rooms with possessions like a pharaoh getting ready for the afterlife (thanks, *Mysteries of History Channel*). Instead I could become a more "evolved" human being, by realizing that "wisdom is the only luggage allowed on the Soul Train to enlightenment" (thanks, *Don Cornelius Zen Channel*).

The idea of becoming more evolved really appealed to me -- I could almost feel the new lobes growing on my brain as I soaked up the satellite TV -- so I decided to stay at the hotel.

## Now That You Can Have Anything, What Do You Want?

Of course my first thought when I got the grant was to hire

a beautiful young escort for a night out. We'd start in Chinatown, dining on the exotic deep-sea creatures I'd only dreamed about. I'd learned from the Green Channel that sadly, a lot of these species are nearly extinct because of demand from a wealthier China, and I wanted to try a few of them before the Pacific Ocean was vacuumed clean. But I found out escorts are really expensive -- you could buy a decent used car for what they asked, and still have enough left over to buy gas and cruise suburban strip malls for bored and lonely housewives who'd be happy with dinner & drinks at a freeway-exit steak house. Not that I would ever do anything so sleazy.

The last escort service I called gave me the number of their "adult entertainment" line. But I was so disgusted after talking to three of the girls there that I gave up. They each had low, husky voices and said the most perverted things I've ever heard. I was turned off by the phone bill too, when I found out the "girls" were really inmates at a prison upstate, and that the calls cost me \$19.99 a minute. You'd think being locked up with a bunch of sweaty thugs would dull the sexual imagination, but I guess not.

## Peacock Feathers Are an Evolutionary Necessity

(Thanks, Natural Broadcasting Corporation)

After that experience I realized there was a hole in my new life -- I was kind of lonely. I was pretty sure I'd have a better shot at getting a girlfriend now that I could afford to maintain a decent appearance. I even considered getting plastic surgery to make myself look really good, but then I

imagined how terrible it must feel for someone like Brad Pitt to be sitting around the house half drunk one day, then look into the mirror at those long eyelashes and suddenly realize it won't be long before they fall out, his gut spills over his belt and pops his shirt buttons, and he's staring into the pink eyes of a fat leprechaun at the tail end of a bender.

Beauty is like fruit: the moment it reaches its peak is the moment it starts to rot.

Plus I wasn't sure what I wanted to look like. Studies show that women prefer "pretty" men like Brad, but then so do men, and I wouldn't be comfortable with a bunch of men's eyes crawling all over me -- I don't know how you women stand it.

I thought about going for a more "thuggish" look, but could guess the outcome: me and my new girl are the only passengers on a subway car late at night when some teenage lowlifes sit down across from us. They stare at us and smile, then ask if we want to go "party" with them. When I say "No thanks," they laugh and say "That's okay, *you* don't have to go..." then start praising the finer points of my girl's anatomy. Pretty soon she turns to me and asks "Did you hear what they said? Are you gonna let these punk mutha.....s say this s..t to a lady?!"

There's no way this scene can have a happy ending. Looking like a thug just attracts trouble, and doesn't scare off a real one, who can smell the killer inside like a shark smells blood (yes, sharks do smell underwater somehow (thanks Cousteau Channel), while we humans get underwater in the bathtub so we *do not* smell). I can get angry and boil for weeks, but don't have a violent bone in

my body, and want to keep all my bones. I decided that being average-looking and sort of invisible, like I've always been, isn't so bad -- you can pass through the world without anyone noticing and see it as it really is, like a reporter from another planet. So I skipped the surgery.

## Prisoner of Love

No matter what you look like, it seems like most relationships either go bad, with a nasty divorce and decades of child support, or the marriage works out and the rest of your life is cast in stone, so there's hardly any point in waiting around to see what happens. Either way, the husband will have to spend his entire life:

1) Working indoors, stuck in a dead end job at an airless office surrounded by incompetent bureaucrats, working for a petty fascist whose only enjoyment in life is spreading misery, until one day he "goes off," then finds himself begging the SWAT squad to "take him out" as he sits on the floor rattling hand grenades and whimpering in the smoke rising from the carnage, looking like a Big Baby Destroyer of Worlds, or...

2) Working outdoors, where the monotony, scorching sun and freezing rain break him down day by day, like erosion eating away at a mountain, until his face is shriveled up like a walnut, all his fingers and toes are crooked and it hurts every time he moves, so he winds up drinking and taking pills all day to numb the pain and silence the alien voices that rise every afternoon like scavenging pterodactyls on the whistling wind.

OK... Yes, as I'm pretty sure you're thinking, I shouldn't look so far ahead and snuff out the embers of romance before they even catch fire.

It's not that I don't feel the longing and desire that make you want to drop everything and follow a beautiful stranger into the unknown. I get that feeling all the time here in New York, like an outline of her was tattooed under my eyelids at birth, so when my eyes lock onto her the world slows to a crawl and the DNA in every cell in my body starts screaming to leave this low-rent vessel and move into hers, to sprout a new branch of the family tree. The trouble is that before long, instead of imagining the branch growing toward the sun in a sky blue future, I see it wrap and smother me as it climbs, like vines on a dead tree trunk.

And you're right, I need to stop thinking so much, it gets in the way of my happiness. But without funds, you can bet I won't have much else to do.

So, after all that relationship anxiety, I decided to buy one of the Japanese key-chain pets (\$29) I saw on the Spend 'n Save Channel. It's a digital leech named Froyd, and I have to push a button to feed him digital blood a few times a day or he starts saying "Froyd wants blood -- a virgin would be good" like a vampire, louder and louder until you feed him. It's really embarrassing to have Froyd go off in my pocket in the middle of a crowd, especially in an elevator, so I'm pretty religious about feeding him.

## The World Turns Out to Be a Super Titanic Death Match

*Note:* I have to warn you that things take off from here. Current events (the 9/11 terror attacks) suddenly hijacked my new life and turned me away from luxuries like love and happiness, and back to the irritated frame of mind I had when I was writing letters to the editor at free weekly papers. Or even more irritated, because the topic in the weeklies was usually just an excuse for an argument, and now it's the fate of the world.

After the terrorists murdered thousands of people for the greater glory of Allah and dimmed every beautiful day, like 9/11 was here in NYC, with a lurking sense of dread, I started wondering if my happiness was the only thing that mattered. I tried to think of what I could do to improve the world.

Of course my first thought was to go on a personal "jihad." I'd buy a plane ticket to Pakistan, grow a beard, and infiltrate the local scene. I'd act deaf and dumb, and carry a Koran with a picture of Osama bin Laden, then point to the picture and hold up a piece of paper that said "Please help me find my daddy!" I knew from watching the King Fahd Channel (KFC) that family is the most important thing in that part of the world, and that some families have upwards of 50 children. (Maybe that's why the women wear those big black robes? Imagine what having so many kids does to your figure!)

Sure I don't look much like bin Laden, but if I started smoking opium when I got there it would give me the

same deadly pallor and serenity, and after I played my KFC Islamic Science video that shows how infidels are descended from twelve-breasted rats, and how Allah invented the nuclear bomb to eradicate them, there would be no question about my sincerity. I was sure I'd find "daddy" in no time.

And when I found him and his bloodthirsty crew I'd martyrize them on the spot. I got a bomb recipe from the Militia Channel (fertilizer, sugar and Diet Coke), and some suicide bombing tips from the Al Jazeera Network: remind yourself that it's the victim's responsibility to be ready for Judgment Day; chew garlic to cover the smell of the bomb; and chant something that sounded like "God is good, God is great! Let's go, let's go, Mississippi State!" until you're in the mood.

But I had no idea what I'd say just before I set off the bomb. People would want to understand my motivation -- was I doing it for God, for my People, or just to get on TV? I needed something clever, something an action hero like Bruce Willis might say, but he had millions of dollars worth of Hollywood screenwriting talent to think up his lines, and all I had was myself. So I decided I'd have to put off the bombing, keep watching TV, and hope some of that talent rubbed off on me.

After the terror attack, you could feel the hole blown in the side of reality, like America just found out it was mortal. All of a sudden nothing mattered but survival, and all the stuff we normally argue about was submerged under a river of grief and anxiety.

But it wouldn't take long for the thieves to learn to breathe underwater and get back to work.

## Thank You Ronald

I walked by a group of street people every day near 51st and Broadway, up the street from Times Square. A few of them looked like pirates, with shifty eyes and missing teeth, as they trolled for spare change in the stream of "suckers" that flows by every day. It was pretty obvious they ran the lives of the more disturbed members of the crew, "managing" their disability checks and medication.

Once in a while I stopped to talk to the ringleader, a loud woman who went by the name Squirrel Girl. In between her twitching and profanity, and while I tried not to stare at what looked like algae growing on her teeth, she told me her story. She said she and her friends used to live in the crevices around the World Trade Center until "them terror morons blew it up for virgins" and they were forced to migrate north, driven out by smoke from burning computers and by rescue workers who didn't appreciate her and her friends standing in line with them for free sandwiches and coffee.

"The morons say they're killin' everybody for God -- ha! God don't give a damn what people do, or he'd take care 'a these morons," she said, pointing a thumb at her friends. These lost souls passed their days buzzing around garbage cans and muttering complaints at passing shadows, living in private worlds that barely intersect this one. I realize this doesn't mean they have no purpose here, though I doubt they know what it is. Their job, ever since the day the other Ronald (that is, Reagan, not McDonald) started emptying the insane asylums, has been to keep the rest of us in line -- to remind us this is a narrow ledge we're walking on, and when we fall off, it's all over. (Thanks to

FOX's *The World's Craziest Homeless People* for this conclusion.)

## God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

Reagan's followers, including the current president, Bush Jr., keep saying that personal responsibility is the cornerstone of a healthy society -- just so long as it doesn't apply to them. They know that if the meek really do inherit the earth someday, it will only be after assertive people like them have chewed it up and spit it out, and are relaxing in cryogenic tubes on luxury space ships speeding toward a fresh planet (thank you, Popular Mechanics Channel).

After all, it's been obvious to them since birth that something in their blood grants them the moral right to lord over and abuse everyone else. And since people like them have been getting away with it since Adam, they know the Lord approves, and that they speak for Him.

## The Promised Land

Just before Bush and Attorney General John Ashcroft began advertising their White House prayer meetings, the president said that we Americans are blessed, and that it's our natural right to burn energy like there's no tomorrow.

Then Osama bin Laden, a product of Saudi oil wealth and official fundamentalism, came along and made self-serving righteousness look bad, and momentarily distracted the Republicans from their endless attempts to

move the U.S. closer to the Saudi religious-right model.

What's this relationship between God and oil, anyway? Is He locked inside the stuff, and we have to burn it to spread His spirit to the lungs, right next to the heart? Or have these people been tipped off that there is no tomorrow, and no point in worrying about the mile-high wall of flame about to engulf us because, in the words of Bush's favorite Supreme Court Justice, Antonin Scalia, "for the believing Christian, death is no big deal." (These facts kept pouring out of the Nonstop News Network; it was so depressing I quit watching.)

Or maybe something even more sinister is going on. I watched a show on the Ripley's Science Channel about how oil comes from dead dinosaurs. After some animations showing brontosaurus graveyards turning to black ooze under the hot sands of Arabia, the show went on to speculate that, because we've inhaled so much dinosaur DNA from gas fumes, some of us will start mutating into human-o-saurus -type creatures. Of course my first thought was that the Texas and Saudi oil people are part of a secret cult planning to mutate and take over the world. But then I remembered that they already own the world, so why bother?

The news media likes to feature politicians attending religious services, but consider it uncouth to ask exactly what kind of weird religious beliefs they have. Maybe that's because so many media stars belong to Scientology? I won't go into the contorted fantasies these people believe, because I don't want to get murdered in my sleep. But they are just actors, the empty shells of characters they play on screen, and their beliefs don't affect anyone -- until they act their way into office like Ronald Reagan.

## The Moral Quandary of Being Protected by Republicans

The ruthless, gun loving Republicans seem like naturals to protect us from the terrorists. But just like the pimply new kid in a prison full of perverts, we're going to have to pay for the protection (thanks for the nightmares, *Scared Straight After School Special*, AOL Time Warner SuperStation). Someone has to stop the fundamentalist mass murderers who see everyone as slaves to the next life, but the Republicans have their own fundamentalists, and have always been comfortable with the rest of us being slaves in this life.

And no one's going to save you from the Republicans now that the Democrats are deflated from finally figuring out that the world will never be fair, and from getting slapped like sissies by the Republicans for so long. Now they just sit and watch, and let corruption creep over them like clouds over the sun. Why should the Republicans be the only ones getting fat?

Meanwhile Bush, like Reagan, thinks reading the teleprompter with some TV emotion elevates him from snake oil salesman to some kind of leader. Of course there's plenty of time for him to change, but I'm not holding my breath. Unless the terrorists spray me with nerve gas.

## Go Forth and Multiply the Right to Bear Arms

The humiliation of being protected by Republicans has helped me understand the people in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Utah, etc., who think they need an assault weapon to protect their paranoid way of life. It's like us Americans need to protect ourselves from those weasels at the U.N. who are always trying to force us out of big, comfortable cars, when everyone knows the U.S. was built on gas-guzzlers, that they are its blood and the freeways its veins. If that fact chains us to corrupt oil countries whose spiteful citizens want to blow us up just because Britney Spears won't answer their creepy love letters (People Magazine Channel), well, what can I say? It was the best deal we could make with the devil at the time. (And if handing over Britney would get the creeps off our back, it's a deal we should make now.)

And then it's common knowledge that after taking our cars, the U.N. weasels would raise taxes to pay for condoms in poor countries -- so they can go buck wild and have safe sex all day for free -- and to pay for abortions in poor countries where all the peasants want boys, which means no more girls, which means pretty soon our shores would be choked with rusty boats full of horny foreigners trying to get at our women, including you! (Thanks Repent! Channel.)

So the pro-gun, anti-sex nuts do have a point. But how can an assault weapon protect you from a jet plane screaming out of nowhere? It's like defending yourself from an asteroid, and to do that you'd need your own

assault spaceship with a nuclear device. Maybe that's what this Star Wars program they've been working on since Reagan is supposed to do? Spaceships are too expensive, but they would give everyone on earth their own miniature nuclear device, and the threat of getting blown up would make people respect the rights of others?

At first glance this seems like a reasonable idea. But with six billion people on earth, there's bound to be a few kids, religious nuts or drunks who just go ahead and push the button, causing a chain reaction of 5,999,999,999 more nuclear explosions that would burn us all off the face of the earth. Of course that would end our suffering -- unless the religious nuts are right, and we're all sentenced to their next life.

You aren't one of those religious nuts, are you?

## Back to Reality and Squirrel Girl

Anyway, in spite of all my complaints about Republicans, I definitely do not agree with people who say "nobody deserves to go hungry or homeless," when everyone knows some people don't deserve to *breathe*. But I do believe everyone deserves a few chances, and it struck me that Squirrel Girl and her friends -- who were working hard to eke out a living as bums in the wilderness of Midtown, and making a more honest attempt to cope with reality than the terrorists or the GOP -- deserved another chance.

So I bought them all plane tickets to L.A. (\$3800 one-way), gave them \$600 cash for drinks before and during



the flight, and enough for some new clothes, two weeks at a motel near the beach, three meals a day, and a chauffeured limo to take them to job interviews (\$8800; thanks for the idea, Game Show Channel).

I was sure the fresh air and new opportunities out west would help them turn things around, but gave them your address just in case. I guess that's what the phone message from your assistant Eldridge was about. I could tell he was upset, but couldn't make out the words -- it sounded like he was screaming for help while being sucked down a drainpipe. You'd think my new Digital Surround Sound answering machine (\$600) could take a message without garbling it.

I have to admit I thought about escaping to L.A. myself -- there's no center to it, so the terrorists would have a hard time deciding what to blow up. But New York needs all the help it can get, so I'm going to stay put. Which means I need your help!

### So Thanks for Everything, But Please Send More

The grant transformed me, like an ugly larva turning into a butterfly (Wings Channel), and I owe it all to you, Ms. Munch. But after the accounting above I guess it's obvious I need more money to maintain my lifestyle than I used to, and now that I'm facing life in the gutter, it's pretty obvious that you should've given me fishing lessons instead of a bucket full of fish, as I'm sure Reagan would tell you if he could.

You saved my life, and it's a well known fact that once you save a life you're responsible for it. It's like saving a dog from the pound; you can't decide a week later that you don't like the slobbering Rottweiler after all and ditch him in the suburbs with a bag full of burgers. You gave him a "second leash" on life, and it's your duty to love and feed him until he drops dead of old age or a brain disease.

You financed my genius in the hope it would improve the world; if you invested in a company, would you turn your back the first time it hit a bump in the road? If everyone did that the economy would collapse and we'd all be sitting in mud drinking rubbing alcohol and trading army surplus grommets for zippers like they were in Russia a few years ago, before they struck oil.

### The Future Depends on You

And speaking of Russia, the only way out of this mess is to spend our way out, the same strategy Reagan used to beat the commies. I don't need my own Star Wars spaceship, or even a nuclear device. I just need time to regain my footing and, let's say, take some classes at a small, elite college, so I'm ready when the future arrives. Maybe Bush and the Saudi princes will become the biggest heroes in history by giving everyone freedom, jobs and satellite TV (and space aliens do not reprogram the satellites to suck out our brains and transport our thoughts to their galaxy for a new reality show called *The Universe's Craziest Planets*). Or more likely, we'll find ourselves neck deep in strife as the world continues to shrink and everyone gets more and more irritated, like a large family in a hot motel room with a broken TV.

How did we wind up in a world where everyone wants to blow up America? We were stupid enough to give them TV, so they've seen all our stuff and now they want it for themselves. They hate the way we run the world too, as if they could do a better job. I just saw some Norwegian on the World Channel talking about what vicious idiots we are. Ha! This from an icicle of a country where nobody's worked a lick since they struck oil and, like the Beverly Hillbillies, decided to buy some class. This from a country whose main export for centuries was seafaring sociopaths called Vikings, who'd chop your head off as soon as look at you (Nordic Pride Network).

Everyone else had *thousands* of years to make the world a better place and they failed miserably. We've been at it for less than 100 years, and now even the most backwards villages in the world can drink Coke and watch MTV while they swat flies. What are these ingrates complaining about?

But I guess it's natural for people from old places to be jealous after they've spent centuries cultivating art, cuisine and ideas, and then an upstart nation stumbles from one success to another without even trying, like a blessed idiot. It's got to be galling to feel the *haute* blood of royalty coursing through your veins under the stupid uniform, as you call out "Un Big Mac, sans le pickle!" from the counter of a Paris McDonald's day in and day out, even if the work does ultimately result in such high-minded programs as the genius grant.

As I see it Ms. Munch, we have just two alternatives: I can prepare for the future, or I can prepare for NO future. And either way I'll need more money -- because that small, elite

college I mentioned above wasn't born yesterday and won't be handing out genius grants anytime soon. Which means that tuition, books, a quiet hotel room near campus, and a new wardrobe in the school colors will have to come out of our pocket.

If you prefer the NO future alternative, and think I should focus on blowing up terrorists, the GOP, or your competitors in the fast food business, I could take screenwriting classes so I can finally come up with a decent final statement, and criminology classes so I can get a discount on the law enforcement uniforms I'll need to infiltrate my target.

But if you like the option of having a future, and you're worried that mad cow disease will make a comeback, I could take science classes and discover a cure, or take advertising classes and sell the idea that going insane is a small price to pay for a cheeseburger. It's the least I can do after all you've done, and have yet to do, for me.

At any rate, as any farmer knows, unless you're lucky enough to strike oil, what you reap is what you sow. (Sew? This is why I need college.) Therefore my fate, and perhaps the fate of the world -- not to mention the hamburger business that's been so good to both of us -- depends on your continued support. Please don't disappoint us!

Thankfully yours,  
Mitch

## Buried in Cups

I eat a lot of yogurt, and the plastic-cup containers keep piling up. A while ago I decided it was time to get rid of them, and thought of a few ways I could put them to use:

**I could stage a demonstration** to shame the yogurt industry into doing something about the billions of throwaway cups they crank out each year. I'd ship the cups to France and unload them on the dock, then pour (biodegradable) corn syrup over the pile and roll it into a huge ball. I'd roll the ball through the countryside to Paris, adding more cups in towns along the way, and park it right in front of Groupe Danone world headquarters, the very heart of the yogurt industry. Then I'd notify the media, put on a t-shirt that reads "Dear yogurt companies: What am I supposed to do with all this garbage?!" and glue myself to the ball with corn syrup so Danone's hired thugs couldn't drag me away.

*Note:* I field tested this idea in my back yard this past summer. It was obvious the real event would have to take place in warm weather for the corn syrup to dry and form a rigid ball. The problem, I soon discovered, is that warm weather is usually accompanied by swarms of insects, and most of them seem to have a taste for corn syrup. Within a half hour of gluing myself to the six foot diameter test ball, I was covered in ants, bees, flies, mosquitoes and wasps, all of them biting and stinging as they tried to escape the still-sticky goo. I was in so much pain and itching so badly by then that I had to yell out for my girlfriend, Samantha, to bring some Benadryl and aspirin. By the

time I'd taken enough pills to find relief, I was so drowsy that I insisted on staying glued to the ball overnight -- the real event might last for days, after all. This turned out to be a near fatal mistake, as I soon fell asleep and, totally sedated, slid to the grass and rolled under the ball. In the morning I woke up choking, with my hair stuck to the ball and my face shoved into the wet grass, barely able to breathe. Fortunately Samantha heard my feeble screams and rescued me. Unfortunately she had to cut off all my hair to free me from the syrup ball, and I've found out over the years that the strength of her sexual passion climbs in direct proportion to the length of my hair. I've heard that used plastic can be spun into fibers; I wonder if they can make wigs from the fibers?

**I could build the next best thing** to a perpetual motion machine: a yogurt cup water wheel. The wheel -- made of thousands of cups bonded together with titanium rivets, and spokes like a Farris wheel -- would be so lightweight it could generate power when dipped in a moving water source, say when attached to the side of a riverboat cruising up the Hudson from New York.

*Note:* It's sad, but the yogurt companies don't seem interested in ideas that could lead to a completely closed ecological loop for the industry where, e.g., power from yogurt cup water wheels could run milking machines at yogurt dairies, and run "grow lights" in the huge caverns where they raise live yogurt cultures. According to the best estimates, these lights now use more electricity than all the clandestine indoor marijuana plantations in the world combined.

Of course the wheel wouldn't generate enough power to propel the boat, because that would make the boat a perpetual motion machine, an impossibility. But if the wheel was augmented with a football field-sized raft full of solar cells dragged behind the boat, and there wasn't too strong a headwind, it could provide enough power to run the boat's bilge pumps, sound system and maybe some festive lights strung above the deck.

I was testing this idea with a scaled down version of the wheel in a nearby industrial canal when I noticed a few problems:

First, the titanium rivets seemed to have a bad reaction to something in the water, and every so often one would heat up to a hot orange color then explode like a kernel of popcorn. This problem may be isolated to the canal and not a factor on the Hudson, unless the boat runs in shallow water where the titanium could come in contact with PCBs and other toxins bubbling up from the mud. I've sent letters outlining the problem to the research labs of Alcoa Corp. (the titanium) and G.E. (PCBs in the Hudson), but have yet to receive a response.

Second, the rivets turned out to be much stronger than the yogurt cups, which were constantly being ripped from the wheel, even by the sludge-slowed current of the canal. This could turn out to be a more difficult problem than the reactive titanium, because I would have to replace the cups at the same rate they're lost and, though I love yogurt, I don't know if I could stand to eat one after another all day long. So I've sent letters to all the big yogurt companies in the hope that their experts can solve this problem -- maybe they could reinforce the cups with titanium?

*Note:* Then again maybe that's not such a great idea, because to recover the valuable titanium without burning the plastic and creating a toxic cloud, they'd probably have to genetically engineer titanium-eating bacteria, then figure out how to pump their stomachs afterwards. And if the bacteria escaped from the dump and dug their way downtown, pretty soon they'd be chewing away at the titanium alloy bolts that anchor high rise buildings to bedrock, and all hell would break loose. Not to mention that the titanium is the good part, and what you really want the bacteria to eat is the worthless yogurt cup, to convert it into something benign like dirt. But for some reason science, which launches rockets so accurate they can crash into the surface of Mars like it was the side of a barn, has so far failed to convince any kind of hungry, mindless microorganism to eat yogurt cups.

### **I could use them to build a mammoth tomb.**

Though advances in the biological sciences and health care may extend my lifespan, someday I will die. That galls me because, from what I've read, if I could just hold on for another hundred years or so, I could have eternal life.

*Note:* By way of inevitable advances in technology and computer science, someday everyone will be able to live forever -- without the effort and obedience required by religious schemes, or the painful injections required by schemes based on the blood and hormones of virgins -- inside the memory of a stupendously large and powerful computer. The computer will get the electricity it needs to grow and run forever by burning the whole universe -- all the stars, planets, etc. -- in its power plant. It's true that

this "forever" is not really eternal, because one day the last planet will be thrown on the fire, and at some point the lights will go out for good. But by then, with everyone having sat around inside the computer for untold eons, it will have seemed like forever, which is equivalent in human terms.

And what galls me even more than dying is the certainty that the yogurt cups will outlast me. Where the food they contain vanishes in a few seconds, and mere mortals like us have to face the idea of "ashes to ashes, and dust to dust," these worthless cups get to live forever.

Since I can't beat them, I plan to join the cups in eternity by using them to build the largest pyramid-shaped tomb the world has ever seen, based on the design of the tallest pyramid on earth, the Luxor Casino in Las Vegas. (And the burial chamber in my pyramid will be located at the same the position the Pharaoh's Pheast Buffet occupies in the Luxor.)

*Note:* I found out later that my research on this was faulty. It turns out that the "great" pyramids in Egypt are taller, at about 480 feet to the Luxor's 350. But the Luxor's pyramid can accommodate thousands of guests, while each so-called great pyramid was built to house just one guest, plus slaves, and not one of them has air conditioning, vibrating beds or cable TV.

The batteries on my calculator died (and when I asked if we had any more, Samantha muttered what sounded like "How the hell should I know, Mr. Clean?" from the sofa, where she'd been drinking beer and watching infomercials all morning), so I couldn't get an accurate figure on the number of yogurt cups the project requires, but it's safe to

say it's in the millions, if not billions. Not to mention the thousands of tons of sand ballast needed to keep the cups from blowing away, and the tons of adhesive needed to keep the top layer of sand from blowing away.

Again, there's no way I can eat that much yogurt, short of eternal life. So I planned to start small -- I have enough cups in my basement to build a 17 foot pyramid -- and rely on donations to complete the project. But then I made a few calls to waste disposal executives, in cities where yogurt cups are picked up with other supposedly recyclable plastics, and found out they'd be willing to pay me to take their stockpiles of yogurt cups!

**So I flew out to Nevada** and purchased a 100 acre site 65 miles north of Las Vegas, right next to the old nuclear test site and the proposed national nuclear waste dump at Yucca Mountain. A railroad spur abuts the site, and there's plenty of sand nearby. Pretty soon trains from around the country will be delivering nuclear waste, and there's no reason they couldn't carry the yogurt cups too.

I filed plans with the County Land Use Commission, and found out that local residents like Gerhard and Hilda Studer, who run a gas station on nearby Jackass Flats Road, are excited about the jobs and tourism the project will bring. An old prospector named Willie, who lives in a shack a few hundred yards into the scrub brush behind the Studer's station, has volunteered his mules, Annabelle and Otis Jr., to pull the winch line we'll need to haul cups and sand up the face of the pyramid.

In fact there's so much enthusiasm for this project that I

see no reason to stop at 350, or even 480 feet. As far as I'm concerned, we can keep piling up cups until we reach the sky, so that millennia from now -- long after the last neon light in Las Vegas has flickered and died, and Nevada has reverted to an irradiated slag heap populated by a few burrowing insects -- the pyramid will serve as a beacon, enticing scientists and tourists from passing space ships to descend to the surface. There they can puzzle over the relationship between the images of fruit on the yogurt cups, and the ones on the carcasses of slot machines scattered across the landscape, blinking in the sun, their luck run out.

My one disappointment is my failure to convince Samantha to come with me to Nevada right away. She doesn't seem interested in the idea of a monument built for the ages (even though I've made it clear that a spot in the burial chamber is reserved for her), and says she'd rather wait until winter to go out west, when the desert heat will seem like a good idea. But I've found her gazing out the front window a lot lately, and I'm not sure what's really on her mind.

Meanwhile life goes on. As I pull out of the driveway in the rental truck with the cups from the basement, headed for Interstate 80 and Nevada, I see our new neighbor Julio, a massage therapist and aspiring actor, diligently raking leaves in his front yard across the street. I rub the stubble on my head, smile and wave, and note the way his long, golden hair catches the receding October light, then turn my attention back to the road.

# Proof

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