

Oral Pleasures

John Scott G



A couple dozen stand-up comics explain everything!

Oral Pleasures

Copyright © 2018, 2023 by John Scott G

All rights reserved.

Edition 2023-11-28

No part of this book may be utilized or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author. Exceptions are hereby granted for brief quotations in admiring, flattering, effusive, and sycophantic reviews, articles, blog posts, podcasts, and social networking commentary. The characters and events depicted herein are fictitious and any resemblance to individuals living and departed is a coincidence. The whole kit and caboodle is being distributed by Golosio Publishing, 5000 Beckley Ave., Ste. 44, Woodland Hills, CA 91364. brian@golosio.com. Presentation of the writings of John Scott G made possible by the Gruenberger Family Trust and contributions from Immedia, the Brian Forest Family, Edward and Pearl Geschke, Pandemonium Productions, the Guyette Family, Creative Communication, and a wonderful group of prescient and delightful folks like you. And congrats on being such a voracious reader that you plowed through this paragraph of tiny type.

GOLOSIO NONTRADITIONAL
UNDERGROUND DISTRIBUTION

gnud

“Sexting is a funny word.”
— *George Washington*

(Quotation unconfirmed.)

Come with me
on an imaginary
tour of the nation's
comedy clubs.

MENU

First Set	6
The Invisible Hand.....	12
Improv Class: Memory Book.....	24
MMA: Nth Degree	27
Calendar Daze	35
Talk About Women.....	42
More Talk About Women	50
Visiting the Parents	58
Droning	66
Improv Class: Portents	76
GOP Outfitters	81
The Edge of Heck	93
Classified Information.....	99
W Doll.....	102
Computer Nerds Must Die	111
Shrink Rap.....	118

All the Douchebag Day 123
Pause 132
Getting Racy 140
Big Bash..... 150
Tour Guides..... 158
Grin ‘n’ Bare It..... 165
You’re Welcome, America 174
Cyborgistics 182
About the Author 196

First Set

Being a professional comic is tough but the road to becoming a professional comic is even tougher. Look at some of the steps you have to take: First, you trudge over to an open mic night in the middle of the week to sign up for a five-minute slot after ten o'clock in the evening. Or a seven-minute slot after eleven o'clock. Or maybe a ten-minute slot after midnight. Then, you get to try out your material on a mostly drunk, mostly bored, mostly hostile crowd. A crowd that is mostly absent—you face a lot of empty seats at some of those prove-you're-worthy sessions. It's a trial by fire even as you're desperately trying to get something lit.

Gerry Forest confidently stepped on stage amidst the charming tackiness of Actors & Others, a performance space in the arts district of Oakland, California. “Good evening, everybody! You guys seem nice, but let's find out a little more about you. Show of

hands, how many of you own a gun? Uh-huh. Okay, show of arms, how many of you are packing right now? Fine, go ahead and lie about that.

“The reason I ask is that the management of Actors & Others wants to extend a warm Oakland welcome to all the attendees of the National Undercover Narcotics Officers Convention that’s here in town this week. You heard right: it’s the countrywide confab of plainclothes narcotics enforcement officers, both federal and municipal. Let’s find out how many officers are in the house with us. Raise your hands—how many undercover cops do we have here tonight?

“Whoa, that many? Wow! I feel so protected.” He pretended to take a question from the crowd. “What? Yeah I know there weren’t a lot of hands in the air. But, well, I mean, they can’t admit it, right? They’re undercover. But most of you here tonight are plainclothes feds and cops, right? Sure. I know you are.

“Now, at this point, a bunch of you are thinking to yourselves, ‘I know I’m not an

undercover officer... And I'm pretty sure my date isn't an undercover officer... But I'm wondering about this guy standing next to me.' You have to start doing that thing where to try to look sideways without turning your head. Right? So let's check out some of the people who are standing nearby.”

Lowering the microphone, the comic swiveled his eyes to the side, then back to the audience. He then spoke conspiratorially into the mic. “This guy's wearing a t-shirt with a heavy metal band logo. That's okay.” He swiveled his eyes again. “Moderately-faded jeans. That's okay. So far, things seem cool.” He swiveled his eyes down and froze. “Wing-tip shoes! Uh-oh!” He whisper-shouted into the mic, “That guy's a narc!

“Don't be scared. Well, okay, you can be a little scared. But look, if we're all very cool and don't blatantly break too many laws, we'll all be okay this evening, right? Please signify by not replying. Thank you. Whew! Did you guys follow what I just said? If you didn't, you're a little stoned. And if you did, you're a lot stoned.

“Now, on a personal note, I just want to say that I’m clean. That’s right: carrying no contraband or illegal substances of any kind. Yup, already used them. Oh yeah, I am baked and basted. On life. I’m high on life. Wait, you thought I meant... shame on you! I’m shocked at the very idea.” He fanned himself with one hand and added, “Well, I never!

“I used to use illegal substances, but I changed all that and now I am totally drug-free! Thank you. Just the occasional toke. Maybe a snort or two. Just the teeniest tiniest injection once or twice... a day. No, I’m kidding. I’m a kidder. I really am clean.

“In fact, I’m so clean that I can say to all members of our audience who are here for the National Undercover Officers Convention that if you want to go backstage and search through my backpack, go right ahead. No problem. If you find any drugs it’ll be because you put ‘em there. And if you do that, it’ll show up on the recordings from the security cameras and then we can nail your ass!

“So go ahead and wander around backstage and search my stuff. In fact, go

ahead and search anything you want backstage. I'm sure the other comics won't mind!" The comic grinned with an evil glint in his eyes.

"Okay, now what all you guys need to understand is that the audio for this show is piped into the dressing rooms, so they can hear what I'm saying out here on stage. Which means that right now there are a whole bunch of comics back there putting their drugs down the toilet.

"It probably happened something like this: 'I'm gonna kill tonight, soon as this Forest dweeb gets booted off the stage. Man it's gonna be great 'cause I—wait, *What the Fuck Did He Just Say???!!* He invited the cops back here! Quick, flush this stuff!!!!'

"Panic is a funny thing. And it brings on a bunch of changes. For example, I usually get to do two or three full sets at these shows because for some reason the other comics just aren't able to come out here and entertain you. Now, there are three possible reasons for this.

"One, they take off for parts unknown.

“Two, they get arrested.

“Or, three, without drugs, they just aren’t funny.

“Okay, that’s my first set. Thank you very much, and see you again real soon!”

The Invisible Hand

of the Marketplace

is a Bit Too Touchy-Feely

Some people cannot get enough of the delicious mixture of anger, sarcasm, skepticism, and social observation to be found on stage at a comedy club. The verbal pleasures awaiting you there can be scabrous and/or delightful. Consider, for example, the word-bombardment of one Richard Johnson.

“Yeah, it’s a dick-joke name,” he admitted to the crowd. “Only thing better would be if I was Richard Peter O’Toole Whitesnake Johnson. Thank you, all you lovers of penis synonyms.

“All right, it’s great to see you here at the Laff Connexion. This is a terrific club despite not knowing how to spell. Okay, let’s get started. Now, I’m not an economist and I don’t play one on TV, but here are my

thoughts on something we're all interested in...Money."

He smiled at the audience. "Yeah, got your attention now, right? So we're going to spend the next couple of minutes on foreign trade, outsourced jobs, tariffs, and the 'invisible hand of the marketplace.' No, no, no, stay with me. We'll start with the 'invisible hand of the marketplace.' The invisible hand. Sounds like it belongs in a horror film, doesn't it? The Invisible Hand, Mm-waaaahahaha!

"The invisible hand of the marketplace is the imaginary appendage that right-wing nutjob douchebags chatter about. They sound like this: 'Yes, Sean, the all-important invisible hand of the marketplace is a figurative appendage that cannot be seen but is still vitally important for everyone within the broad confines of fiduciary interaction... so to speak, more or less, as it were, by your leave, and on and on, and so forth, etc.'

"That's the kind of yada-yada you hear on the Fox Fake News channel, right? But in this case, they are actually referring to

something real. They had to be correct about something sooner or later, I guess. The phrase, ‘the invisible hand,’ was created by a man named Adam Smith in his book, *The Wealth of Nations*. It refers to market forces that operate in a free economy. It works like this:

“Let’s say you’ve got two groups of people. This first group of people over here have something for sale and they want to charge a lot for it.

“But over there is a second group of people and they have something similar to sell and they realize they can sell more of it if they charge less than these other folks.

“So both groups start dropping their prices. Eventually, the concept called ‘the invisible hand’ will point the way toward fairer, or at least more competitive, prices. In theory.

“But here’s the thing: the invisible hand is always augmented by the very visible kick-in-the-butt of tariffs and trade restrictions and incentives and a whole lot of stuff. Why is that, you may well ask. Well, we’ll get to that

in a second. But first, let's examine foreign trade."

He peered into the audience and addressed the undercurrent of misgivings. "Problem?" He listened to a few mutterings. "Oh yeah, I know, this doesn't sound like good comedy club material. Your reaction is more like 'Hey, we came here for fart jokes and one-liners about cock and pussy, so what's with this economics bullshit?!' Well, yes, I completely understand that point-of-view and it is deserving of a thoughtful and reasoned response, and so here it is:

"Fuck you. Okay, now, foreign trade."

He waited for the groans to subside. "Hey, I'm going to finish this bit so you might as well sit back and be comfortable. Think about the fun you could have with some audience members if you had an invisible hand." He paused while the possibilities of that sunk in. "Yeah, you guys like that concept, don't you?!" He shook his head ruefully. "Reprobates," he muttered.

"Okay, so look, the whole world is interconnected. One country has more of *this*

thing and less of *that* thing, while another country has more of *that* thing and less of *this* thing. So it's in each nation's best interest to work out a deal. So here in the USA, we look for a country that has what we need but at the same time needs what we have, right? It's not evil. It's how things have to work, right? No? You're not with me on this? You prefer the fart jokes and one-liners about cock and pussy, is that it?

“Okay, I've got a way for all of you to think about this in the context you prefer. Pay attention now. Here's the deal: A guy approaches a girl and says to her... ‘Hi. So, listen, I think we can work things out between us. It's a perfectly fair exchange. You see, I've got a cock and need pussy, whereas you, on the other hand...’” He paused for an appreciative smattering of laughter. He had won over the crowd for the moment. “You see how this invisible hand thing can work now, right? It works through trade. Often foreign trade. It can be a good thing. But you don't trade cock and pussy with people who keep farting at you.

“See how I worked in your most important comedy club desires? You’re welcome. Actually, I understand your feelings. I appreciate the fascination with cock. Girls like what it does for them. Guys like what it does for them. I like my cock. It has given me an enormous amount of pleasure through the years, which is more than I can say for several other body parts.

“Okay, stay with me now... We’ve covered the invisible hand and foreign trade. Now it’s time for: Outsourcing. Okay, outsourcing is where you fire a bunch of American workers and hire people who work a lot cheaper. And these cheaper-working workers are usually in countries where the government doesn’t care about employees. Forget eight-hour shifts with regular breaks. In a lot of these countries, you work a fourteen-hour shift and the only breaks you’re allowed are when you break your arm or break your back. In which case, you’re fired.

“Outsourcing is actually the sleazy businessman’s way of fucking his own country. Outsourcing American jobs is the

scumbag business way of saying that you hate the people of America. It's a way to demonstrate that you worship profits. That you put profits ahead of people.

“I don't want to get too partisan here but what political group is more likely to be involved in this type of activity? It's a Grab Obscene Profits approach. It's a plan formulated by Greedy Obstructionist Pricks. Grab Obscene Profits. Greedy Obstructionist Pricks. Those phrases can be said in a shorter way just using the initials. Let's see, you've got a G, and an O, and a P. I'm just saying. Any Republicans here? Uh-huh. Just out of curiosity, some of us are wondering why you hate women, gays, blacks, Hispanics, students, the elderly, the veterans, the unemployed, the middle class, and anyone who doesn't make more than a million dollars a year. Seems like all you've got left are rich, old, racist white guys and a smattering of trophy wives. And corporations. You've got the corporations.

“Okay, back to economics, where you can all see that there's a conflict between

foreign trade and outsourcing. You've got your need for foreign trade—dicks seeking pussy... And you've got your outsourcing—hey look, there's some cheaper pussy! And by the way, why is it cheaper? One reason is that it is unregulated. And unregulated pussy is going to give you an STD.

“So, your dick needs pussy and you're happy to see that the unregulated foreign pussy is available at a lower price. How do we protect our good American pussy providers from being undercut by these work-for-nothing foreign bitches? We could try tariffs. Right?

“A tariff is a fee placed on the price that is paid for foreign-made goods when purchased in this country. If you want to enjoy the low-price foreign pussy, you have to help support our home-grown USA pussy with a tariff. This is already being done, of course. Yeah, it is: not for pussy but for manufactured products. There are arguments about it but the arguments always seem to be about how large a tariff there should be. But you've got to do some of it because

otherwise, you'd have ridiculous situations in the marketplace. 'Hey, this foreign pussy only costs two dollars!' Over here, try finding even a crack whore who'll do you for two dollars.

“Or you'd go to the store and find two different products of equal quality and the price would be very different. Take an electric can-opener, for example. Here's one made in the USA, and here's one made in China. Both open your cans but the one made in the USA costs a certain amount more because workers here have to get paid enough to live on. So without a tariff, you might have the USA can opener on sale for fifty dollars and the Chinese can opener on sale for about a dollar-ninety-nine. Suddenly it hits you: Oh, that's why all the crap at Wal-Mart is cheap: it's made by slaves.

“Some people say we shouldn't even have foreign-made products in this country because of this problem. Sorry, I didn't mean to open a whole big can of worms on this subject. You know, with one of those can openers. Ba-dum-bum-bum. Hey, I have to do my own rimshots and sound effects because

there's no band here. You know, because of tariffs.

“All right, it's a global economy. And a lot of manufacturing is done overseas. And their workers are working for thirty-two cents. Not per hour. They're working for thirty-two cents a day. And they live in buildings right next to the factories. They don't go anywhere except to work and then to bed. And they buy their food and clothes from stores owned by the manufacturing company, which is often the government. That's different from where you work, correct?

“I'm sure you probably complain a little about your job. You say: ‘The air conditioning is never at the right level!’ They don't have air conditioning in a sweatshop. That's one of the reasons it's called a sweatshop. You say: ‘The coffee is so bad in the lunchroom!’ They don't have a lunchroom in a sweatshop. You say: ‘The managers here are all assholes!’ They don't... well, yes, they have assholes. It's a universal phenomenon. When humans were created, God was particularly fond of idiots and assholes. That's

why God made so many conservatives. But do you really think God wanted us to have all our stuff made in sweatshops? And do you think God likes sweatshops? Come to think of it, do you like them? I'll bet you wouldn't want to work in one.

“Show of hands, how many of you would like to change places right now and go to work in a foreign sweatshop? Usually there are a couple of drunks who raise their hands at this point. No, most people in the USA don't want to go to work in a sweatshop. But you love the fact that other people work in them, right? Right? No? Really? Well, let's see if your actions match that view.

“Right now, you're wearing clothes made in a sweatshop. You're wearing shoes made in a sweatshop. You're carrying a phone made in a foreign country by young adults and teenagers and even kids, working long hours for short pay... in a sweatshop. At home, you've got TVs, computers, music equipment, microwaves—all mostly made in foreign sweatshops. Cars and trucks, too. Your so-called American car might have a lot

of foreign parts. Hell, it might have been manufactured in Canada or Mexico. Okay, I know, Canada and Mexico are like Puerto Rico. You know: our ‘fifty-first state.’ We keep telling all three of these places that they’re getting close... Just keep working on it and maybe we’ll let you in. It’s like the way people talk to their pets. ‘Who’s a good country? Who’s a good country? You’re a good country! Oh yes you are! Yes you *are!!*’

“But when you take all this stuff and put it together, what do you get? What conclusion do you reach from placing tariffs on your outsourced foreign trade in the romantic semi-darkness of your just maybe-it’s-not-so-free marketplace? What can we all agree on in this international financial muddle? Here it is:

“The invisible hand of the marketplace is way too far up your ass.”

Improv Class: Memory Book

Two performers were sitting next to each other. One was crying. The other person was gently patting the arm of the person in distress.

“It’s going to be all right, it’s going to work out...”

“I just can’t believe he’s gone.” [SOBS]

“How long have you been mourning?”

“Oh god, I don’t know... [SOBS]... maybe, uh—I mean, it seems like forever, sometimes.”

“It’s okay to have a good cry once in a while.”

“I— I know, but, but, it’s just that, oh god...”

“It’s all right. Although I’ll bet it’s exhausting.”

“Yes! Oh god, yes. I haven’t slept since it happened.”

“Well, you may have to just cry it out. No one knows the length of time each of us will put into grieving. But let me know if

you'd like something constructive to do in the meantime."

"What? What is it?"

"No, no. You're probably not ready."

"No, I'm ready! Really."

"Well, if you're certain."

"I am. Honest."

"Okay. I'm going to tell you something that I have found really quite helpful whenever I was going through a period of bereavement."

"Uh huh..."

"What I did was, I got a small notebook and a pen and carried them everywhere. Whenever I felt sad about the loss, I forced myself to think of something nice that happened during the time we shared together. And I jotted down a line about it."

"Jotted down... You mean write it down?"

"Um hmm. You don't even need full sentences. Like this: 'That time in the backyard when the butterflies made us happy.' Or 'Playing in the park on the first sunny day of Spring.' It could be anything."

“Anything?”

“Sure. ‘Sharing an order of meatballs from the Italian place.’ Write it down. Anything that made you smile, jot it down. You don’t have to read it back to correct spelling or syntax or punctuation. Just write down the happy memories. Simple, right?”

“I guess...”

“At the end of a couple months, have the notes typed up. Pay someone to do it if you have to. Then read them. You’ll cry again, but this time they’ll be tears of joy and acceptance. And you’ll be holding your own personal, private word portrait, an emotional ‘phrase painting,’ a unique memory book.”

“That sounds beautiful!”

“It can be.”

“So that really works?”

“It has worked for me every time I have mourned for the loss of a loved one.”

“I think I’m going to try it.”

“Good for you.”

“Because, you know...”

“Yes?”

“I really loved that dog.”

MMA: Nth Degree

You snooze, you lose. Woe unto those who failed to make it into the Grin Mill nightclub just as a rising star made her unannounced appearance at midnight. The super-secret hush-hush event was part of the publicity tour surrounding the new season of Amanda Cee's off-the-wall broadcast show, *Full Body Search*.

“Hi there, everybody. That's right, it's me, Amanda Cee. Thank you. You're too kind. I'm just using you. No, really, comics do things like this when they want to try out some new material to see if it, you know, lives and breathes. And by lives and breathes, I mean does it make you laugh or does it just sit there, drowning in a sea of cricket chirpings.”

She brought the microphone close to her mouth and grumbled out the word, “Crick-etts.”

Nodding, she continued to address the crowd. “See? See how that worked? Now I have the perfect word, the perfect sound

effect, whenever a joke doesn't perform the way it's supposed to. I just do this: Crick-etts. And you guys chuckle a little. Let's practice... Crick-etts. Yeah, like that. Very good. You're being a good audience. Not great, but good. Keep it up and there might be a little something special for you after the show."

She brushed her hair, cocked her head at the audience, and shrugged. She adjusted the mic, sighed, and continued. "So, I saw a story the other day about next year's Oscars Trademark Registered All Rights Reserved. That's the official name. Oscars Trademark Registered All Rights Reserved. Those guys are such fussbudgets. Always checking up on every little thing. Well, every little thing except women behind the camera, minority casting, musicals that don't suck, and plots that make sense... You know, the small stuff.

"The minority casting, or lack of it, sometimes makes me wonder about blowback. Tables being turned. Reverse casting. Cross-cultural casting. Cross-gender casting. Payback casting!"

Looking very serious, she began imitating the type of voice used on commercials and trailers for motion pictures. “This Fall, Margaret Cho IS James Bond. It’s go-go-go for Cho as 007 in *Lesbo*.” She went back to her normal voice, “Sounds great, right? I’ll go see that. Yeah. Payback casting. Think of the possibilities.”

She used the movie trailer voice again and again:

“Caitlyn Jenner will surprise you as Othello!” She nodded at the audience.

“Cate Blanchett is astonishing as Josef Stalin!” Another nod.

“Daniel Craig is regal as Madame Curie!” Nod.

“Sarah Silverman virtually channels General Douglas MacArthur!” Enthusiastic nodding.

“Shaquille O’Neal stands short as Napoleon!” Small nod.

“Tracy Morgan reaches new levels of pathos in his sensitive portrayal of Florence Nightingale!” Nod.

She returned to her normal voice. “Yeah, lots of great cinema coming up. I think it’s going to be very interesting. Hell, with payback casting I’ll be considered for the lead in the new musical version of *Titus Andronicus*. Yes. Forsooth.”

“All right, it’s now time for the clever lead-in to our next subject. You know, the adroit use of word-play that takes us from Topic A to Topic B. So, here goes: There are people who argue about the artistic validity of payback casting. Yup, they really fight about it.” She dramatically paused for a second and then: “Speaking of fighting... I’ve been watching a lot of mixed martial arts matches lately. Yeah. MMA. Not the stupid fights they show on C-SPAN but the real ones. I’ll let that sink in for a second. I’m talking about the fights with bruises and blood and smashed cartilage and broken bones and shattered dreams. Good times.”

She struck a fighting pose. “You like this? Think I could take one of those MMA bitches? Ya think? Nah, I couldn’t. I can out-joke ‘em. I can out-pedicure ‘em. But I can’t

out-fight ‘em. But in watching those battles, I’ve noticed a few things. Shall I tell you what I’ve noticed?”

The audience responded in the affirmative. “Nope, you’re still not great. Want another chance? Okay.” She cleared her throat. “Shall I tell you what I’ve noticed?” The audience urged her on. “Good. Thank you. Okay, I’ve noticed that the crowds at mixed martial arts love the violence. ‘Kill him!’ ‘Destroy him!’ ‘Fuck him up!’ See, that’s where it kind of overlaps with C-SPAN. And then the MMA fighters do actually sometimes destroy each other. It’s amazing to see two guys at the end of a fight, barely able to stand there next to the referee, big welts all over their bodies, hematoma pulsating on their heads, ears all mangled, blood streaming down what’s left of their faces, and then one of them is pronounced the winner.”

She shook her head in wonder. “And for about ten seconds, the joy of victory erases the pain. And then the pain comes back. Oh yeah, the pain comes back. Pain that night. Pain the next morning. Pain in the bathroom.

Pain at the gym. Boy, sometimes I'll bet they want to be put out of their misery. And that's where I can help."

She nodded at the audience. "Oh yeah. You see, I've got an idea that will take this whole MMA thing to a higher level. You guys like smash 'em crash 'em contact sports, right?"

She heard a few shouts from the audience and kept whipping them up. "You like fights? You like epic battles? You like combat? You like seeing people enacting a blood feud right in front of you? You like the concept of 'Two enter the cage but only one gets out alive'? You like that, right? Well, I've got just the thing for you. It's MMA on rocket fuel. It's MMA to the max. It's—are you ready? It's MMA... with knives."

She nodded enthusiastically. "Oh yeah. Oh yeah, baby. No more of the namby-pamby MMA. No more of the pussyfooting MMA. We're going to have full-bore cut-throat fight-to-the-end death matches. Okay, now some of you are asking, 'How would this work?' IT WILL WORK FUCKING FINE! Sorry, I get

a little carried away sometimes. But hey, I'm ready for your ideas and points of view. So let's open this up to you guys. Questions? Anyone? Yes ma'am."

She pretended to take a question. "Um hm, um hm, sure. Well, the first rounds would be the same as they are now, and then in the final round... knives. Thank you for your question. Glad we could delve into that topic and really clear things up.

"Okay, let's have another question. Yes sir. Uh huh, uh huh, good point, good point. Machetes. Machetes, sure thing. Machetes, yes, but only in championship fights. I mean, we're not savages. Well, some of us aren't.

"Another question? Yes, you sir. Yes, go ahead. What's that? Chainsaws? Yes! Now you guys are getting it! MMAC—Mixed Martial Arts with Chainsaws."

She nodded enthusiastically to the audience. "So let's turn this into a movement. Mixed Martial Arts with Weaponry! Are you with me?"

The audience reacted.

"I can't hear you! Are you with me?!"

The audience roared.

“With machetes!” Roar. “With chainsaws!” Roar. “With blow torches!” Roar. “With bazookas!” Roar. “With tanks!” Roar. “And for conservatives...” She lowered her voice and spoke one frightening word: “Nukes!” Roar and groans.

“And you know what will be left after that...

“Crick-etts.”

Calendar Daze

Fattery can work wonders. Fawning sweet talk is always a good way to treat the audience at the start of a set, especially if you intend to spend some time insulting many of them. Therefore, Jerry Brillstein began his part of the evening with a little obsequiousness: “Wow, that spotlight is bright, but even so, I can see that you’re a great-looking audience! Oh yeah, give yourselves a hand. Okay. So, this evening we’re going to do some old jokes. No, really, because, you know, the old jokes are sometimes the best. Speaking of old jokes... the Republicans. Show of hands, people, how many of you are... morons? Yeah, there’s always a few.

“The GOP. The G-O-P. Members say it stands for Grand Old Party but it actually stands for Greedy Old Phuckers. Yup, I’m spelling ‘fuckers’ with a P-H. Sue me.

“What? Some of you object to that? Well, you need to remember how the GOP used to collectively do an impression of

Sergeant Schultz from *Hogan's Heroes* when it came to climate change. The GOPers would say, 'I know nothing, nothing!' And then they'd be proud of their ignorance!

"It's embarrassing. The GOP is like a sixth grader holding his hands over his ears and shouting, 'No climate change No climate change No climate change!' There were GOP assholes in the Senate who said, 'It's a hoax!' They actually said crap like, 'liberals are in bed with tree-huggers and they're perpetrating a hoax.' But as soon as the science was demonstrated to them, the GOP changed to 'Sure the climate is getting worse but it's not humans' fault.'

"Then the facts showed it *was* humans' fault and the GOP changed to 'Sure the climate is getting worse and it's mankind's fault but there's nothing we can do about it. It's too expensive and too late.' After that, they said that technology will save us. Or—and here's my favorite—they said that 'God will provide.' Yeah, 'God will provide.'

"But you watch, the minute some of their constituents begin dying from bad air, bad

water, floods, rising tides, and out-of-season tornados, the GOP will be all ‘Oh my sweet lord, climate change is real! Why didn’t you warn us? Why didn’t you do something to prevent it?! Why didn’t the liberals act in time?!?!?!?!’ You watch. Conservatives do that kind of thing every time.

“I know I bash the right-wing nut-jobs a lot, but everyone needs to speak out about this plague. Most decent people are not equipped to cope with the evil of conservatism because we are out-gunned; conservatives may be strange, silly, stunted people but they have ignorance, superstition, and prejudice on their side while all we have are facts.

“Okay, okay, enough of that. I see the republitarads squirming in the audience. You know I’m right, you just don’t want to ‘fess up to it. But okay, enough. Segue to new topic. Okay, a deep breath. Deep cleansing breath. Try it—feels good. Okay, here we go: Hey, I’ve been spending a lot of time in New York City lately. How many of you have... lived in filth? Yeah, yeah, a lot of us have to do that in New York.

“You see what I did there, right? How I made you think we were going in one direction and then I pulled the old standup comedian’s switcheroo.

“Here’s how that works: I mention New York City and then I start to ask how many of you have been there... but I pause, and then instead of asking about visiting the place I put in a bit of commentary about how dirty the city is. Sometimes that’s called a ‘change-up.’ Sometimes we call it a ‘turnaround.’ Either way, some of you can see those things coming a mile away. It’s like when the comedian says something that seems like it could only conclude one particular way, but then the comic changes it up or turns it around and it becomes something else.” He muttered the next line: “Hopefully, something humorous.

“Let me give you an example. I’ll start to say ‘Nice weather we’re...’ and you want to finish with...? Very good! ‘Having.’ Having, that’s right. Nice weather we’re having. You expect ‘having’ to be the end of that sentence. But with the turnaround and the comedian’s switcheroo you can take off in new directions.

Watch how I do it again: Okay: Nice weather we're... destroying with carbon dioxide emissions. You see how that works? Isn't that great? Fun for the whole family.

“Let's do another one: I just bought a couple of lottery tickets. How many of you also like to... throw your money away? Yup, I knew I wasn't alone.

“Here's one more: I've been looking into religion lately. How many of you also believe in... invisible people in the sky? Yeah, yeah, see? It's funny 'cause it's true.

“Hey, speaking of weird things we just take for granted, did you ever wonder about holidays? Not the holidays themselves, but when they happen. Why do some of them fall on the same *day* each year but not on the same *date*? And why do others fall on the same *date* each year but not on the same *day*?

“For example, Christmas is always December 25th but it can be on any day of the week. Thanksgiving is always the fourth Thursday in November, but it can be as early as the 22nd or as late as the 28th, or anywhere in between.

“Jewish holidays, however... They must drive calendar makers nuts. First, there’s the spelling of the holidays, which no one seems to agree on. But then there’s the fact that they don’t fall on the same day *or* date each year. They don’t even take place in the same week from year to year. They don’t even have to take place in the same month from year to year. What’s up with that?

“I looked into it. You know, so you guys don’t have to. You’ll thank me in a minute. So, here’s the deal. There are two different explanations. Two, separate, and distinct possibilities. I’ll give both of them to you and you can take it from there.

“The first explanation is this: The Jewish calendar year is not the same length as other calendar years because it bases a year on the rotation of the Earth, the revolution of the Earth around the sun, and the revolution of the moon around the earth.

“And no, that doesn’t mean their calendar uses astrology. But it does mean that one of the Jewish months may not line up

with anybody else's month. They even, sometimes, add an extra month to their year.

“Man, how often would you like to be able to do that?! ‘Whoa, I am so behind on everything I don’t know what I’m gonna do. Wait, I know—I’ll add an extra month to the year! Man, this is great—I’m ahead of schedule!’ I guess the only thing holding most of us back from doing that is we’d have to pay an extra month’s rent each year.

“So, that’s the first explanation of why Jewish holidays jump around. Okay, here’s the second explanation:

“We’re just fucking with you.

“Yeah, yeah, that’s right, I said it. Each year, it happens something like this: At the head rabbi’s house, they sit down to dinner and one of the children says, ‘Papa, the goyim calendar guys called and wanted to know the dates of our holidays for next year. What should I tell them?’ And the rabbi shrugs and says to his son, ‘After dinner, call them back and make shit up like we did last year. They’ll never know.’”

Talk About Women

Stepping into the spotlight for a seven-minute slot during open mic night at Frankie's Place was a comic billed as the Midnight Maverick. As he put it, "I'm the real M-and-M." He nodded at the crowd. "You can forget about the other Eminem, that white boy who so desperately wanted to be black. I mean, I can see how you guys would confuse the two of us. We both paint pictures with words. We both comment on society. And we both have incredible sexual energy." He smiled and winked.

"So, how you all doing this evening?" There was not much reaction.

"Hmmm, not much of a reaction," he said. "That's okay," he told them. "I'm familiar with Quaaludes." He got a couple guffaws at that. "No, I do. I do. 'Ludes are effective for certain occasions. You work a full shift and you've got machines pounding away all around you and then someone drags you here to this comedy thing when all you

want to do is to throw back a few and watch some porn. No, it's fine. I get it.”

The crowd perked up a bit. It seemed like there was a chance Mr. Maverick could win them over.

“Or maybe you've got a job where people ask you stupid questions all day and you have to be nice to them or you get fired.” A little wave of laughter moved across the crowd.

“Or maybe your company is run by people who have the intelligence of a cauliflower and the personality of a broken door-knocker and you have to be nice to them, too.” A few more laughs greeted that observation.

“Yeah, I've been there. After each shift, I'd be looking at my stash and considering what to pop to take me far, far away. Let's see, I've got Bad Bandits, Mega Mandies, Randy Mandies, 714, Wagon Wheels, Quack Quack, and Disco Biscuits. I'll just close my eyes, grab two, wash them down with a shot of Jack Daniels, and we Escape From The Realities and Vicissitudes of Life!”

The audience was with him now.

“But I didn’t come here tonight to discuss drugs. Unless you got something good to sell or trade. Anyone? Anyone? Bueller? How many of you are holding right now, don’t raise your hands. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Thought so. Yeah, confusion is a signal. Confusion is a sign. Your confusion is actually a confession. Oh yeah.” He pulled out his phone and said, “Just calling the cops.”

Maverick smiled at the audience and put away his phone. “Okay, I’ll let you off with a warning. You’re nothing but a bunch of drugged-out, porn-addled degenerates.” He nodded approvingly. “My kind of people.” He timed the laugh and immediately went into an orator’s call-to-action, complete with phony echo effect. “I hereby welcome the degenerate delegates to our first annual convention of drugs and porn-orn-orn-orn!”

A few people clapped.

“Thank you for that round of almost applause. That’s called clappus interruptus. But my short set tonight isn’t about drugs or

jobs or applause or me or you. Well, it's about some of you. I'm here to talk about... " he dropped his voice one full octave and concluded the sentence with one vital word: "women."

Several hoots and hollers greeted that line.

"Women. The true celestial bodies. The objects of our desire. No, it's true. Everyone likes women. Straight men like women because we want to do them; gay men like women because they want to be them. Or at least discuss important stuff like skin lotion and the true meaning of pop song lyrics."

He took a few steps to his left, out of the bright light. He then moved back to stage center. "Sorry," he said to the crowd. "Just checking to see if anyone was working the spotlight. Obviously not. Okay, we're on the subject of women. Everybody likes women. Beautiful. Desirable. Enticing. Exciting. Well, a lot of 'em. Some of them are dogs."

That got some scattered boos.

"Yeah? Seriously? Booming may make you feel politically correct but we all know

there are some women out there who are not doable. Right? Right? Hey, don't get me started on whether men are desirable. I'm here to tell you that no man is desirable."

He paused a second, listening to the crowd, which was mostly silent. "Nobody booing that, I see. Okay, so some of you thought I was being misogynistic a minute ago, but no one thinks I was being homophobic a second ago? Wow, okay. But I'm not homophobic. You can be gay and be my friend, my neighbor, my fellow comedian, my retail sales person, my politician—I have no problem with you being gay. Just don't be gay with my body."

That got a mixed reaction from the crowd.

"I'm just saying. Sorry, but I don't find men's bodies attractive. In fact, I think a lot of guys feel that way. And I think that accounts for some of the violence against women and a lot of the anti-women's legislation from male rightwing politicians. It has something to do with the hatred and disgust men have toward their own bodies. No, hear me out. It goes like

this: (A) Men's bodies are horrible; (B) women are attracted to men; therefore, (C) women must be horrible.”

Another mixed reaction from the audience.

“Okay, all right, okay. So, let's get back to what we can all agree on. Women are great! Yes. Oh yeah. Women are mystical, magnificent, and magical. Women are glorious! But— But— C'mon, you know there was a 'but' coming. And it's a big 'but.' No pun intended. But seriously, there are some problems with women. Let me give you just one example. Women create a fantasy calendar in their minds and then get angry with you for not knowing it's there.”

In a woman's voice: “Do you know what today is?”

In a man's voice: “Uh, Tuesday?”

Woman's voice: “No, silly, it's the second one-month anniversary of when we first met.”

Man: “The hell you talkin' about?”

Woman: “Remember, we first met at the off-track betting shop next to the free clinic?”

Man: “Uh-huh, I guess.”

Woman: “That was two months ago, exactly. Isn’t it romantic?!”

Man: “Yeah, right. Romantic.”

Maverick rolled his eyes. “So, the man says to the woman, ‘Okay, our second one-month anniversary of when we met. Darlin’, let me put that in my phone’s calendar for when this day rolls around next year.’ And then they hug, and the hugging leads to kissing, and the kissing leads to caressing, and the caressing leads to making love. But after they’re done, the man starts thinking.”

Maverick paused and the crowd seemed to lean forward, listening expectantly.

“The guy says to himself, ‘Our second one-month anniversary of when we met’? Fuck that. And then he removes the date from his phone’s calendar because there is no way they’re going to be together for a year!”

The crowd appreciated that.

“Thank you. Listen now, my time is just about up. Okay, so there is one significant and imperative idea that must continually be in your mind when discussing the fair sex. There

is one scientific fact that is irrefutably and indubitably true. And that fact is...” He relished the dramatic pause before completing the sentence: “...some of them bitches is crazy.”

More Talk About Women

Until he stepped on stage, Lanny Keegan was a soft-spoken man, the kind of guy who could attend a party all night without making much of an impression on anyone. But get him in the spotlight in front of a crowd and his quiet voice suddenly achieved power and excitement, especially when spoken through a microphone and amplified through the P.A. system of a nightclub.

“Hey, nice to see all of you here at Smiles,” Keegan said into the mic. “Especially you two,” he added, eyeing a couple of women at the front of the club. Then he turned back to the full audience. “So, tonight’s topic: dating. I see lots of people here who are on dates. Dating’s tough, right? I don’t know how women look at it... Russian Roulette, probably. For guys, it’s a different kind of game. A different kind of numbers game. It’s a mathematical calculation. There actually is some sort of scholarship involved

in this. No, no, no, just hang on. Keep still and allow me to tell you how it works.

“Okay, here it is: You hit on as many beautiful women as you can until you find one who says ‘Yes.’” He paused and got a small laugh once the audience realized he was done with the explanation. “That’s it. Yup, that’s the great and well-documented systematic theory. You ask every attractive woman if she’s interested in you until you find one who is amenable.

“That correct: amenable. And by amenable I mean one who is desperate enough or drunk enough or stupid enough or heartbroken enough or horny enough or stoned enough to say ‘yeah’ to your indecent proposal.”

He eyed the two women again and spoke softly into the mic. “Hiya. How you doin’ tonight? Buy you a drink later? Maybe smoke some cannabis? I’ve got sativa and indica, whichever you prefer. You both are looking very lovely this evening. Well, you couldn’t help but look lovely no matter what you’re wearing. Or not wearing. Listen, there’s this

thing I have to do right now,” indicating the club, “so let’s talk after.” Then, back to the whole club: “Yup, just basic math. I’m proceeding with science over there.”

He glanced back at the women. “Ladies, you didn’t mind my singling you out, right? I mean, putting aside my obvious physical charms and immense wealth, it was just good fun, right? Right. Okay.” Then, back to the whole audience again: “You know, I’ve got something for all the ladies in the club tonight. Well, every guy always feels that way! Okay, but look, there’s some advice and commentary that I think every woman is going to find helpful. Yeah, I know what some of you are thinking: ‘Uh-oh.’ But hear me out.

“So, ladies—we are all happy that you spent hours shopping for that outfit. And for the hours preparing your body. You spent a lot of time on your hair, make-up, clothes, shoes, nails, jewelry. And you made sure that your skirt and blouse were form-fitting and alluring, right, so that people would notice you. And then guys notice you... and when

they do, you should just... be happy about it. But are you happy about it? No, most of the time you're annoyed! Hey, you tried to get my attention and now you're rolling your eyes at me for giving you some attention. You know what? I think you should perform a biological impossibility. Yeah, that's correct, fuck you!

“But I digress. We all enjoy looking at women. Straight women enjoy looking at women to check them out, see what the competition is doing. ‘Are bangs back in?’ ‘Is that amount of cleavage okay for this type of event?’ That sort of thing. Lesbian women enjoy looking at women because they're, um, considering the possibilities. ‘I'd take her.’ ‘I'd take her.’ ‘Naw, I wouldn't want her, but where did she get that great necklace?’

“Hey guys, I got a tip for checking out women. You know how it is when you see a beautiful girl and you look her up and down? Sometimes that doesn't go too well. It can be like this: your eyes go from her face to her legs and back up again and she waits to be sure to catch your attention so she can roll her

eyes at you. Or look at you as if you were a bug on her arugula. But it doesn't have to be like that. Guys, here's how you do it: you spot the beautiful girl, your eyes go from her face to her legs, but you go a little further down, to the ankles at least, and you bring your eyes back up again and just before you make eye contact you smile and say, 'Nice shoes!'

“And instead of a put-down eye-roll you hear, ‘Oh, thank you! You’re so sweet.’ And sometimes she’ll look at her shoes and comment on them, thus affording you a wonderful opportunity to let your eyes play over her body again from her face to her feet and back up again. Have a long enough conversation about shoes and heels and straps and colors and you can look at her for an hour.

“Guys, you’re welcome.” He smiled and nodded to the crowd.

“So many similar things about the sexes but so many differences, too. For example, women enjoy sex more than men.

“Yeah! Ladies, you know you like it even more than us. Oh sure, you may not

pursue it the same way as men. Guys don't consider all the ramifications quite as much as you do, we just want it. You, on the other hand, you lovely female creatures, you consider it, ponder it, weigh the options, discuss it with friends, start a blog about it, write a children's book... 'My Little Orgasm.' Or 'Come Play With Me.' Next time you're checking out some books, read some children's book titles for double meanings. 'Pink is the Best Color.' Things like that.

“Yeah, women invest more time, thought, and consideration. Oh yeah, sometimes women are just hot but usually they're thinking about how there could be a commitment that involves spirituality, caring, sharing, love—you know, all that crap. That's because women are aiming for something big: 'A Relationship.' Well, ladies, guys are aiming for a relationship, too; it's just that some guys think of a relationship as drinks, fucking, maybe breakfast the next morning, and then 'buh-bye.'

“That means it can be a struggle getting the two genders together. But once a woman

decides to make love, to go all the way, to become intimate, to have sex, to fuck—once they're to that point, well, let's face it—they enjoy it way more than men. During orgasm, it's totally different for women. I'm not even sure you gals are still on this planet during an orgasm. I think you're zooming your way through the eyes of hurricanes on other worlds in other galaxies.

“Plus, and most importantly, you get the multiple. Right? The vaunted and fabled and celebrated multiple orgasm. We just get the one time per session. Maybe two at the most. But you get to climax once, twice, three times, quatro, cinco, six, seven, ocho, nine, a dozen! The multiple orgasm. Let's hear it for the multiple orgasm!

“Ladies, you're so lucky to be able to have unlimited visitation rights to enter into ecstasy. And as a man, let me say that I recognize something very profound about the female climax. Ladies, let me assure you: I know—I absolutely know—that it is my job to help you reach it as many times as possible. That's my job. That's my quest. Yes! No, no,

no, thank you. Seriously. Thank you, thank you, ladies. I'll be charging for my services from now on. Right: 'Just a gigolo...'

“‘What do you do for a living?’ Oh, I get women to climax. It's a dirty job, but thank god I get to do it. That's it for my set, thank you, hope to see you soon. Especially,” he looked at the ladies in the front, “you two.”

Visiting the Parents

Tillie MacMillian appeared to be totally in control as she stood in the spotlight at the Five Stages of Comedy. She was speaking with the microphone almost pressed against her lips. Dramatically, she semi-whispered, “So, my mom asked my dad....” She waited for complete silence and then finished the line, “Murray, has our relationship been just physical all these years?”

“Yup, that’s what Mom asked Dad. I know! Weird stuff, right? Okay, now I wanna tell ya that I was not eavesdropping.” The crowd didn’t buy it. “I wasn’t!” More groans.

“No, really. I swear!

“Okay, so I was eavesdropping a little. Y’know, a wee bit. But I’ve got a good excuse. A very good excuse... I’m nosy. So, you see, everything’s kosher with that, right?”

“So okay, here’s what happened. I was over at my parents. I didn’t just drop in. No, ‘cause I hate that. I hate the ‘drop-in.’ Hate the drop-by. Y’know, when you’ve just gotten

out of the shower and someone shows up. ‘Oh is this a bad time? Are you busy?’ No, no, not at all. Just let me towel off, select an outfit, get dressed, put on my make-up, fix my hair, and I’ll be right with you to listen to your crap. Sure, sure, fine.

“Or they arrive just as you just get home with the groceries and they wonder if you have time to hear how they got dumped by the boyfriend who just a week ago they were telling everybody was ‘The One.’

“Sure, honey, let’s commiserate together. I’ve got chocolate. Okay, they’re actually Reese’s Pieces, but the peanut butter’s good for you. You need the protein if you’re gonna get through this. Meanwhile, ya wanna give me a hand with the perishables? Hey, that kind of ties-in, right? The stuff for the fridge is perishable and so are your relationships. Oh, sorry. Here, have another Reece’s.

“So I hate the drop-in. The ‘Let’s surprise our friends and see if we can catch them shooting up. Or whatever it is they do all day when they’re not out on the road claiming to be a comedienne.’ I’m just

saying.” She pretended to check her arm for needle marks.

“All righty, me, at my parents. Which is always a little strange anyway. All those memories of when you were a kid but now all of you are adults. Except for them now-and-then ‘cause they’re regressing into childhood. Y’know, just a little, right? You find yourself reminding them about this and that, the same way they reminded you to brush your teeth, do your homework.

“Okay, there are a few teensy little differences. Instead of them telling you not to leave your toys on the living room floor, you’re now reminding them not to leave their teeth on the kitchen table. Or in the mailbox, which is where I found a set once. I took it as a biting commentary on the state of today’s junk mail. Hey, hey, hey, don’t boo. I’ve still got a complete working set of choppers and I swear I’ll come out there and bite you. I am allowed a bad pun once in a while. Puns are okay from time to time. Y’know, if they’re punny enough...” The crowd good-naturedly

groaned. “Oh, shut up!” she told them. They good-naturedly laughed.

“So, I’m at my parents and we had a good visit. Good fun. Good chat. No, really, it was good. It was good because I’ve got technology working for me on this. I have a little pocket digital recorder and I’ve got all my responses programmed and ready to roll. Here, let me show you. Hang on. Okay, here we go. I’ll catch you up on the last dozen conversations with my parents and show you how to handle your in-laws at the same time. You ready? Okay, just listen. You don’t need to know what they said ‘cause you’ll know from my recorded answers. Okay here we go:

Tillie’s voice was a bit tinny on the recording, but the words were clear: “‘Sorry to hear about your hip, mom.’”

“Don’t I sound good in a digital file? And don’t you wish you thought of this? Here, let me play it again:

“‘Sorry to hear about your hip, mom.’”

“Right? You’re all going to be able to use that one. Okay, here’s the next one:

“‘Sorry to hear about your back, dad.’”

“Yup, that comes in handy. Isn’t technology great? If I can get them both to take off their glasses I don’t even need to do some bad lip-sync. I can just push the button on this thing and be checking my e-mail. Okay, here’s the next one:

““Oh, so sorry to hear that. When’s the funeral?’

“Now that they’re in the retirement community, sometimes you have to use that one a couple of times. I’m just saying. Okay, here we go with another one:

““No, not at the moment, mom, but when the right man comes along, then we can talk about wedding plans.’

“She keeps letting me know about finding the best wedding planner, the best caterer, the best florist, the best photographer, and so on. It’s not that she’s suggesting we hire them; she wants to set me up on a date with one of them. Moms can be so helpful that way. Actually, come to think of it, she probably is thinking of an all-in-one deal: I should date ‘em, get engaged to ‘em, and then hire ‘em to do the wedding and the reception.

You see why I've recorded my standard conversational responses. Okay, here's one more for ya:

“‘Yes mom, I promise I won't go lesbian without letting you know first.’

“‘Yeah, as if I'd ever tell her. Okay, now these little recordings help out a great deal. They're a lifesaver. But the technological wonders do not stop there. Oh no no no. There's more. Well, hold on and I'll tell ya!

“‘Okay, next thing I do is something we've all done: I pretend to get a phone call from my manager so I can get outta there. You have that feature on your phone, right? The Fake Call App. You push a button and thirty seconds later it rings and there's a recorded voice that you can let them barely hear while you talk. So you can fake an important conversation and then you get to move forward with your life. You pretend to talk seriously in hushed tones on your phone, and then you end the fake call and turn to them and say, ‘Sorry mom and dad, I've gotta go or I'll miss my flight.’ Or you say, ‘Sorry mom and dad, I've gotta go ‘cause I've got an

audition for a TV series.’ Or you say, ‘Sorry mom and dad, I’ve gotta go or I’ll miss my dentist appointment.’ Followed by: ‘No mom, I’m not dating my dentist.’ And ‘Yes, mom, I’m sure you know the best single dentist in Ft. Lauderdale and you could set me up on a date with him, but, well, you know, I’d rather die.’

“Then we do the kiss-kiss love-love thing and I promise to call more often which we both know I’ll never do unless I can figure out how to pre-record the whole conversation. And then I leave them in the living room and walk down the hall to the front door. I open it, but just then I remember one more thing I have to tell them about why they shouldn’t buy gold from a TV commercial, so I close the door and walk back toward the living room. I’m almost there when I hear my mom say to my dad, ‘Murray, has our relationship been just physical all these years?’

“I froze in my tracks. They heard the door open and close so they think they’re alone, right? Now what do I do? Do I tiptoe back down the hall and try to quietly get the

hell outta there? Do I noisily barge on into the living room, pretending I didn't hear them? It was as if I was paralyzed. My mom's question just reverberated in my head. 'Murray, has our relationship been just physical all these years?' And after a pause, my dad said, "Yes."

"I know! Bet you didn't see that coming. I sure didn't."

"There was another pause. And then my mom sighed and said, 'Thank god.'"

"I decided this was not going in a direction I liked so I tiptoed back to the front door, quietly opened it and was just stepping over the threshold when I heard my mom ask my dad, 'If we pull the oxygen tank next to the bed, wanna fuck?'"

"And here is where technology is letting me down. There's no app for helping me forget hearing that."

Droning

On February 4, 2002, the CIA used a drone to launch an AGM-114 Hellfire precision-strike missile at a human target somewhere on the western edge of eastern nowhere in Afghanistan. The projectile successfully arrived at its destination, the target was liquidated, and the world officially entered the era of “warfare by model airplane.”

An amazingly short time later, a comic was doing a drone routine on stage at the Laff It Up club in downtown Chicago. The performer was Reginald Krissy, a big but affable man with a lilting British accent. “You may be able to tell from my lilting British accent that I am from out of town,” Krissy said to the crowd. “That’s right, I’m from Dallas, Texas. I say, pip-pip y’all. Thank yew!

“I’m a-tryin’ to learn to speak ‘Murikun and to act ‘Murikun. I’m a-tryin’ really hard. I mean, like, knowwhutI mean? It’s sometimes difficult for me, actually, because I’m from

Great Britain. Although with the state of things at the moment, it's more like Adequate Britain. Or maybe Fair-to-Middlin' Britain. I'm sorry, what's that? Do we have a heckler already?" He peered into the audience.

"London? Oh, do you mean am I from London? Certainly, let's say I'm from London. There. I do hope you feel better now. Do you? That's good. Because no, I'm not from London. Actually, I'm from Hull. Hull. Spelled H, U, uhlllll. It's quite all right if you don't know it. Americans usually only know a few British towns. London, maybe also Manchester. And Dover because of Dover sole. But wait, there's one more...

"Americans know one other English town because of a very famous and very culturally significant rock 'n' roll musical group that came from there, and that British city is ... Liverpool, that's right. Liverpool will always be famous as the birthplace of the world's very best pop group, and I'm speaking, of course, about Gerry and the Pacemakers. What? I'm sorry, I can't quite

hear you... The Featles? No, don't think I know them.

“What? Oh, The Beatles. Right, right, of course. Nearly forgot about them. Yes, well, they came from Liverpool as well. But I was talking about the really important pop groups. Now, now, now, none of your backtalk. I'll have you know that Gerry and the Pacemakers starred in one complete full-length feature motion picture that is broadcast on cable at least once every decade at four in the morning. And—and—and they had at least five, or so, hit songs that were played on the wireless. The whachamacallit, radio. That's right. Damn impressive, that. I mean, what did The Beatles ever do, I ask you.

“All right, now that we've all been properly introduced... What? We haven't? Oh bollocks. Right, well here's what we'll do: each of us will reach out to whoever's sitting next to you, offer to shake hands and say 'Hello, pleasure to meet you, cheerio.' Go on now, shake hands and say 'Hello, pleasure to meet you, cheerio.' I'll wait. Go on, now.

“There, that’s a nice icebreaker, isn’t it. Hope there weren’t too many sticky fingers. ‘Hello, pleasure to meet... ewwwww.’”

“All righty then. This evening’s sermon is from the Book of the Drone. Yes, that’s right, we’re going to discuss your country’s drone warfare program. Don’t worry, I won’t try to make you feel guilty about raining death down from the skies, truly I won’t. But by the same token, I may play upon your jingoism by making you feel proud that you were the very first country with an automated army of flying robot killing machines! U-S-A! U-S-A! U-S-A!”

Reginald Krissy regarded the crowd with some bemusement.

“What is wrong with you people?!”

“Sometimes I get the feeling that Americans will shout ‘U-S-A’ after almost any accomplishment, no matter how dubious. Let’s see... how about this: America has the lowest reading test scores among first world nations! U-S-A! U-S-A!” He waited out the chant and then finished off the bit with: “U-S-oh-damn-I-don’t-know-how-to-spell-it!”

“All right, let’s continue. Now we need to examine the drone itself. Well, first of all, it’s not technically called a drone. It’s a You-A-Vee. UAV stands for Unmanned Aerial Vehicle. There are lots of models of UAVs and they all have cool names: The Predator! Oooh! The Fire Scout! Ooooh! The Global Hawk! Ooooooh! The Reaper! Ooooooh! The I-GNAT! Wait, the what now? The Eye-gnat? Well, *most* of them have cool names.

“Anyway, drones are quite interesting because they are the junction between little boys’ fantasy games and big boys’ all-too-real death, doom, and absolute destruction.

“Now, some of you have operated remote-controlled toy planes, right? Or maybe a remote-controlled toy boat in the pool or the bathtub. Same principle. The controls are in your hand while the object, the drone, the UAV, zooms around according to how you tilt the wheel, spin the control, pull the trigger.

“Ahhh, the trigger. Well, that’s where the thing is a little bit different from mere toys. A drone can drop explosive devices,

launch missiles, shoot laser beams and bullets, and so forth. Kind of like combining little kids playing tag with the firepower of the U.S. Department of Defense.

“You know, just like in tag, you run, and you’re being chased, and whatever is chasing you gets closer, closer, really close, and it taps you on the shoulder and says ‘Gotcha!’ And then a funny thing happens...shhhhh, what happens is this... KA-BLOOOIE!!!

“Because the pilot has been given the okay to take you out. That’s correct, I said ‘pilot.’ The operators of drones are called pilots. They are on the ground, in air-conditioned buildings or bunkers, but they are piloting the drone.

“Must be an interesting job. You’ve got a computer screen for the status of the vehicle: fuel, altitude, remaining armament, and so forth. And you’ve got another screen for the terrain of the place you’re droning. Or whatever it’s called. Droning? Sky-stalking? Death delivering?

“Whatever the name, there’s a lot of it going on and it really disturbs some people.

Privacy issues. Prior restraint issues. Due process issues. Constitutional issues. And, of course, funeral arrangement issues.

“Think about being a drone pilot. There you are, next to some of your fellow officers, ensconced in your command-and-control bunker, sitting in your high-backed chair, with all your controls spread out in front of you on your ultra-high-definition computer screens. And you activate your radio to report to your commander:

“Eaglefire, this is Fist of Fury. I am locked onto target #10754-Baker-Delta. Permission to fire requested.’ Then you turn to your buddy sitting next to you and pass the time while waiting for mission control to get back to you. ‘Hey, did you catch the game last night?’

“Oh man, I lost twenty bucks on that.”

“Told ya they wouldn’t cover the point spread. Oop, hold on.’ In your headphones, you hear:

“Fist of Fury, this is Eaglefire. Roger your update. You are cleared for delivery. Render target. Repeat: render target.”

“‘Roger, Eaglefire.’ And some buttons are pushed and the screen shows death leaping out of the drone and wrapping itself around target #10754-Baker-Delta and whoever was riding in the car with him. The visual of the explosion on the screen is eerily silent. Then you make your report: ‘Eaglefire, this is Fist of Fury reporting target erased. Request new coordinates.’”

“‘Roger, Fist of Fury. Nice kill. Proceed to new coordinates now input on screen two. Confirm when in position. Eaglefire out.’

“‘Roger, Eaglefire, will do. Fist of Fury out.’ So you turn back to your buddy and you’re surprised at what is on one of that guy’s computer screens.

“‘What’s that?’

“‘*Force Field Five: In the Warzone.* Wanna join the game?’

“‘Hell yeah!’

“And now both guys are overseeing highly stylized cartoonish exploits and performing totally unrealistic devastation—and they’re also playing *Force Field Five: In the Warzone.*

“Thank you. It’s not easy doing your Midwest and Southern accents. Hope I didn’t foul them up too badly.

“You know, a lot of people are upset about the idea of drones in their city. And drones are going to be everywhere. Above stores. Circling banks. Checking out parking lots. Monitoring the country’s borders. Collecting weather information. Watching traffic. Chasing perps down the alley and up the street.

“PETA has drones. That’s People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Yes, they have a drone program to monitor the activities of hunters and fishermen.

“Lots of companies are vying for contracts to manufacture and supply drones. They have a trade organization and a trade show. Yes! It’s the AUVSI, the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International. Their last convention was held in... guess what city... That’s right: Las Vegas. Where else, right? Gambling, nudie shows, blow jobs, and drone death machines. An ideal combination for a great weekend getaway.

“So many uses for drones. Crowd control, surveying, crop management, finding downed power lines, and on and on. Many good uses.

“The armed forces have drones. Police have drones. Firefighters. News media. Paparazzi. Delivery services. Everything is going to be serviced by drones and robots.

“All righty then, that’s it for me except for collecting a gratuity for my services. That’s correct, one of my drones will be coming down your row and I strongly suggest you tip generously. Otherwise, the drone doesn’t understand. Here’s how that might go:

“TIP DUE NOW.”

“Well, I’m not sure I want to give—.”

“ARMING SEQUENCE INITIATED.”

“Oh, a tip! Right, right, lemmie get my wallet.”

The British comic smiled at the audience and said, “As you can see, I’m getting good at some aspects of being ‘Murikun. Cherio, y’all!”

Improv Class: Portents

WOMAN: You know, this has been nice.

MAN: Yes, it has.

WOMAN: Yeah!

MAN: Sure.

WOMAN: It's good for us to be able to take some time and catch up.

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: So...

MAN: So...? You're grinning.

WOMAN: Yes. Yes, I am.

MAN: What's really going on?

WOMAN: Well, okay. I wasn't going to say anything, but I can't hold it back anymore. Bill and I are thinking of getting married!

MAN: Really.

WOMAN: Um-hmm!

MAN: Is that what Bill is thinking?

WOMAN: We're talking about it, yes.

MAN: So it might be more correct to say that because you are thinking about it, you sometimes bring it up and make it a topic of discussion.

WOMAN: I— Never mind.

MAN: Okay.

WOMAN: You know, I just...

MAN: Yes?

WOMAN: You can be so exasperating!

MAN: Problem?

WOMAN: I don't— Aren't you happy for
us?

MAN: Not especially.

WOMAN: You're not?!

MAN: Hey, I am the last person you should
be asking about marriage.

WOMAN: Just because your marriage didn't
work out doesn't mean ours won't.

MAN: I can't argue with that statement.

WOMAN: So why are you being so
negative? Don't you want us to have a
chance at happiness?

MAN: Seriously?

WOMAN: Yes.

MAN: Okay, setting aside the obvious
problem of using the word "happiness" to
describe marriage, let's concentrate on the
word "chance." You definitely have a
chance that your marriage will result in

something that endures. Statistically, it's a fifty-fifty chance.

WOMAN: Oh no, don't you go there.

MAN: Because half of all marriages end in divorce.

WOMAN: But this is different. We—

MAN: Love each other?

WOMAN: —love each other. Yes, that's right! We love each other.

MAN: Uh-huh.

WOMAN: We do!

MAN: Sure.

WOMAN: You— But— I—

MAN: I think you just started three different sentences.

WOMAN: Why are you being such a killjoy?

MAN: A killjoy. Is that what you're saying I am, a killjoy?

WOMAN: Yeah, that's right: you're being a huge killjoy.

MAN: Once you've been married a couple years, you'll know the true definition of the word "killjoy."

WOMAN: You are so unsupportive.

MAN: Look, my objection stems from the probabilities that are stacked against the two of you.

WOMAN: I am really trying to come to grips with the intensity of the anger welling up inside me right now...!

MAN: Because, when it comes to a decision that is going to affect you for the rest of your life, it might be nicer to at least have the odds a little more in your favor. Instead of fifty-fifty it might be better to have the odds at, oh I don't know, let's say sixty-forty.

WOMAN: You have no— you're not being romantic!

MAN: Romantic. Yes, my understanding of you guys leaving your future to what is essentially a coin flip is certainly romantic.

WOMAN: You make me so mad sometimes!

MAN: That bodes well for your first argument over finances or when he forgets your anniversary.

WOMAN: I hate you!

MAN: Right now or forever? Hey, wait a minute.

WOMAN: Not now. I am out of here!

MAN: But I thought we were going to split the check.

WOMAN: Good-bye!

MAN: See? This is one of the things I'm talking about. Men and women have trouble working together on finances!

GOP Outfitters

Comedy teams have a long history in the United States: Laurel and Hardy, Burns and Allen, Nichols and May, Cheech and Chong, Stiller and Meara, Bob and Ray, Abbott and Costello, and many other less famous duos stretching back to the days of Vaudeville. Continuing in that fine tradition are Masters and Mark. Whether performing scripted material or improvising, Darrell Masters and Mark Izikoff offer a mixture of shock and amusement, especially when performing at their home base, The Nightspot.

Masters and Mark meet at center stage and...

“Welcome to GOPO! How may we equip you?”

“Well, I don’t know, exactly. I mean, I’m not sure how all this works.”

“No problem. Let me take you through it. We’re in the middle of our Get to Know GOPO program and it only takes a few minutes. First, GOPO stands for GOP

Outfitters. We're the company that works with conservatives, neo-cons, righties, tea partiers, republicans, and crypto-fascists."

"Wow, that's impressive."

"That's right. GOPO has done more for the moron majority than anything this side of the Creationism Museum."

"Oh, that's a great place! It's just packed full of facts that nobody knows anything about."

"Yes, it sure is. Now, I'll bet you're running for office in a swing district, am I right?"

"Yeah, it's about half republican, half democrat, and half independent."

"And you are a republican I see."

"How did you know?"

"Your math skills gave it away. Which is great for you because you won't need to purchase the NIC."

"The nick?"

"It stands for Numerical Information Crusher. Helps keep your mind blocked from mathematical facts."

“I see. Well, I don’t have any problem avoiding math facts.”

“Good for you! But now you’re going to want to have all your other bases covered. We usually begin with the code words.”

“Code words. What are those?”

“For example, let’s say you have good, fine, upstanding Americans in your district, okay?”

“We sure do!”

“And you recognize that they’re afraid of those ‘other people’ who are not like us.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“That is right. So, you want to speak out to your people, show them you understand them, and make it seem like you’re on their side. But there are pitfalls waiting for you out there. It used to be you could call a spade a spade, if you know what I mean.”

“You’re talking gardening tools now?”

“No, no, it was a metaphor. See, you can’t call a minority by certain names anymore. Even though we all know and love those terms. You have to use code phrases. I’m going to give you a couple of the words.

Don't worry, these examples are free of charge. Y'know, just to get you hooked on our products. Okay, so here's what you do: you call them undesirables. Or you call them thugs. Or you say that they're foreign. You see how this works?"

"I think so... I could refer to blacks as 'thugs,' right?"

"Exactly."

"And I'd say Muslims are 'suspicious characters,' right?"

"Right! You catch on fast!"

"And Hispanics are 'illegals,' right?"

"Uh, no, but that's the kind of trap we at GOPO can help you avoid. We can provide you with lists of acceptable and media-approved words that quickly and easily describe nigs, spics, jews, chinks, fags, broads, cripples, students, freeloaders, the poor, Pocahontas people, the godless, people who think, and independents. Y'know, all the types who, for some strange reason, never vote republican."

"So you're saying there are lists of words?"

“Absolutely.”

“Boy, I’m not sure about this.”

“Why?”

“I don’t really like to read.”

“Of course you don’t. True conservatives hate to read. But don’t worry, the lists also come as digital files so you can play them on your phone, your computer, or in your car.”

“Oh, well, that sounds okay.”

“Sure. Look, you already learned something from our conversation and you didn’t have to read anything so far.”

“That’s right!”

“That is right. Okay, now let me tell you about our religiosity products. Are you a religious person?”

“Well, I—”

“Wrong answer. The correct response is ‘Yes.’ There should be no hesitation.”

“Right, I know, but, well, I—”

“Wrong again. You would do well to get our video ‘Knee-jerk Reactions: Learn ‘Em Right.’ It can be a life-saver when talking in public.”

“But using god in politics is just—”

“Just about the best gol darn thing there is! That’s one of the two greatest aspects about being on the conservative side: one, you get to use god to back up whatever the hell you might say, and two, you never have to think. About anything! Just praise Jebus, wear a flag pin, and say that you pray every day.”

“But, um, I don’t.”

“Never say that!”

“Yeah, but—”

“NEVER SAY THAT!!!”

“Okay, okay. Jebus.”

“There ya go. When asked a tough question, just say ‘That’s a good question and I will pray about it to arrive at the correct response.’ You can stall your way out of answering almost anything with that. Um, don’t tell anyone I gave that one away for free, okay? And hey, remember that there are oodles more great pieces of GOPO advice on the CDs, DVDs, Blu-Rays. Oh, and the podcasts.”

“Podcasts?”

“Sure, we sell a lot of our stuff through podcast sites. You can get all kinds of crap there.”

“Right.”

“Right. Okay, now how are you fixed for position papers?”

“Position? You mean, like maps?”

“No, I mean your positions on the issues. You need to think exactly the way the big corporations expect you to think so they’ll write those big fat checks to your campaign and to your PACs and SuperPACs.”

“I see. But the reading, you know...”

“Oh sure, no problem. You don’t read ‘em, your office hands ‘em out to those snarky reporter types who are always sniffing around for the truth, and facts, and reality, and left-wing stuff like that.”

“Oh, right.”

“Sure. Through GOPO, you can have all the ‘facts’ on destroying Social Security, starving the poor, killing the elderly, and jailing the teenage and twenty-something black and brown people.”

“Whoa, some of that sounds bad.”

“Well, we don’t say it like that.”

“We don’t?”

“Not in public. Now, this is all high-class writing by college educated writers working for the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the ALEC organization—you know, the fake think tanks and dirty tricks organizations. They can make irresponsible right-wing nonsense sound almost palatable. Believe me, you see dimwads spouting this crap on the Sunday morning talk shows all the time and people hardly ever make fun of them.”

“I see. But let me ask you a question. What happens when an intelligent person asks me about all the weird republican positions?”

“That’s where the guilt phrases come into it.”

“The guilt phrases? Like gold paint?”

“No, like in guilt trip. Here, here’s one for free. Say a progressive person challenges you on one of the claptrap GOP ideas that would let corporations do to America what the unregulated coal industry has done to West Virginia’s drinking water. Or what the

right-wing nut-jobs in Michigan did to the drinking water in Flint. You turn to them with a snarl and you ask them, ‘Don’t you have any respect for other people’s beliefs? You liberals are so intolerant!’ That can get you out of a lot of bad situations. And we have lots of other recorded examples you can practice with your iPod. Here, take a look at all the stuff we offer.”

“Ohhh, more reading...”

“Just scan it.”

“Okay... I see a lot are from the Koch Brothers.”

“Well, you know, the Kochs are mighty fine people—they have tons of this folderol and a lot of it seems to make excellent points based on what could maybe even be called ‘research’ even though it’s all basically made-up—and they’ve graciously donated it to us to help the cause of conservatism.”

“Donated?”

“For sale at reasonable rates.”

“Oh, right.”

“And you will love all the GOPO material because it seems to say one thing but

it means something else and the douchebag base will know the code words.”

“The douchebag base?”

“Republican voters.”

“Ah, I see.”

“Sure. These packages work out really well for our conservative candidates. How much of it would you like?”

“How do you sell it?”

“By the pound.”

“Ah, I see. Well, how many pounds do you think I might need?”

“Depends on your district. Ted Cruz bought three thousand pounds of it, but he had to reach all the mental defectives in Texas. And Texas is a big place with a lot of mental defectives. Lindsey Graham bought five thousand pounds, but she always overdoes everything.”

“‘She’?”

“I meant he.”

“Okay. But five thousand pounds of this stuff!”

“That’s nothing. Rand Paul bought eleven thousand pounds, plus he has his own

people churning out more of it. We're even negotiating with him to get the rights to sell his stuff through our stores."

"Good luck. Negotiating with people as wacko as the Paul family can be tough."

"Boy, you said it! Okay, now let's get you some pharmaceuticals."

"What?"

"I can tell that you like to appear amenable when voters say things to you, am I right?"

"Of course."

"And you take in what's being said and reply based on a normal human reaction to the information you just received, correct?"

"Yes, but why are you—"

"You have to stop doing things like that."

"But—"

"Don't worry, we have SQUELCH. It's an L-I-P."

"An L-I-P?"

"Logic Inhibitor Pill. It'll fix you right up. Hey, don't be down about it. Most conservatives need them. It's not natural to

say what they say and do what they do, am I right?”

“Yes, you’re right.”

“So, just buy a jar of SQUELCH and you’ll be alt-right, right?”

“Right!”

“Here, have one while I ring you up for those purchases. Go ahead, that one’s free.”

“Really?”

“Sure.”

“Okay. Do you have a glass of water?”

“A true conservative doesn’t need water. Just pop it.”

“Pop it?”

“Yeah, pop it into your mouth. Put it on your tongue and gulp.”

“Okay, here goes...Ewwwww, yuck! That’s terrible!”

“Yeah, well, after all, conservatism is—wait for it—a bitter pill to swallow.”

Blackout.

The Edge of Heck

Three microphones stood in front of the brick wall of the Comedy Capers nightclub. The house lights dimmed and spotlights hit the mics as three people confidently took the stage to a trumpet fanfare, although the trumpet was a vocalization from Jeremy Spence, the orchestral component of the act. The two comics with speaking roles were Melanie Waters and Nick Klein. They squeezed into the spotlight beam while Jeremy remained in the shadows to provide what he called “mouth music and sonic affectations.”

With big smiles, Nick and Melanie launched into the sketch:

“Hello! I’m Ryan Seabreeze!”

“And I’m Kathy MacGuffin!”

“Welcome, everybody! Kathy and I are high atop an active volcano here on the Philippines islands!”

Jeremy began providing volcanic rumbling to dramatically frame the moment.

“It’s time for today’s edition of *Tame That Tummy!*” Kathy yelled. “Sorry to be shouting at you but the noise of the churning lava is almost deafening!”

“Oh, was that too loud?” Jeremy asked.

“No, it’s fine,” Melanie told him, breaking character. “Don’t speak. You’re not in this bit.”

“Sorry.” Jeremy returned to providing the rumbling.

“Okay,” Melanie said. “Where were we?”

“Uh, we’re on the edge of heck,” Ryan half-whispered to her.

“Oh, right. Thanks.” She went back in character: “The noise of the churning lava is almost deafening. Don’t you agree, Ryan?”

“That’s right, Kathy! And some sources have told us we can expect an eruption at any minute!

“In addition to the noise, there’s the temperature! The heat from the giant pit of fire is peeling Ryan’s make-up!”

“What?”

“And that is not a good look.”

“Why didn’t you guys say something about my make-up?!”

“Stop whining and grow a pair, Ryan.”

“You don’t understand—“

“Sure we do: Your face is all you’ve got.”

“No, but, but—“

“Yes, you’ve got your butt, too. Not such a big deal, but better than your face. Okay, let’s focus here, people. To show the immense power of this thundering volcano, we’re going to follow the ancient custom of sacrificing a female virgin.”

“I’m not a woman, Kathy.”

“That’s debatable, Ryan, but in this case, we kidnapped a conservative twit who admitted to being a witch. Well, she didn’t really have to admit it. I mean, hey, she’s a conservative.”

“I don’t think any of this is in the script, Kathy.”

“We call it improv, baby boy. Get with it or get out of the way. Okay guys, take off her gag.” She broke character again to tell the

audience, “Jeremy will briefly play the part of the conservative twit.”

Jeremy used a falsetto voice to play the conservative twit: “Trickle down economics works!”

“Okay guys,” Kathy said, “toss the rightwing bitch into the volcano.” She said to the audience, “Jeremy will now provide the sound of the rightwing bitch falling into the volcano...”

“Aieeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!” Jeremy said.

“You know,” Kathy noted, “that was the first intelligent thing she’s ever said.”

“Wait, Kathy, did we just kill someone?”

“You want to go down there and find out?”

“Kathy, this is terrible!”

“Zip it up, drip-face, I’m workin’ here. Okay, in my hand I’ve got just one tiny Tummy Tamer tablet. Now, to show that it’s the only heartburn treatment you’ll ever need, I’m tossing the Tummy Tamer tablet into the erupting volcano and let’s listen to what happens...”

Jeremy stopped the rumbling.

“Wait, I don’t hear anything, Kathy.”

“Yes, Ryan, the silence is wonderful! That’s the relief of Tummy Tamer! Strong enough to pacify even the most beleaguered belly. Cue the sponsor music.”

Jeremy dutifully tootled a smarmy musical theme as they wrapped up the bit.

“So remember,” Kathy continued, “that’s Tummy Tamer. Ask for it at your grocery or pharmacy. Okay, reporting from the Philippines, this has been Kathy MacGuffin, picture-perfect in every way, plus Ryan Seabreeze, the guy who is starting to look like a Salvador Dali painting.”

“Hey Kathy, I’m slipping!”

“Wrong, Ryan, you’re being pushed!”

“Aieeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!” Nick collapsed to the floor.

Jeremy added a lovely sound effect of Ryan Seabreeze ker-plopping into molten lava.

“Hmm,” Melanie said, again breaking character. “Not quite dramatic enough for the ending.”

“Yeah,” Jeremy mused, “you’re right. What about some screaming?”

“Good, yeah, screaming would be nice. Let’s take it again. Ready?”

“All set,” Jeremy said.

“Okay,” Melanie said. “Wrong, Ryan, you’re being pushed!”

“Aieeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”

Jeremy again performed a lovely sound effect of Ryan Seabreeze ker-plopping into molten lava and they all began screaming.

Blackout.

Classified Information

Jeffrey Baldwin Walsh brought his guitar with him as he took the stage at the club called The Pit of Laughter in downtown Poughkeepsie. The patrons were a mixture of New York Hudson Valley locals; students from Bard, Vassar, Marist, Mount Saint Mary, and Sarah Lawrence; and visitors attending the Mountain Jam music festival. Everybody was in a mood to party. Walsh strummed a couple of chords to test the volume and launched into his set. “Great to see you guys here tonight, especially since I’m competing with that Jack Johnson concert tonight. Sorry you guys didn’t score tickets. But I’ve got a story for you. And it goes like this...”

My eyes are open wide to what we used to call
The Classifieds...

There are stacks and stacks of dog-eared
paperbacks,
Mostly mysteries to give you a thrill.
There's a used Plymouth wagon, its tailpipe
draggin',
Runs real great when it's headed downhill.

There's a lonely man with a master plan
Who's looking for a hot date.
A single mom of three won't feel free
'Til she finds a responsible roommate.

How do I know,
how do I know,
how do I know these things?
My eyes are open wide.

There's opportunity here, to change your
career
Step right up and don't hesitate.
The chance of a lifetime, this could be a
goldmine
Too bad you're living out-of-state.

There are plenty of places, some with wide-
open spaces
For you to buy or lease or rent.
There are miracles that cure, made of herbs
that are pure,
And drugs to shake your firmament.

How do I know,
how do I know,
how do I know these things?
I am no longer mystified.

Now there are people selling affection,
Call 'em to aim some in your direction.
The hands of Pam, the legs of Peg, the
derriere of Pierre.

You can have it near, you can have it far,
On the piano or behind the wet bar,
Even in the privacy of your own car.

And how do I know,
how do I know,
how do I know these things?
I read the classifieds.

Tales of long-lost dogs and kittens.
Hand-woven scarves and a box of mittens.
Equipment to help you exercise.
Magazines to help you fantasize.

The ads all add up, the ads all add up, the ads
all add up.

The dinette set that's missing a chair.
The garage sale featuring maternity wear.
The residue of a thousand dreams.
Real estate deals and investment schemes.

The ads all add up, the ads all add up, the ads
all add up.

When you read between the lines,
Exclamation points and dollar signs,
You can find every kind of human story,
Faith, love, trust, hope, and even glory...
In the classifieds.

W Doll

(Death Watch Edition)

Standing backstage at Mirth of a Nation was the manager of up-and-coming comic Sal Longmire. He wasn't laughing during his client's routine. Instead, he was timing the length of each bit, trying to see if a brief talk show appearance could be carved out of the whole set. On stage in the spotlight, Sal was moving smoothly into the next part of his routine:

“Gift-giving can be a pain,” Sal told the crowd. “Now, we all like *getting* gifts, but *giving* them can be hard work. How much to spend, how to wrap it, how much postage to put on it, and all that crap. So it's nice if you can find the humor in this situation. I had a friend once who liked giving gag gifts. It didn't take long before we were in a contest to see who could find the most outrageously awful gift.

“So he would get a ‘My Little Pony Coloring Book’ ... and I would get a recording of ‘24 Solid Gold Polka Classics.’ He would

get a bouquet of plastic flowers... and I would get an inflatable Easter Bunny lawn decoration. He'd get a few pairs of zebra-striped tube socks... and I'd get a hood ornament for a 1937 Hupmobile. One year, we did books. He got *The Encyclopedia of Plumbing*—all six volumes ... and I got *My Humble Greatness* by Dick Clark. It was all quite alarming.

“He usually won these contests, and one year he totally outdid himself to achieve the title of MR. GOAT. That’s M-R-G-O-A-T, which stands for: Most. Repulsive. Gift. Of. All. Time.

“Yeah, MR. GOAT. He accomplished it. And so now the back of my closet contains something weird, twisted, sad, and evil. Something eerie, unsettling, and strange. Something called the George W. Bush Talking Doll.

“We will pause for a moment to indulge in the fun of blurting out questions that immediately come to mind. For example: ‘How is a talking George Bush doll any different from the real thing?’ Or ‘Are you

freaking kidding me?’ Or ‘You’re making that up, right?’ I mean, a George W. Bush Talking Doll gives new meaning to the term ‘gag gift’.

“I know some of you think this is fantasy, but the George W. Bush Talking Doll is for real. It is a hideously ugly, 12-inch high inaction figure in suit-and-tie with battery compartment and prerecorded tidbits of auditory blather. On the side of the box it states, ‘George W. Bush delivers actual speech sound-bites.’ They were referring to the doll but that line fits his entire speechifying output for the 2,920 days the country suffered under his ‘presdensity’ as he might put it. The doll delivers seventeen recorded statements. Yup, seventeen bits of audio garbage to enliven your family gatherings. In order to fully appreciate the rancid flavor of this thing, let’s just consider some of the recorded Bushisms inside the doll:

“The first one is, ‘Together we will renew America’s purpose.’ This is a fabulous quote from Shrub because it is so accurate.

Well, perhaps *accurate* isn't exactly the correct word because, like much of what W said, it wasn't, well, accurate. Unless you think getting America into unnecessary wars and nearly bankrupting the nation are both part of America's purpose.

“The second one is, ‘I come from Texas!’ As everyone knows, that is an absolutely positively true statement. The guy was born in the section of Texas called New Haven, Connecticut. He also attended Phillips Academy in the corner of Texas called Andover, Massachusetts. And let us not overlook the fact that he attended those two great Texas institutions of higher learning known as Yale and Harvard.

“The third one is, ‘I was not elected to serve one party, but to serve one nation.’ Again, completely true and verifiable, assuming the nation being served was the military-industrial complex. With non-stop warfare and off-the-books spending on weaponry and logistics, he served that crew like crazy. Estimates vary, but W and his fellow war criminals filched around half a

trillion dollars from the pockets of most Americans and placed it in the coffers of the defense industry.

“The fourth one is, ‘The presidency is more than an honor, it is more than an office, it is a charge to keep and I will give it my all.’ This also seems to be a reference to Bush’s vast war machine expenditures. The use of the word ‘charge’ must refer to putting the wars on a credit card. Using the lowest estimate, W and cohorts charged five hundred billion dollars. And since it was never funded in the nation’s budget, the drain on the nation is even worse than it looks at first glance. Current estimates of the ultimate cost of the Bush wars are around four trillion dollars. Yeah, four trillion bucks.

“The fifth one is, ‘I didn’t have Hollywood people come down. I didn’t have an advisor on my staff trying to convert me into some kind of Alpha-Male.’ You know, it would be great fun to mock this statement except nobody can figure out what the hell it means. Moron is as moron says, I guess.

“Okay, enough with the cretin quotes. Now, checking out this product online shows what other people have posted about it. One of my favorites: ‘I gave it to my dog as a chew toy and he loves it!’ Another nice one is: ‘I have used it to light my fireplace, get dust-bunnies from under the fridge, and unclogged my toilet twice!’ So take that, liberals—George W. Bush is good for something after all.

“The big problem for me is that the damn doll isn’t worth very much. I’ve seen them on eBay for less than a hundred bucks. Kitsch isn’t selling well this year, it seems. But once history marches forward a little and a certain doll’s namesake is finally able to do something right—that is, shuffle off its mortal coil—then perhaps the price tag might climb a bit. Just like the deficit under W.

“Not that I would ever do anything to foster such a thing. No, I wish Bush well in his taxpayer-funded retirement. He isn’t screwing up anything as long as he just works on his paint-by-numbers canvases. So I’m okay with him continuing to exist despite his

having been at the center of a litany of monumental fuck-ups. Let me give you a list... Hang on, got to take in a lot of oxygen for what's coming next... Hold on... Almost ready... Okay, here goes: Bush attacked the wrong country, depleted the national treasury, crashed the economy, outed a CIA agent, declared 'Mission Accomplished' in a war that would last another decade, and botched the Katrina relief effort. But wait, there's more. Bush withdrew from an Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, attacked U.N. weapons inspectors in Iraq, undermined the international Criminal Court, provided U.S. troops with unsafe gear, and refused to attend soldiers' funerals. Wait, still more. Bush condoned torture, created Guantanamo, cut funding for veterans' healthcare, and gave tax cuts to the wealthy. Whew. Thank you. Just let me... catch my breath.

“So, like all conservative politicians, the guy is excrement with appendages. Okay, so he's not as big a shitpile as Trumpeinstein. The one known as Orangedump. Cheeto Mussolini. Hair Hitler. And he's not as big a

traitor as all the Rethugliklan jerkwads who are Mini-Trumps. Trumpettes, if you will. But still, George the Turd was quite astonishingly awful.

“Despite his worthlessness, I still respect the law that says there should be no threats against a current or former president. No, I do. I do. I’m just saying that for those of us in possession of one of these demonic totem dolls, there are dollars at stake here and the natural course of events will eventually boost some of those dollars. Nothing personal, Shrubby, but you can understand why some of us check in on your health from time to time, right? So while you keep on pretending to be an artist, you might also consider some other interesting hobby like, oh, say, going into training for the National Glass-Chewing Championships.” He confided to the audience: “Watch, he’ll think that’s a real thing.

“Let’s conclude with a quick glance at the other extremely valuable information printed on the W Doll box. For example, it says, ‘Do not immerse in water’ and ‘Choking

hazard, small parts.’ But the really important statement is the one on the back, way down at the bottom, where it says this model of an American president was—are you ready?—‘Made in China.’ I guess that’s because no worker in America would touch this atrocity. Hey, thanks, that’s it for me, and Merry War on Christmas, everybody!”

Computer Nerds Must Die

Jason Rudolfo's prop-heavy set at the 4Grins comedy club was a big hit with people who hated technology. Wearing a jumpsuit with lots of different types of electronic gear Velco-fastened to it, Jason happily harangued the crowd while pulling off the devices one at a time and grinding them in a large and noisy blender.

“Down with the tyranny of computers and electronic devices! Down with multiple charging cords! C'mon, who's with me on this?” And with that, Jason pulverized a cell phone to the delight of the audience. He got an additional chuckle as he poured the remains into a bucket. He reached down and rotated the bucket to reveal that it was labeled “GOP Morals.” This produced one more chuckle.

“You know, all the automated gear in our lives can be a pain. Okay, now I have to confess that I don't totally hate *all* these modern advancements. I love that they let us

store a lot of information, and that the data is searchable, and you can exchange e-mails, and surf the 'Net, and make spreadsheets, and do your taxes, and all kinds of great stuff. I respect all that. Wait, there's something else... What is it that I'm leaving out?" He looked at the audience with a puzzled expression on his face. He was rewarded with several shout-outs.

"Oh, right," he said. "Porn. Sure, the porn. So, yeah, there are some uplifting things about the digital age. Some exciting things. Some filthy, engorging things. Okay, enough of that. I'm not totally anti-tech, it's just that modern technology doesn't always work right. Not by comparison with other types of technology. Let's take a closer look at this.

"When you get in your car, you start it, you drive to where you're going, you make some turns, you drive back. You put in the fuel, whether it's gas, diesel, or electricity, and you keep up the maintenance, and most of the time the damn thing works.

"But with modern technology, you're supposed to do the maintenance thing every

day. You have to empty the trash, clear out the cache, go through the shut-down procedure in a certain way, in a certain order, and even then, sometimes the whole thing . . . just starts to . . . s-l-o-w d-o-w-n and then what? It. Grinds. To. A. Halt. And you have to do a re-start right in the middle of whatever you're doing.”

And he popped a portable storage drive into the blender. “Ready?” The audience shouted their approval and cheered as he destroyed the piece of electronic gear.

“Can you imagine if cars acted like your computer system? You're pulling out of the grocery store parking lot and you . . . just . . . slow . . . down. Maybe a mechanical voice tells you ‘Must hit re-start.’ Or ‘Must clear out previous turns and destinations.’ Nobody would stand for that with a car but we just put up with it when it comes to computers.”

Another device was destroyed in the blender as the audience cheered.

“Even when computers are working, they give you problems. I mean, heaven forbid you get a file from someone who's

using a different type of computer or a different software processing system or is on a different mobile platform. Now you're engaged in some sort of bits-and-bytes battle with the data from someone else's machine. This would be like having to buy only a certain type of fuel or only drive on certain pre-approved roads.

“Think about inviting people over to your house. Imagine if you'd have to ask what kind of car they drive because you've got Microsoft roads and Mac cars won't run on them. You're on Android Operating System X-Oh-Oh-Nine-Point-Gazillion so there's no way to find us with those Apple maps. Too bad, you'll have to miss the party.’

“Let's say you're at work and you get files that are incompatible with whatever system or platform you're using. What happens when you try resolving that? Where do you go? What do you do? Some people say you can just call the Customer Support line. Ha!”

A phone headset was held up for the crowd to see. “This is what telemarketers

wear when they make their annoying phone calls. Should we spare it or blenderize it?” The crowd overwhelmingly voted for “Blenderize!” He smiled, stuffed the headset into the blender and ground it to smithereens as the crowd cheered again.

“Customer Support? First of all, that sounds like they are going to outfit you with girdles and foundation garments. Okay, then they ask you strange questions that embarrass you and annoy you and upset you—questions to which only dweebs have an answer! Questions like: ‘What browser are you using?’ Browser? I’m using my eyes, pal.

“Or this question: ‘What operating system are you on?’ Operating system... dude, I’m operating on one toaster strudel and twelve cups of coffee. What’s that got to do with my computer?

“Or this question: ‘Are you interacting with someone on your network?’ Depends what you mean by ‘interacting.’ I’ll show you some high-tech interactivity right now.” Another device was deposited in the blender to the roar of the crowd.

“Look, only computer geeks care about any of those questions. And I don’t think they want the rest of us to know the real answers! They just ask those things to try shifting some of the blame to you. Like it’s your fault for not knowing any of this crap.

“Basically, I think here’s the problem: the computer and mobile companies are very busy always making eleventy-seven different operating systems and platforms and protocols and restrictions and depictions and refractions and contractions so that nothing works right with anything except their own damn company’s stuff. And you know why they’re doing that, right? Because they can make more money that way!”

A GPS device was put into the blender. “Ready?” The audience roared. “Blend or Puree?” The audience shouted their votes and cheered as the machine roared.

“Okay, okay, okay, now I want to get serious for just one little minute. Just give me one minute’s consideration for a proposal I’ve got on how to resolve this problem. Okay, here’s the deal: First, we’ll take every

manufacturer of computer or mobile hardware and software, and every one of their programmers, and we put them all in the middle of a large corral. And second, we massacre them.” The audience gasped then applauded. “Yup, we just mow them down. Then, when the dust settles, we can peacefully start all over again and we’ll see to it that companies develop operating systems and platforms that *fucking work with one another!*”

“Who’s with me on this? Who’s with me?! C’mon, let’s do this thing! Kill the nerds! Kill the nerds! Kill the nerds! Kill the nerds!”

“C’mon! Everybody!”

“Kill the nerds!”

“Kill The Nerds!”

“KILL THE NERDS!”

“**KILL THE NERDS!**”

“**KILL THE NERDS!**”

“All right, that was great. Give yourselves a hand. Thank you and good night!”

Shrink Rap

The audience at The Comedy Cabinet was in a good mood. Each performer basked in the favorable atmosphere. “Great crowd!” one said. “Love these guys!” said another. Some were thinking they finally found their rhythm. “It’s starting to come together,” thought one, a glass-is-half-full personality. Some were fearful that the crowd reaction was a fluke. “This can’t last,” thought another, a glass-is-half-empty type.

Then Ronny Wright took the stage to see if the good mood would continue with his act. “Hey, hi, how are ya?! So, did you guys take enough drugs for this evening and are you getting enough alcohol?” The spectators made some lively and positive noises.

“Great, great. Glad to hear it. I’m supremely adequate, thanks for not asking. No, that’s okay. I don’t need you for validation. I go to a psychiatrist for that.

“Don’t you just hate it when people tell you about their therapy sessions? I know!” Ronny smiled pensively. “So, let me tell you

about my therapy sessions. Okay, okay, fine. Just my last visit. So, I'm at the psychiatrist's office. I'm on the couch but sitting up. You know, not fully committing to the process. And the psychiatrist asks me if I've ever thought that maybe I had 'mental issues.' Yeah, that's the term he used. 'Mental issues.'

"I told him, 'Sure, sometimes. In fact, lately I've been wondering about my having 'mental issues' practically every damn day.' And my shrink nods and starts making a note on a big legal pad of paper.

"So I figure what I'm saying must be interesting. And that's cool, because I'm an interesting guy. But apparently I'm interesting in a 'let's make note of this' sort of way but not interesting enough to provoke a conversation. I was hurt." The crowd reacted in mock sympathy. "Awwwwww, yeah, yeah, I know. Fuck you. But I was offended. I stopped talking and the shrink didn't notice at first. He just kept writing. But now there was this awkward pause and after a few seconds he became aware of the silence between us, and it was deliciously dramatic, you know?"

“If this had been a movie there would be a tense stillness in the room. The atmosphere would be brittle. And somewhere in the distance you would hear something eerie playing on the soundtrack. You know, a David Fincher, David Lynch, Ridley Scott spooky droning sound. It’s not ‘music’ in the way you’d normally think of it, but a powerful celestial Deep Sonic Inner-Ear-Attack kind of thing—an electrical hum at such a low frequency that you feel it more than you hear it. You know, ummmmmm.... Like that. You’re not getting the full effect unless it’s in surround sound. So, everybody, join in: Ummmmmmmmmm...”

Now Ronny had a room full of adults making a low moaning sound and then laughing about the silliness of it.

“Thank you. My show is interactive. Anyway, the psychiatrist wants to get rid of this break in the conversation, this oppressive droning, so he nods and tells me, ‘Go on.’ Yeah, that’s it, just: ‘Go on.’ He studied at college for years and years but so much of what he does comes down to nodding and

telling the patient to continue talking. It's a good gig if you can keep a straight face.

“Okay, he wants me to ‘go on’ about how I think I may, indeed, suffer from ‘mental issues.’ Dunno where he came up with that idea. Other than because, you know, *it's one of the reasons I'm seeing a psychiatrist!* Sorry, didn't mean to shout. Guess that's just one of my ‘mental issues.’

“So I tell the shrink—you know, the headshrinker—I tell him, ‘Doc, I think about the possibility of insanity every day, sometimes several times a day.’ And he starts making more notes.

“And, ladies and gentlemen, just between you and me, let me admit that I do think about insanity. Yeah, that is absolutely true. I really do. And there's a feeling of sadness that flows over me at that instant. A feeling of despair and hopelessness. A feeling that I am lost in a vast and meaningless sea of electrons and protons and protoplasm and cosmic dust—and none of it adds up to anything. My existence is for naught. I am insignificant. I am worthless. I am nothing.”

The crowd was really with Ronny now, hanging onto every word and caught up in the dark night of his desolation.

“But then I say to myself, wait a minute. Just consider some of the things that have taken place in the world. I mean, a crass, conceited, ignorant, bullying, badgering, dangerous, unhinged, con-artist television reality show host was elected president of the United States, and *THAT’S JUST TOTALLY FUCKING BATSHIT CRAZY!*”

The audience erupted in laughter mixed with some boos, and then there was a smattering of applause.

“So I figure, you know, by comparison, I’m doing okay. Same with you?” He got stronger applause on that.

“One thing my shrink and I agree on: whenever conservatives get elected, that is a good time to invest in liquor companies and firms that make anti-depressants. All right, that’s it for me, thank you, and, as highly edumacated shrinks might say... Go on.”

All the Douchebag Day

Raisa Pahwirth confidently took the stage at Club WTF, which the local Chamber of Commerce claimed stood for Where's the Fun. She smiled sweetly at the audience and said, "Welcome, everyone, and thank you for attending tonight's sermon entitled 'Humor Shall Set You Free.' We begin with a proverb that states, 'Walk a mile in someone else's shoes,' suggesting that you need to see things from another person's perspective. With that in mind, I decided to attempt something so onerous, so vile, and so frightening that you will marvel at my courage and valor. As painful as it was, I endeavored to..." She lowered her voice dramatically. "...live one day as a conservative."

There was a murmur of anticipation from some in the audience and a mumble of acid indigestion from others. Pahwirth continued, "I know, weird idea, right? It's like I had to do everything backwards. Evil twin instead of good girl, plutocracy instead of democracy,

sampling instead of actually composing my own music....

“To accompany my morning exercise routine, I put on some appropriately insipid songs by Hank Williams, Jr., Kid Rock, Ted Nugent, and so forth.” She suddenly shouted: “Take that, people with taste!” She returned to her pleasant tone of voice. “That’s my mantra during sit-ups and crunches.

“Next, it’s on to breakfast where I first thank sweet little baby Jesus that we are all able to consume food that is chock full of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) courtesy of Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta, Dow, Land O’Lakes, and other corporate entities that put profits ahead of people’s lives. I also offered up a prayer that one day soon we will all be able to chow down on meat, fruit, vegetables, bread, and dairy brought to market without any pesky health inspection nonsense. I know it can happen once we rightwingers get rid of intrusive government regulation of the food industry. ‘Eat up and take yer chances!’ I shouted in the general direction of the front door.

“If an errand needs to be run and it’s nearby, I would normally take my bike, but that’s not the conservative way so I used the car for all my short trips. But no matter the mode of travel, streets are used. Yes, streets. You know, since we still have them. As a conservative-for-a-day, I once again give thanks to republicans for ensuring that our roadways and bridges are in such disrepair that they are literally crumbling. As I drove across the Turnpike Bridge, I yelled, ‘Look out below ya damn liberal hippies!’

“Then it’s off to work where I took a moment to thank the male, white, Christian God for helping republicans allow corporate entities to arbitrarily raise rates for electricity, water, gas, Internet connections, phones, mobile communications, and so much more. ‘Praise Jebus as we remove regulations on these industries so they can cut service and raise rates even further!’

“At lunch, I stepped out of the building and took a few deep breaths of the air that will soon be causing everyone emphysema because of conservative attacks on the

Environmental Protection Agency. Then I silently recited a few hosannas to the good people of Washington, DC, who have enabled our many fine upstanding multi-national corporations to send million of jobs offshore. ‘All of you (formerly) working Americans can drop dead—it’s your own damn fault for being born without trust funds!’

“During the next part of my douchebag day, I sang praises to the conservative congresscritters who always courageously accept campaign contributions from US-based corporations that evade paying their fair share of taxes. ‘Screw all of you who were too stupid to not be corporations!’

“Back at my desk, I gazed at the crazed and confused diatribes of online rightwing nutjobs. Conservatives have their own sites, places like World Nut Daily, InfoWhores, and Not-Very-Bright-Bart. I realized we must always send out a prayer of thanks for the brave conservative pundits who disseminate fake stories that call for attacking the homeless, the poor, seniors, children, students, women, and veterans. ‘Up yours to

everybody who is not me because I've got mine, ya commie pigs!'

“It can be exhausting. As a member of the clown car cabal, I've got plenty of work to do because each and every day, a conservative must do the following: Deny climate science. Deny fiscal facts about wages. Deny the rights of workers to organize. Deny the criminality of Wall Street and the big banks. Deny a woman's right to choose. Deny minorities the right to register to vote. Deny the damage from income inequality. Deny rights to LGBTQ citizens. Deny the need for immigration reform. Deny the need for drug policy reform. Deny the need to close tax loopholes for the wealthy. Deny the need to close tax loopholes for corporations. Deny the need for strong regulation of food, pharmaceuticals, water, banking, and stock trading. Deny the need to remove the Supreme Court troglodytes—especially Alito, Thomas, Gorsuch, and Kavanaugh. The elephants in the room.

“There are so many bits of logic and decency that must be ignored in order to be a

conservative. ‘We must cut taxes on the rich!’ they shout, just after pointing out that it’s too bad that the country can’t afford funds for education, seniors, healthcare, veterans, and infrastructure.

“In my country, we have a word for conservatism. Would you like me to teach it to you? You would? Great. In my country, the word for conservative is four syllables and it is pronounced like this: Doo... Come on, say it with me: Doo...” The audience repeated the sound. “Good. Now say Shh...” The audience repeated the sound. “Excellent. Now say Bah...” The audience repeated the sound. “Terrific! And now say Geh...” The audience repeated the sound. “One after the other now: doo, shh, bah, geh. Good. Now, put them all together: Douchebag, that’s correct. Very good! Douchebag. Yes, indeed.

“Let us not forget about conservatards’ racism, homophobia, and religiosity. During lunch, I chant: ‘Fuck the Muslims, fuck the niggers, fuck the atheists, fuck the fags, and fuck the Jews!’ Yes, this is uncomfortable for you to hear, but please understand the

concept: I'm simply pretending to be an asshole for a day." Some in the audience were squirming but she quieted them by adopting a pious tone:

“And now, let us pray: Oh Sweet Lord Baby Jesus, Champion of Hypocrites, we sing the praises of our brave republicans who defeated an infrastructure jobs bill, blocked a veterans bill, blocked an increase in the minimum wage, blocked the paycheck fairness act, blocked unemployment benefits, and prevented millions of uninsured people from receiving healthcare. Amen.

“Whew, that was harsh! But look, acting like a conservative is hard work. Their lack of basic morality is difficult for a normal person to maintain. For example, while a decent human being hopes to see justice for all fellow human beings, a conservative hopes to see justice for those who can purchase it. Plus, a dispiriting feeling often smacks you upside the head and inside the heart.

“And yet, I have a confession to make: it sometimes seemed quite liberating to undermine the basic tenets of the United

States of America. Was it possible my mind was atrophying into a conservative point of view? Was the syphilitic monster that is conservatism eating away at my very core?

“Spend a day in rightwingnut world and you’ll see three big reasons why being a conservative is so very attractive to some people. (1) You can openly hate women, children, veterans, minorities, teachers, scientists — in fact, you will be free to mock every decent human being on the planet. (2) You can attempt to force your religious cult beliefs on everyone. And most importantly, (3) you never have to let an original thought enter your, uh, that thing inside your noggin, um... brain! Yeah, that’s it.

“It’s great over here inside the conservatoid bubble of Faux News. Being a conservative means you’ll never have to learn anything because you’ll be allowed to just make stuff up! Being a conservative means you’ll always be able to blame some ‘other’ for any problem that occurs anywhere. Being a conservative means living a life that is science-free, fact-free, and morality-free!

“So come on over and experience the deliciousness of evil by becoming a conservative. Join the Party of Stupid! Join the Party of No! Join the Party of Know-Nothing!

“Best of all, with very minimal effort you, too, can quickly learn to spew lies, bile, hatred, and nonsense while proclaiming yourself a patriot. Okay, now it’s time to go masturbate to some guns. My time is up so allow me to say unto you, *sieg heil* and farewell.”

Pause

Richie Dabble stepped outside his comfort zone when he decided to take part in an open mic night at The Laff Emporium in Oklahoma City. In his day job as a mid-level accountant for a small chain of retail stores, he would never have thought of doing such a thing. By using a stage name, however, he got the nerve to give it a try. Which is why he had the emcee introduce him as Baron The Thinker. Richie slowly shuffled to the center of the stage and stared out at the audience, his deer-in-the-headlights eyes sweeping across the room. There were a few titters during the silence. Then, finally, Baron The Thinker allowed us to hear what was on his mind:

“Wouldn’t it be terrible if your psychological profile was one of your mug shot photos?”

He paused with his deadpan look.

“Have you noticed that when you’re down in the dumps, alcohol gets you high as a kite?”

He paused with his deadpan look.

“You can see what happens if you play it by ear. Or so I heard. I feel it must be true. I am so confident I can taste it.”

He paused with his deadpan look.

“Don’t worry, they aren’t all like that.”

He paused.

“Some are worse.”

He paused.

“Much, much worse. So, I guess right now I should say ‘good evening’ but it’s only been so-so for me so far. How about you guys?” The audience made a few noises that indicated agreement. “Waiter, more wine for these people.”

Several in the audience applauded, hoping to get a free glass of vino.

“No, no, you’re still paying for it. All I did was order it. You know, to save you the trouble. You’re welcome. There’s no free alcohol, folks. Sorry. Nope, nope. It’s all part of life’s lessons. Today’s lesson: we all have to learn to live with disappointment.”

He paused again, also relying on his wide-eyed look. Some of the audience

members groaned. A few then chuckled at the groan.

“Speaking of disappointment, sometimes things get lonely, you know?”

The audience mocked him with an “awwwww.”

“Awwwww,” he joined in. “Yeah, right. But really, loneliness affects everyone sooner or later. It affects me in odd ways. I mean, forget about finding a soul mate, I can’t even get all my socks to match.”

Pause for the deadpan look.

“I read that someone was trying to make writer’s block a medical condition. Screw writer’s block, let’s work on recognizing taxpayers block.”

Pause for the deadpan look. The look was garnering titters as the audience started to adjust to the stop-and-start cadence of Baron the Thinker.

“They say barking dogs don’t bite. Which is true. While they’re biting you they’re growling.”

(Pause.)

“Sorry that some of you don’t care for this material.”

(Pause.)

“Damn cat lovers.”

(Pause.)

“Whoever said that truth is stranger than fiction never read my sister’s diary.”

(Pause.)

“Or the Congressional Record.”

(Pause.)

“Or political campaign literature.”

(Pause.)

“Or the fine print in an insurance policy.”

(Pause.)

“Or ads for used cars.”

(Pause.)

“One more?”

The audience was mostly with him:
“Yeah!”

“Or those funny little folded-up booklets that come with over-the-counter medication.”

(Pause.)

“There’s an old adage that says you can’t run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

Which I guess means you can't be the hunter and the hunted at the same time. But I think you can... if you're really fast."

(Pause.)

"I saw a sign in the library that said silence is golden. I looked around quietly but didn't find anything. I tried whispering some silver and speaking some emeralds. Still nothing. They threw me out when I started shouting opals and yelling platinum."

(Pause.)

"Maybe you've heard that one man's ceiling is another man's floor... Not if you own the building."

(Pause.)

"Some of you seem ambivalent about my act."

(Pause.)

"See?"

(Pause.)

"A grade school teacher once told me that virtue is its own reward. I asked her if she'd ever seen a wanted poster."

Baron The Thinker took a sip of water and watched the audience before continuing.

“A friend of mine runs a movie theater. He shows interesting double-features. *Finding Nemo* and *Saw*, for example. Sometimes the projectionist gets stoned and alternates parts of films to make one long strange film. Like *Pirates of the Titanic*. Or *Sisterhood of the Traveling Transformers*.

(Pause.)

“I kinda liked that one.”

(Pause.)

“But I was stoned.”

(Pause.)

“If an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, does that mean a fast-food meal is worth a pound of crap? Seems about right. Although I’ve never weighed it. Have you? You sir, in the last row, have you? Would you? Please? And get back to me on that. I’ll be at the Comedy Palace next Thursday and Flattop’s Laugh Stop over the weekend. When you ask for me, tell the doorman to say, ‘I weighed the shit.’ That should work out really well.”

Baron The Thinker took another sip of water before continuing.

“If the President was involved in a divorce, would the first lady own half the White House? Would she control half of our armed forces? And when a woman is elected president, finally...” (Applause.) “When a woman is elected president, what will happen if her husband is caught with a White House intern? I think I know: Drone strike. The press will be all like, ‘What happened to the First Husband?’ And the president’s press secretary will be all like, ‘There is no longer any such person. Next question’.”

(Pause.)

“The press will follow up with vigor. ‘But the first husband has disappeared!’ And the press secretary will deny it publically but admit privately, ‘It was just, Poof! All gone’!”

(Pause.)

“Couple days after that, Madame President will be on Tinder.”

(Pause.)

“They say time is relative, so it’s a quarter past my cousin.”

(Pause.)

“Okay, I admit that was a bad one. But the point about time being a relative concept is true and I can prove it: Three seconds holding a burning lump of coal is way longer than three seconds making love. But enough about my sex life.”

(Pause.)

“Ba-dum-bum-bum.”

(Pause.)

“Correct me if I’m wrong but doesn’t it seem like death is a side-effect of life?”

(Pause.)

“You probably noticed by now that my catchphrase is a pause.”

(Pause.)

“Yeah, just like that one.”

(Pause.)

“Okay, I’ve now come to the final resting place. The terminus. The end of the lines. The final indignity for a comic, which is someone in the wings signaling to you to wrap it up. But you don’t have to think of this as good-bye; you can think of it as good riddance. I’m Baron The Thinker, and we are now putting our relationship on... pause.”

Getting Racy

Fifteen hundred ninety-two people were in the Oaks Grove Civic Arts Theater, all eagerly waiting for the show to begin. Coming to their town for the first time was Simon Locke, on his second nationwide tour and fresh from numerous guest appearances on many late night talk shows. No one knew what to expect from the brash comic because of his reputation as a freethinking improviser who never did the same show twice.

Locke burst onto the stage just as the house lights were extinguished so he could only say a few words before he was drowned out by applause.

“I was thinking about some deep shit the other day...”

The ovation lasted for thirty seconds before he started trying to control the crowd. “All right, all right, thank you, thank you, save it for the end when I’m really going to need it. Yeah, yeah, yeah, shut up so I can talk to you guys.

“Okay, thanks. Probably I should bask in the applause because I might not get any of that again. No, really, you can’t tell. Some nights are funny and fun, other nights are dead and buried. *Omini patri vobiscum sanctus abolish his assholish name-o.*

“Hey, you never know what’s going to happen. Okay, so...” He took a breath. “I’ve been thinking about slavery lately.” He paused to allow the audience to react. “See? You just don’t know how things are gonna go.

“I’ve been pondering how our country started. Now, this is a great country, don’t get me wrong, but we have had our ups and downs, right? Just take one minute to consider that we expanded from a few acres around Plymouth Rock to owning the whole damn center of the continent. The non-frozen part of the continent. And how did we do it? Hard work, stick-to-itiveness, and a total lack of moral values. No, really. Think about it. We landed on the East Coast and moved West, slashing and burning everything that got in our way. We grew our nation—get ready for it—we grew our nation through genocide.

That's right: genocide. I'll pause while you mutter amongst yourselves...

“Yeah, kinda hard to admit, isn't it. But it's true, what we did was genocide; although we didn't call it that. We practiced genocide but we cleverly re-branded it as ‘Manifest Destiny.’

“That's right, we called it Manifest Destiny. Which sounds a lot better than ethnic cleansing, extermination, or annihilation, right? But in reality we wiped out a huge percentage of the indigenous population. Our actions were disgusting but our labeling efforts were excellent. Genocide gets punished as a war crime; Manifest Destiny gets you into the marketing hall of fame.

“I know, I know—not the comedy show you thought you were going to get.” He smiled sweetly and added, “Fuck you very much for pointing that out! No, sincerely, fuck you.

“So, from genocide we quickly moved on to slavery. We did. We built our economy through slavery. And I got to wondering about the way this was justified back when

we were just an itty-bitty little nation trying to grow up.

“I mean, you can kinda-sorta understand slavery from the business person’s perspective. It’s your basic dollars-and-sense issue. Come with me now to ‘Murika, back in the sixteen hundreds...”

Locke began doing all the voices of the characters in his history play.

“Guvnor Johnson, we think we have a solution to our cost-of-labor problem.”

“You don’t sayeth?”

“We are almost positively certain, yessir.”

“All right, then,” the guvnor said, “you just pull up one of those Early American four-spindle hickory stools, set yourself down, and tell me all about it.”

“Thank you, guvnor. Wellsir, me and the other landowners here have a plan whereby all we’d need to do is pay a one-time fee for the labor force, transport them to the work sites, and build some shacks where they can sleep. From then on, all we’d have to do is feed ‘em.”

“We wouldn’t have to pay them?”

“Nosir.”

“That certainly would be a great boon for our bottom line. Are there any problems with this plan? I mean, what’s the potential downside on it?”

“Okay, well, guvnor, there is one teeny, tiny, little probl—okay, not really a problem, more of a wrinkle. A kink. A hiccup.

“A hiccup?”

“Right, Guvnor, just an eensy little, um, situation.”

“What is it?”

“Brace thyself, but, well, the plan is built on slavery.”

“What?”

“Slavery.”

“Slavery?”

“Correct.”

“And that’s a hiccup?”

“It could be.”

“Oh wait, I understand. Yes, yes, I can see how slavery might pose a bit of a public relations difficulty.”

“Yes, Guvnor.”

“Unless...”

“Unless?”

“Unless... gentlemen, hold onto your wigs while I explore this for one moment. All right, I freely admit that I’m just spitballing here. Just brainstorming. There are no bad ideas, right?”

“No bad ideas from you, Guvnor.”

“That’s right. Now, we’ll just go with the flow here. We’ll just run this up the flagpole and see if a dog salutes it, you know what I’m saying?”

“Yes, Guvnor. We really cannot wait to hear your idea.”

“God’s will.”

“Sorry?”

“What if it’s ‘God’s Will,’ what about that?”

“Um, excuse me, Guvnor.”

“Yes, um, you there, um, what’s your name again?”

“Henderson is my name, Guvnor.”

“All right, Henderson. So, what’s your question?”

“Is it true?”

“Is what true?”

“That slavery is God’s Will. Is that true?”

There was an ominous pause. Finally, the Guvnor replied, “How the fucketh should I know?”

“But then—”

“We just say it.”

“What?”

“We just say it. We just say that slavery is God’s Will.”

“But—”

“It’s not going to be a problem if we all say it and then keep on saying it. Everybody just repeat it and repeat it and repeat it and then keep on repeating it. Try it and see, gentlemen. Try it: Slavery is God’s—say it with me now—Slavery is God’s Will.”

He included the audience in his exhortations. “I can’t hear you. Everyone, just try it, as an experiment in history. Here we go: Slavery is God’s Will. Good. Again: Slavery is God’s Will. Again: Slavery is God’s Will. See how that works?!”

“You’re right, Guvnor!” one exclaimed.

“Yes, Guvnor, it’s already starting to sound real!”

“Exactly. I kneweth that you all would come to see it. And I’m sure we can get the churches to go along.”

“Really?”

“Sure. The churches, the other landowners, the shopkeepers, everybody who can vote. Praise be to the good Lord above for helping me think of God’s Will. Why, there isn’t anything else that could be so effective in this important matter of fiscal progress.”

“Although—”

“Although? Who said that?”

“Uh, it’s me again, Henderson.”

“Yes, Henderson. What do you mean?”

“Well, Guvnor, I’m just spitballing here. Just brainstorming. No bad ideas, and all that. But what if, to go along with your brilliant God’s Will concept, what if we also say, um...”

“Yes? Out with it, my good man.”

“Well, what if we also say that we’re the superior race?”

There was another ominous pause.

“Hmmm, two concepts working together... God’s Will *and* the superior race. Not bad. Not bad at all. What do you think, gentlemen?”

“YesYesHaw-rumphYesYesHaw-rumphHaw-rumph.”

“So, that means you’re for it, right?”

“Right, Guvnor.”

“Well then, I think we are ready to proceed on this.”

“Absolutely, Guvnor.”

“Have the PR people put out a statement.”

“Yessir. Do we want a new name for Slavery?”

“What do you mean?”

“Maybe something like Slavery but, you know, not so racy.”

“Why do we care?”

“Well, Guvnor, if Genocide is Manifest Destiny, then Slavery is... what?”

“Look, uh, Henderson...”

“Yes, guvnor?”

“And gentlemen. Payeth attention to me now. If we’ve got the politicians, the church,

the landowners, the shopkeepers, and the voters, well then, fuck it, we can just call it Slavery.”

“Good thinking, Guvnor!”

“Thank you. I tell you, I am liking this combination: God’s Will *and* the superior race. Wait, hold on... Not just the superior race, but maybe it’s ‘The Master Race.’ No? Too much? Yeah, probably too much. Maybe someone will be able to use that later. Mid-twentieth-century, maybe.”

Blackout.

Big Bash

The audience at Club Chuckles was immediately intrigued by Sebastian Lovett's opening line: "The party was a success, meaning only a very few people died." Lovett smiled at the crowd and continued with an earnest and upbeat tone. "And their bodies were never found, so it's all good." Lovett watched the crowd laugh. "What is wrong with you people?!" He smiled as they laughed some more.

"Okay, so right now I'm going to tell you about The Best Party I Ever Attended. It was such a good party that when two very nice police officers showed up, they waited patiently just outside the door while the volume on the music was turned down and the girls dancing nude on the balcony stepped back inside. And when the officers warned us about what would happen if they had to come back and tell us again, it was very politely worded.

"As the two cops turned to leave, one of them made a half-wave of his hand, which

was almost friendly, or so it seemed to me. The other officer directed a somewhat envious glance at the cooler of beer sitting on the front patio. The host of the party noticed that, too, and offered them a couple of cold ones. They said they couldn't take any. 'I insist,' he said.

"They said, 'No, no, we absolutely can't do that,' but they said it while taking a couple of bottles. Nice guys. I felt very protected.

"All right, let me tell you more about the party. As you entered the place, you saw that there wasn't much furniture but the music system cost more than the average new car. In the living room, there were mounds of comic books piled high on the floor and some of the stacks extended about three feet out from the wall. It would be possible to build a fort out of them, and someone will try this later in the evening, and no, it wasn't me.

"I wandered into the kitchen and there was an open metal lunchbox sitting on the counter. (It was a Hello Kitty lunchbox, if you must know.) Spilling out of it were a dozen pre-rolled joints like a parody of an English

gentleman's cigar box advertisement from long ago.

“As I continued to move through the place I peeked into one of the bedrooms. Right next to the door there was an end table with a baggie of cleaned grass, a nice gesture for anyone who wanted to roll their own joints or use the nearby hookah.

“I went back into the kitchen at one point and opened the refrigerator. And sure, there were bottles of wine and twelve-packs of beer, but there also was a foil-wrapped brick of hashish sitting in the crisper drawer next to three rather shriveled tangerines and one fresh mango. It was delicious, by the way.

“Some of the partygoers brought, um, well, additional substances. Things to lift you up, things to take you down, things to move you sideways, and things to introduce you to oblivion, at least for the rest of the evening. Several people made some trades. ‘Ooh, I’ll give you two blue ones for one of those yellow ones.’ A good time was had by all. Well, a good time was had by most. Those who remained conscious.

“All of a sudden there was a flurry of activity as some new people arrived. They were visitors from the mysterious East! Okay, they were from New Jersey. They brought acid. And now look: some visitors from the Mysterious Lands of the Great Sands! Yeah, okay, they were from Las Vegas. They brought mescaline and peyote buttons. Then some vehicular nomads arrived. Okay, they were car club members. They brought amphetamines.

“Meanwhile, a gaggle of soon-to-be scientists from the UCLA Chemistry Department appeared and were welcomed with a curious undercurrent of trepidation. They brought something which they claimed was ‘far fucking out.’ I couldn’t help noticing that they weren’t using any of their own concoction. I took this as a hint to avoid it.

“The point is that a lot of mood-altering stuff was readily available and this had an affect on the nature of our interpersonal communication. Let me give you an example. One person said, ‘Our very existence is really a strong socio-political statement because,








like, if our vibes can spread to a wider cross-section of society, then we will be changing this whole country and, like, making it a place that's really heavily into a kind of universal karma, y'know?' Yeah, I told him, I know. You're fucking stoned, that's what I know.

“Then someone arrived with ‘the X.’ By which is meant ecstasy, or MDMA. Well, okay, technically this drug is called 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine. The club drug. The euphoric drug. A lab-created semi-combo of amphetamine and hallucinogen that also makes you thirsty, so it was very fortunate that all those bottles of beer and wine were available.

“There may be a formula for determining the extent of the damage at a party that gets out of hand. Just for the sake of scholarship, let's see if we can figure the equation. I think it might be something like this: Amount of alcohol consumed... multiplied by variety of drugs ingested... added to the number of hours since eating... minus the number of hours since sleeping... plus the square root of how horny you are.

“Now, I’m not certain if I’ve allowed for all the variables. We might have to factor in such things as current level of dissatisfaction at work and the number of unpaid bills that are sitting on your bureau at home next to an unmade bed, but I think we’re close.

“Whatever the scientific explanation, the fact is that this particular conglomeration of party-goers, distilled spirits, fermented libations, misused medications, and illegal substances resulted in:

-  TP tossed on nearby trees and hedges
-  a bake-off featuring a couple of kitchen fires
-  lamps and small appliances hurled into the street
-  a series of toothpaste battles that escalated into fistfights
-  vegetables stuffed into exhaust pipes of parked cars
-  flamethrowers made with BIC lighters and bug spray
-  unlatching gates to release neighborhood dogs

- 🚒 a rooftop pool-diving contest
- 🛹 nude skateboarding

“And, yes, the cops returned. But before they did, there was one more event from *The Best Party I Ever Attended* that has always stayed in my mind. So, the doorbell rings. ‘Get that for me, will ya Jimmy?’ the host shouts from across the room. Jimmy opens the door, expecting more guests. Instead, it turns out to be two cult members who want to discuss saving people’s souls. Jimmy grins and says, ‘Hey, glad to see ya! Hang on a second.’ Jimmy uses his phone to snap a photo of the religiosity freaks and then tells them, ‘C'mon in and by all means start telling us all about saving our souls!’

“They tentatively step inside and one asks Jimmy why he snapped a picture of them. Jimmy is pleased at the question. He tells them, ‘It may come in handy later.’ And they go, ‘Later?’ And Jimmy explains it to them with a knowing smile: ‘Yeah, it’s for your families to use on the Missing Person posters when you don’t come back.’ It took

only a few tortured seconds before those nutjobs got the hell away from there.

“Okay, that’s it for me right now. Oh, one more thing: anybody up for a party later on tonight? I’m still holding some really good stuff from that last one.”

Tour Guides

It was improv night at the Laugh Machine nightclub. Depending on the skill of the performers and the mood of the audience, the event could be exciting or a drag. Fortunately, this evening was one of the upbeat sessions. The emcee acknowledged the spirit of joy and camaraderie in the room: “We are having some fun tonight! How about another round of applause for these terrific performers!”

The crowd whooped it up for several seconds. As the noise subsided, the emcee continued: “All right, our next performers here at the Laugh Machine are two actors who you have probably seen around town. You know her as the lovely and talented ‘Miss Information’ from the Tangleson Brothers Muffler Shop commercials. Say hello to Betsy Mathis!” There was a small round of applause. “And you know this guy as the host of the ‘Friday Fright Night’ horror film showcase at the Bel-Ray Theater. Here’s Rondell Paye!” Another smattering of

applause. “Together, they are Betsy & Paye. Let’s welcome them to the stage!”

Betsy & Paye ran to their microphones and got right into their performance.

“Hello, everybody,” Betsy said, “give us an occupation.” Several audience members shouted out some job titles and Betsy selected one. “Tour Guide. Great, we’ll each be tour guides.”

“Competing tour guides,” Rondell said.

“That’s good,” Betsy agreed. “Now, give us a location for the tour.” Again, several suggestions were shouted out. “Oooh,” Betsy said, “I heard heaven from one person and then someone shouted hell. So, Rondell, what do you think?”

“Sounds great,” Rondell said. “Let’s do both.”

“Okay,” Betsy said. “So, it’ll be Heaven to Betsy and Hell to Paye.”

That earned a laugh and some applause.

“All right,” Betsy began, speaking in a soothing tone of voice: “Welcome to all of the recently departed liberals and progressives.”

“Hey, rethugliklans,” Rondell shouted at the crowd. “Welcome to hell, you motherfuckers!”

Betsy spoke using dulcet tones: “As new members of the Eternal Cosmic Universe, let me first offer each liberal and progressive a chardonnay or a merlot.”

Rondell contemptuously barked out his lines: “Drink your own piss, conservatards!”

Betsy promised: “Here in heaven, you can drink as much alcohol as you want with no side effects.”

Rondell threatened: “Here in hell, there’s nothing but side effects!”

Betsy purred, “Right now, your earthly garb will be replaced by more rarified raiment. Enjoy the sensation of angels gently draping your body in silken gowns.”

Rondell growled, “Spider monkeys!”

“Wait, what? Spider monkeys?” Betsy asked.

“Spider monkeys!” Paye yelled again. Pointing at the audience, he shouted, “Spider monkeys will rip the clothes off your worthless hides. And yes, there will be

scratches. And no, those wounds will never heal!”

“Oh,” Betsy said, “spider monkeys. Of course.” Turning back to the audience, she once more spoke in soothing tones: “As you can see, here in heaven, all is sweetness and light.”

“You’re not going to see anything!” Rondell screamed. “You will be in permanent darkness!”

“Up here, everything is beautiful,” Betsy said. “The floating beds, the friendly faces, and the cloud cathedrals.”

“Down here, everything is garbage!” Rondell shouted. “The chemical fires, the screaming faces, and the torture chambers!”

“The air is pure and the water is sparkling,” Betsy said.

“The air and water are polluted!” Rondell thundered. “Just like on earth because the conservatards stopped regulating them!”

“In a moment,” Betsy assured everyone, “we’ll get on the tram for a ride around all the attractions.”

“In a moment,” Rondell yelled, “you’ll be shackled and put on a chain gang!”

“Be sure to keep your hands and arms inside the tram cars at all times,” Betsy reminded them.

“You can’t imagine what we’re going to cut off your wretched rethugly bodies,” Rondell warned ominously.

“Breathe in the delightful scents and aromas,” Betsy purred.

“Oh, you’re gonna beg to breathe!” Rondell warned.

“Ummm, smell the rose petals,” Betsy said.

“Your nostrils will fill with sulfur!” Rondell threatened.

“And freshly baked bread,” Betsy added.

“And wet dogs!” Rondell yelled.

Betsy, soothingly: “Eat chocolate with no consequences.”

Rondell, angrily: “Eat shit and die!”

Betsy, soft: “Lib-progs will have roasted duck every night.”

Rondell, loud: “Conservatards will be roasted on a spit every night.”

Betsy, gently: “You’ll be petting pooches and pudgytats.”

Rondell, angrily: “You’ll be gnawed by hyenas and woverines!”

Betsy: “You’ll be greeted by smiles.”

Rondell: “Mine is the nicest face you’ll ever see, maggots!”

Betsy: “Up.”

Rondell: “Down!”

Betsy: “In.”

Rondell: “Out!”

Betsy: “Rainbow.”

Rondell: “Storm!”

Betsy: “Blue skies.”

Rondell: “Dark clouds!”

Betsy: “Cool breezes.”

Rondell: “Blistering heat!”

Betsy: “Cat purring.”

Rondell: “Dog growling!”

Betsy: “Music.”

Rondell: “Explosions!”

Betsy: “Mozart.”

Rondell: “The Macarena!”

Betsy: “Bach.”

Rondell: “Celine Dion!”

Betsy: “Beethoven.”

Rondell: “Nickleback!”

Betsy: “Hi, Mr. Ghandi.”

Rondell: “Heil Hitler!”

Betsy: “Hello, Mother Theresa.”

Rondell: “Hell-oh, Mr. Trump!”

Betsy: “And finally, please enjoy as much sex as you wish.”

Rondell: “And finally, you’re each going to be a whale’s dildo!”

Grin 'n' Bare It

The man's name was Gregory Higgles and he had dubbed himself the Man With The Giggles. Working a tri-state circuit of dives, Higgles was considered to be a pretty good storyteller. "Welcome, everybody," he said with mock seriousness. "Thank you for your attendance. My mission this evening is to enlighten the multitudes about the theater of the stark. You have come to the college of comedic arts, the school of reality, and you shall now learn some of the most important points about our universe because tonight's lecture will be about titty bars. Nudie cutie joints, gentlemen's clubs, burlesque, burly-que, body shops, strip joints, grind houses, exotic dance emporiums, body bars... you get the picture.

"Well, some of you might not get the total picture. Some of you may not have frequented one of these flesh palaces and so I am going to provide you with some information for your edification. You're welcome.

“You find strip joints in every large metropolis, and probably in every other size city, town, burg, hamlet, and municipality. These establishments have names like Spearmint Rhino and the Blue Zebra Adult Cabaret. They have punny names, too, like 4Play and UCKitty. Under whatever type of name, these are caring, loving places. Well, okay, maybe not. But they are locations that can serve as a respite and refuge from the vagaries of the world.

“Let me tell you about my vast experience with such places. That’s right, all three of my visits to strip clubs will be fully explicated for you this evening.

“Here is the full, unadulterated tale of my first titty bar experience: A friend’s group, a band called Rear Pong, was playing in what they happily called an “itty bitty titty bar.’ Much to the consternation of the club, I watched the band perform. That’s it. That’s the entire story. Was there a certain amount of ogling of the gals as they sashayed back and forth from the dancing pedestals to the private rooms at the rear of the club? Sure. But at the

time, my only income was from writing reviews for the local newspaper, meaning that any extra twenty-dollar-bills in my pocket were earmarked for groceries. And come to think of it, there weren't any extra bills of any denomination in my pocket.

“Okay, my second titty bar experience: I attended a nudie-cutie bar was with my friend Lucas who was visiting the USA from Brazil. Someone made him feel welcome to Los Angeles by giving him a couple of free passes to the Grin ‘n’ Bare It Review, a place that claimed to have ‘Two Dozen Long-Stemmed Beauties Every Evening.’

“I told Lucas that two dozen seems like more than you'd need. He said, ‘One cannot have too many long-stemmed beauties.’ Well, you know, when a guy is right, he's right, right? Right. So, we walk into the Grin ‘n’ Bare It and start counting long-stemmed beauties.

“I counted twelve and Lucas said, ‘Thirteen. One of the bartenders is a girl.’

“Oh yeah, thirteen. Which leaves us 11 short. So Lucas turned to one of the bouncers

and said, ‘Excuse me, my man,’ but before he can inquire as to the number of long-stemmed beauties, the bouncer said, ‘The girls work in shifts. There’s two dozen if you stay the whole night.’

“Lucas and I looked at the guy, then at each other. And we had to smile. So okay then, one point for Grin ‘n’ Bare It, zero for Lucas and me.

“We only stayed in the club for an hour or so, but in that time we saw quite a few semi-nude dancers. We saw them on stage, at our table, and in the aisles; we saw a two-girl wrestling match in Jell-O; we saw a multi-girl wrestling match in mud; and we saw lots of beautiful women kissing each other, which can be quite a turn-on when it happens in person. Sure, you see it a lot in movies; hell, there are two girls kissing in the first ten minutes of *The Social Network*, fer cryin’ out loud, but on film it’s just okay, while alive and up-close-and-personal, it can be hot. Very hot. They lightly touch each other on the neck, shoulders, arms, waist, hips, breasts . . . Then they slowly lick their lips and move

toward each other to meet in an erotic embrace . . .

“What? Oh. Yeah, the story. So at one point Lucas called over another one of the bouncers and said, ‘What is the situation with the people going through that door over there?’ He pointed toward the entryway to another room at the far end of the club. The guy said, ‘Private rooms, private dances.’ That didn’t seem to be a complete answer, so Lucas said, ‘But one of you guys goes with them,’ referring to the fact that there always seemed to be three people going into the private rooms, a male customer, a scantily-clad girl, and a male bouncer. ‘We’re there to enforce the rules,’ the guy said. ‘What rules?’ Lucas wanted to know, and come to think of it, so did I. And the guy goes, ‘Basically to see that the girls aren’t touched.’ Lucas was incredulous. ‘Wait, you mean you can’t touch them? In Brazil you can do anything you want with them!’ And the guy was a bit more forceful when he said, ‘Not here, pal.’ Lucas asked him, ‘Is that a club policy?’ and the guy said, ‘Hey, it’s the law.’ Lucas had two strong

reactions to that. First, he said, ‘Absurdity!’ as if it was the final pronouncement on the matter. Then he said to me, ‘Come on, we’re leaving.’

“So, okay, a little later in life, my employment was high-rolling again and a friend decided to take me to a strip joint because I said that I didn’t understand how the rules worked. The friend was Biff Walker, the lead singer in a rock band called Jeremiah Sunrise.

So, Biff drove us up to one of these places, hopped out and approached the doorman. I followed at a discrete distance.

“You can’t park there,” the doorman said, waving his hand behind him, signaling for security. Very quickly, two rather large individuals were by his side, ready for trouble. Their sports jackets didn’t seem to fit very well. Could they be packing heat?

Biff, totally unfazed, told the guy, “No problem, we’ll move it in a second. Just need to ask a question. Let’s say we drive down the street and then come back to go inside. When you guys frisk us, you’re not going to have a

problem if, for example, I just happen to have a pint or a flask or something like that in my sock, right?”

The guy looked at us for a couple of very long seconds.

Very. Long. Seconds.

“Yeah,” he FINALLY replied. “Like you said, no problem.”

“Copacetic,” said Biff. “We’ll see you shortly.”

Back into the car, down the street to a liquor store, purchased a pint of tequila, and back to the club. Parked in the proper spot. Got frisked, paid the entry fee, and entered the club.

Okay, gotta admit that there is something quite powerful about seeing a nude dancer moving suggestively to some relentlessly rhythmic music.

I wondered about our purchasing liquor from outside the club. Biff said, “You have to bring your own liquor because this is a totally nude bar. If it’s tits-and-g-strings, then they serve alcohol. If it’s a pussy bar like this one, then you can only order juice or a soda.”

“Why is that?” I asked.

“Because the laws are made by hypocrites,” he said.

“Oh. Right.”

“Hey, there are two spots right at the front. Let’s go.”

The whole process was laid out for me, no pun intended. Here’s what I was told: Make sure you have plenty of cash. Sit close. Order the damn fruit juice but then hold your glass below the bar so you can spike it. Watch the girls (duh) and when one you like dances close, put a dollar bill on the bar right in front of you.

“You don’t hold it out to her?” I asked.

“Of course not,” he said, his eyes never leaving the girls. “You want her to take a few extra seconds bending down to get it.”

“Oh. Right.”

“And when she does, look into her eyes. A lot of them appreciate that and they’ll stay in front of you longer. If she closes her eyes and keeps dancing, then you look at her body. You’ll get a much better view that way.”

“Okay.”

“Now, if she keeps on dancing for you, that’s when you hold out more money and she might have an interesting way of taking it from you.”

“Yeah, it can be fun hanging out with Biff. Try it some time. He’s getting out in about one to three years.

“Thank you and good night!”

You're Welcome, America

The crowd at Flannery's was mainly young and mostly hip. Drawing from two nearby universities, the club catered to boisterous men and women who were painfully aware of what was happening in America and the world. A comic who commented on the political scene was not unusual for this audience, so they happily welcomed Pat Reger, an androgynous figure who was currently involved in numerous lawsuits against rightwing nutjob political figures across the country.

Lawrence Flannery, the son of the club's original owner, served as the emcee and his intro was enthusiastic, calling the comic "a joy, a treasure, and a thorn in the side of regressives everywhere, please welcome Pat 'Jokes for Justice' Reger!"

Pat Reger walked solemnly to the microphone, waited for quiet, and began speaking in an overly serious tone, as if making a formal speech. "Master of Ceremonies Flannery... soundman Billy...

bouncer Clarkson... lighting director Maurice... fellow comics... ladies and gentlemen. I come here tonight because of a menace within our sick society. Evidence of this illness is everywhere and you know it as the pestilence called conservatism.” Reger somberly regarded the crowd and repeated part of the last line with more volume: “I said, ‘the pestilence called conservatism’.”

This time, the audience reacted appropriately and Reger nodded in acknowledgement. “That’s better. All right, moving on: As conservatism festers, metastasizes, and spreads throughout the nation, our political leaders are often afraid to act in defense of democracy, which means that when it comes to doing something about the Nazis, it’s up to us. It comes down to our actions, our laughter, our battles, our sarcasm. All right then, so be it. Let’s make fun of conservatards!”

A ripple of laughter moved across the audience. What would happen now? A political speech? A call to arms?

“The face of conservatism is not pretty,” Reger noted. “Throughout the country, conservatives are actively engaged in, or supportive of, a lot of, what is the appropriate word? Oh, I know: shit. Conservatives are engaged in shit. Excrement, filth, offal, detritus, effluvia. Or, as I said: shit. Think about what conservatism actually means...” Reger began a litany of conservative horror and the crowd good-naturedly joined in, turning this part of the evening into a call-and-response event: “Voter suppression” Reger said, followed by mumbling from some in the audience. “Gerrymandering,” Reger said. Now there was muttering from many in the crowd. “Regressive laws.” (Hollering) “Biased law enforcement.” (Hooting) “White supremacist marches.” (Booing) “Deliberate destruction of the economic safety net.” (More booing and some angry shouts) “Weakening of the earned income system of Social Security.” (A few people shouted, “fuck conservatives!”) “Undermining access to healthcare.” (“Fuck conservatives!”) “Threats of physical violence.” (“Fuck

Conservatives!”) “Attempted physical violence.” (“FUCK Conservatives!”) “And, ultimately, actual physical violence.” (“FUCK CONSERVATIVES!”)

“Thank you for participating in that part of our show. Give yourselves a hand.”

During the applause, Reger took a sip of water and pretended to anoint the crowd. “Yeah, sure, let’s add a little blasphemy to the show. That all right with you guys?”

The crowd was fine with that except for some religiosity freaks who stood up and began making their way out of the club.

“Ah, we’re losing some conservatives already. The truth hurts. Say ‘Bye-bye, Nazi douchebags.’” The crowd derisively shouted at the departing douchebags. “Let’s give them what is known as the DoubleTrump Salute. That’s where we give them the gesture they worship, right arm jutting out and up just as Nazis like it, and left hand giving them the recognition they deserve, the middle finger.” The crowd happily joined in until the rightwing nutjobs exited. “Good riddance to bad rubbish. All right,” Reger continued. “As

you all have observed over the years, everything conservatives do is shameful and disgusting, and they love to broadcast it. Conservative propaganda floods the airwaves and helps them in their efforts to pervert the very idea of truth, justice, fairness, equality, and decency. The rise of conservatism is obviously disheartening to anyone with an I.Q. above seventy and/or a soul.

“Despite the profound ugliness of conservative programs, the countermeasures from liberals and progressives are inefficient, to say the least. Sure, we shouted at a few of them just now, but the well-meaning but namby-pamby Left often attempts to placate the radical, regressive, repugnant Right. This lapdog reaction seems strange to anyone viewing our nation from a safe distance outside our country’s borders. Not only do we have forty percent of Americans behaving like jackbooted thugs—which makes us look like we are a nation of assholes—we also have another forty percent wringing their hands while whining ‘oh, oh, what to do, what

to do’—which makes us look like a nation of weaklings.

“No matter the extent of GOP perfidy, many otherwise worthwhile people regularly issue pleas for peaceful coexistence with conservatives.” There was some booing from the audience. “It’s true,” Reger continued, “no matter how many times the GOP attacks the principles of democracy, some people express the hope that ‘both sides’ will work with each other. In other words, it doesn’t seem to matter how blatantly the GOP engages in anti-American activities, there will still be calls for a ‘coming together’ of Left and Right. Yes, there are far too many people hoping for compromises between decent human beings on one side and conservative pieces of human detritus on the other.

“This seems very wrongheaded to me, but if this is a goal of some of the Left, well, all righty then, let us now seek common ground with conservatives.” There was anticipation in the crowd. “I am not sure what to do about their worship of greed; or their misogyny and homophobia; or their

warmongering and xenophobia; or their embrace of plutocracy and theocracy; or their disgusting fascination with Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini. But I believe I've developed a solution to coping with two conservative bugaboos, abortion and racism. Would you enjoy hearing my answers to these two problems?"

The crowd roared "yeah!"

"Okay then. Here's how we reach common ground with conservatives on abortion. We say, 'hey, conservatard, if you don't want an abortion, don't have an abortion. There. Individual freedom. As for anyone else's decision about it..." Reger paused for complete silence. "...Mind Your Own Fucking Business, Assholes!" The crowd cheered.

"And now, would you like to hear my solution to the problem of conservative racism?" The crowd shouted "Yeah!"

"All right, here's how we reach common ground with conservatives concerning their racism. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, everyone will act like decent human

beings. Now, this is obviously impossible for conservatives, so they will simply remain at home.

“On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, everyone will be free to get in touch with their inner racist and act just like conservatives: bigoted, ghastly, redneck-stoopid, scurrilous, underhanded, and thoroughly sickening.

“Then, on Sundays, everyone will gather at neighborhood recreation centers and have a potluck brunch. We’ll exchange jokes, swap recipes for potato salad, and discuss the events of the previous week. And then, every other Sunday, we’ll hold a lynching.

“So,” Reger said, surveying the crowd. “That’s how we achieve common ground with conservatives on racism.

“And just as a side note, having the deplorables stay home three days a week will greatly ease traffic congestion, so this is clearly a win-win.

“You’re welcome, America.”

Cyborgistics

Drinks are flowing and the nightclub crowd is in a good mood. With a brief blaring of recorded music, a movie screen descends in front of the stage and an unseen emcee introduces the next segment, his voice booming through the club's public address system:

“Ladies and gentlemen, the world infamous Joke-on-a-Rope proudly presents another in our continuing series of combination motion picture and live staged comedy extravaganzas, the first portion once again photographed in the modern-day miracle of 2-D! Tonight, performing with a cast of dozens in their thus far vain attempt to land a TV series, here are Masters & Mark starring in ‘Our Technological World!’ Enjoy, everybody!”

On screen, Darrell Masters appears in a wig and a gray suit, sitting behind a desk on a news show set. “Good evening. It’s about nine-fifteen, so welcome to the Six O’Clock Report. After last night’s staff party, I’m

what's left of Darrell Masters.” He straightens the pages of his script and continues: “Topping tonight's news, it seems that you can have the latest technological advances right at your fingertips. Literally. We go now to Raving Reporter Mark — sorry, Roving Reporter Mark Izikoff for this live report. Take it away, Mark.”

The filmed sequence ends and the screen scrolls back up into the ceiling. On stage is a crudely painted set depicting a college science lab. Mark Izikoff is interviewing Professor Johnson (played by Darrell Masters without the wig and now in a blue suit).

“Thank you, Darrell. I'm Mark Izikoff and I am here with Professor Hiram Johnson of the Transnational Institute of Technology and Science.”

“TITS.”

“Pardon?”

“That's the acronym of our name.” He points to the wall where the logo “TITS” is seen. “Transnational Institute of Technology and Science. TITS.”

“Ah, I see. Well, Professor Johnson, I understand there has been an important breakthrough in the way humans can interact with science and technology.”

“Yes.”

“Uh, okay, well, can you discuss this?”

“I could do that.”

“You’d better or we don’t have a bit.”

“Good point. Okie-dokie then. First, you’ve all heard about drones.”

“Yes.”

“Well, this story has nothing to do with drones.”

“Then why did—?”

“The same electronic controllers are used. The same type of electronic sensors. The same sort of highly complex, technological science stuff.”

“I’m sorry, did you say ‘science stuff’?” reporter Izikoff asks.

“Yes. Yes I did. Why, is that terminology too advanced for you?”

“No, it’s just, uh, never mind. So, tell us about how this ‘science stuff’ affects

everyone. You know, those of us who live in what we call the real world.”

“Is that what you call it?”

“Sometimes.”

“I see. Well, all right, let me introduce you to Ayesha, one of our latest creations.”

Clanking out on stage is a seven-foot high vaguely female-shaped robot. Ayesha takes a few ominous mechanical steps toward reporter Izikoff.

“Whoa,” Izikoff says.

Professor Johnson proudly gives a command to the robot: “Ayesha, say ‘hi’.”

“Bleep-Hi-blorp.”

“Very good. Now, Mr. Izikoff, say ‘hi’ to Ayesha.”

“Uh, Hi there.”

Ayesha mimics him: “Uh-Hi-there.”

Mark Izikoff says, “Wow, that’s—”

Professor Johnson says, “Great?!”

“—weird.”

Ayesha says, “That is greatweird.”

“Okay,” Professor Johnson says, “now let’s say you’re a student here at the

Transnational Institute of Technology and Science and you were out partying last night.”

“I can dig that.”

“And the next morning you can’t drag your tired carcass out of bed.”

“Oh yeah, I’ve been there.”

“Right, and so what you do is you insert the recording chip into Ayesha and send her to class for you. That’s something you enjoy, don’t you, Ayesha?”

“Bleep-Yes-blorp.”

“So then Ayesha attends the class for you and records the lecture. Then you insert the playback chip and download the lecture in your sleep the next night.”

“Does the recording have the bleeps and blorps in it?”

“Sometimes. You have to ignore the nonsense.”

“Like talking to a republican.”

“Exactly.”

“I see. How much does Ayesha cost?”

“Depends. Couple million dollars to build one. Unless you mean by the hour?”

“Oh, I didn’t know that was an option.”

“Certainly. You just install the vagina chip.”

“It’s going to have to be bigger than a chip, I can tell you.”

“Heh-heh-heh, yes, I know what you mean!”

“My man!”

They exchange a high five.

“All right, back to our report,” Izikoff says. “What other, um, services does Ayesha perform?”

“A great many things, but of primary interest would be all the ways Ayesha’s technology can be inserted into you.”

“Say what?”

“I said, ‘A great many things, but—’”

“I heard you, I just don’t believe it.”

“Believe it. The latest technological advancement is cyborgistics.”

“Cyborg-what?”

“Cyborgistics.”

“Okay, you want to explain that?”

“Certainly. Ayesha has electronic activation chips throughout her body. And now, thanks to this device right here,” he

brandishes an evil-looking contraption from behind his back, “you can have them, too.”

“That looks like a gun,” Izikoff says skeptically.

“Yes, but it’s a very special gun. It shoots tiny electronic chips into a live subject.”

“That sounds dangerous.”

“Oh no, not at all. Here, I’ll demonstrate on myself. I’ll take one of these tiny chips that has been programmed with the code to the lock on this cabinet of chemicals on the workbench here. So, I take the chip, I’ll load it into the chip shipper—that’s what we call this gun—aim it at the fleshy part of my hand, and—pow!”

“Wow, does that hurt?”

“It stings a little. Like having your hand slapped. Now, instead of fishing out my keys, finding the right key, inserting the key into the lock of the cabinet, unlocking the door to the cabinet, and then putting my keys away—instead of doing all that, I just wave my hand at the cabinet like so, and presto, the door is unlocked.” He opens the cabinet. “See?” He

closes the cabinet. “Wave your hand again and the door is locked.” He jiggles the handle and the door doesn’t budge.

“That’s great.”

“Same thing can be done for the door to your house, or your car doors and the vehicle’s ignition. Or a great many electro-mechanical devices at home or office.”

“That’s amazing.”

“Would you like to try it?”

“Well, I don’t know if—”

“You’re not afraid, are you?”

“Well, no, but—”

“Okay! Here we go. Pow!”

“Ouch!”

“See? Doesn’t really hurt much, does it?”

“Well, no, but I didn’t—”

“And now you can start your car with a wave of your hand.”

“Yeah, well, I usually take public transportation, so...”

“Oh don’t worry, we’ve thought of lots of other things. Ayesha, a little help here.”

“Wait, what’s it doing?”

“Each of her fingers is a chip shipper.”

“What?”

“A gun.”

“Whoa, hold on, I— Ouch! Just wait a minute— Ouch! Damn it, I don’t— Ouch! Hey, that’s enough— Ouch! But I— Ouch! Stop— Ouch!”

“Congratulations, you are now a cyborg.”

“What?”

“A cyborg. That’s a human being with machine interface capabilities.”

“But I didn’t— I didn’t— I didn’t— I didn’t—”

Professor Johnson whaps him.

“I di— Bleep-Hi-blorp.”

“You’re welcome. We’ll send the invoices to your TV station.”

“Bleep—The invoices?”

“This technology is not cheap you know.”

“Yeah, but—Blorp—I didn’t ask for any of it.”

“Okay, but you should know that surgical removal of the chips is a lot more

expensive and painful than insertion. A word to the wise.”

“Bleep—if I was wise, there is no way I’d still be working in this damn club.”

“Ah, yes. Sad but true. And now Ayesha and I have some experiments to conduct.”

“Ex—Blorp—periments?”

“Yes, sometimes there are conflicting electronic signals that cause the chips to activate at inappropriate times. We’re studying this problem and hope to develop a solution over the next few years.”

“Wait, what are you say—Bleep—ing?”

“For example, consider two people who have chips with similar encryption codes. You’d wave your hand at your car but the person standing nearby would scratch his head and the signals would cancel each other out. It’s actually pretty funny.”

“Uh huh...”

“Or worse.”

“Worse?”

“The car could explode.”

“Explode? What the—Bleep!?”

“Rarely happens. Don’t worry about it.”

“But I am worrying about it,” Izikoff insists.

“Or a plane will fly over and that can cause trouble.”

“Trouble?”

“Oh sure. Lots of electronic signals are emitted from a plane.”

“Blorp—Like that plane over there?”

“That one will do. The signals can really get crossed when there’s a plane overhead.”

“Well, nothing seems to be—hey!”

“Yes! Yes, that’s exactly what I mean. For some reason, it makes you start acting like you’re coming in for a landing.”

“Stop th-th- this!”

“And helicopters can be bad. Like that traffic copter over there.”

“Uh-uh-uh-uh, hey!”

“Or a fire truck goes by, like that one over there.”

“Whuh-oh, whuh-oh, whuh-oh, damn it!”

“Or you get a phone call.”

“Ah—rrrrring!”

“Right. Just like that! Or the signals from one chip set off some of the other chips, and, well, you start to perform what Ayesha and I call the Twitchdance.”

“Hey, wh-wh-what th-th-the hell is go-go-going on?!?”

“Exactly like that, yes. Ayesha, activate your video because we’ll want to show this to the students.”

“Hey! St-st-stop it!”

“Another thing. You know how most homes have garage door openers?”

“Ye-ye-ye-yeah?”

“They emit signals too.”

“I-I-I-I-uh-uh-uh—”

“Right. Also, don’t forget about TV remotes, microwaves, DVRs, game consoles, coffeemakers, and credit cards.”

“Sm-sm-sm-Bleep!?”

“And don’t get me started on apps.”

“A-a-a-a-a-apps?”

“Oh yeah. Someone activates their ‘Find a Restaurant’ app and you start acting like the cursor on a schizophrenic’s computer screen.”

“Wait, I—”

“Or somebody uses an app to identify a song, and—Oops, I’ve got a call. Hello?” He puts his mobile phone to his ear. “Hi cutey-pie!” To Izikoff he says, “It’s my lady.”

“Phrupt-whrrrrrrr!” Izikoff replies.

“No, honey, I won’t forget,” Johnson says into the phone.

“Bleep!”

“How could I forget our anniversary? And I found the perfect e-card. Here, let me send it to you.” Johnson taps his phone.

“Pa-plunk!” Izikoff states.

“There you go, honey,” Johnson says into the phone. “Like it?”

“Pzzzzzzottt!”

“Awwww, I love you, too!!!”

“Karack-BLOOP!”

“Hey, Izikoff! Hold it down. I’m talking to my woman here.”

“Bleep-blort!”

“Will you knock it off?!”

“KAZORT!”

“For cryin’ out loud, will you just— Oh, wait.” Professor Johnson waves his hands at the reporter’s head and barks out a command,

“Halt!” Izikoff freezes in place. The Professor waves his hands again and orders Izikoff to “Shut down!” Izikoff collapses in a heap. Professor Johnson smiles, nods, and is about to go back to his cell phone when he notices the audience. He waves his hands at the crowd and issues another command, “Applause.”

About the Author

Wearing mismatched socks and fake dreadlocks when he appears in public, John Scott G has made enemies around the globe through his constant attempts to push people's buttons and/or tie their shoelaces together. Working from a haunted cabana on the grounds of an abandoned estate, JSG has dedicated himself to the idea that anything can be verbed.



John Scott G tries to act all coy and innocent while flipping off the photographer with his other hand.

johnscottg.com