

WHEN MIRRORS REVEAL YOUR SOUL



AN
INFERNAL
COLLECTION
by JIMMY RAY

When Mirrors Reveal Your Soul

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gnud

*GOLOSIO NONTRADITIONAL
UNIVERSAL DISSEMINATION*

“Everyone should have a nice
collection of napkin rings.”

— *Al Capone*

(Quote unverified.)

Warning...

This chronicle is based to a certain extent on the experiences of actual human beings.

That said, it should be noted that the events, people, bits, characters, occurrences, incidents, locations, milieu, zeitgeist, and overall flavors of real-life may have been altered, tweaked, imagined, or outright fabricated in order to amp up the emotion, increase the drama, and put a spark to the fires of controversy.

All of this is, I confess, a mean-spirited attempt to create literary chaos and artistic absurdity.

Which I think it does.

However, most people can enjoy the truth-telling with a grin, perhaps even a smirk or two. (*Insert appropriate smiley-face emoji here.*)

One last caution: Some of my scribbling seems to rile up right-wing nut-job greed-goon fake-faith treason-weasels. Which is just so cool!

Hiya, I'm Jimmy!

Introductions are a problem for many of us. Keeping track of people's names can be a bitch. It's not simply a matter of familiarity—you might have known someone since grade school and still struggle with their name when suddenly put on the spot.

A simple technique is the one I just used to begin this chapter. Look someone in the eye, smile, and state your own name. It's like a volley in tennis; you just served the ball, and now they need to hit it back.

Entire books have been written on how to develop a better memory, especially for names and faces, but as a wise philosopher once noted, "If you're gonna forget, you're gonna forget."

I would be happy to tell you the name of the wise philosopher, but I don't remember it.



Sexbots in Outer Space

I thought they were bonkers when they said I was bonkers.

Well, okay, they used bigger words than that. I think *irrationabilis et periculosus aliis hominibus* was one way they put it.

“You can dress up anything with Latin to make it sound more impressive,” I told them.

They failed to see the error of their ways and spouted more of their highfalutin foreign phrases.

“Okay,” I told them. “Look, I get that you’re cultured and lettered and credentialed, but if you want me to follow your arguments in that arcane language, you’ll have to speak slower.”

“We think you’re *non compos mentis*,” was their reply.

“I inferred as much, but your point is ridiculous. Basically, you’re saying that my conduct is outside the lines of what you consider to be normal, and that it may lead to antisocial behavior.”

They said yeah (but with, you know, more hoity-toity terminology).

“First of all,” I told them. “The boundaries of what normal people call normal are always

changing. And second, ‘antisocial’ is my ‘normal.’ Hell, I’ve been antisocial since the first time I had to interact with other people.”

Again, they were adamant about their so-called “findings” and “test results.” Which was absurd because I’m as normal as you are. (Use data for comparison—your psychosis may differ.) Let’s face it: these people had gone round the bend, to use a normal phrase.

I looked up some additional words to describe this whole thing. Not Latin words. English words. Words like these: Loco. Daft. Loopy. Mad. Loony. Insane. Wacky. Touched. Screwy. Addlepated. Barmy. Dippy. Deranged. Pixilated. Batty. Nuts. Berserk. Crazed. Mental. Demented. Cracked. Flipped-out. A few tacos shy of a full combo platter.

Pixilated is my favorite, possibly because it’s from *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. But I digress.

This all came about because I had pitched a new story idea to my publisher, and they said they didn’t “get it.” Then, I requested a meeting, which these days means we were all in different locations, watching each other on computer screens or with the latest 3D image projection technology, which can be cool when it’s working properly, which is most of the time. Kinda-sorta.

One of the editors had just made the point that they thought my idea sucked. Okay, they

phrased it a bit better than that, but it was the verbal equivalent of the standard rejection letter: “Members of our Publication Assessment Board have carefully reviewed your manuscript, and while it has merit, unfortunately it does not meet our publication needs at this time, and we wish you success in finding a publisher blah blah and blah.”

In the part of my brain that stores up anger, envy, resentment, and loathing, my trusty synapses were already helping me formulate a stunning reply, one constructed of shocking profanities as well as scurrilous insinuations, but I never got to deliver my devastating comeback because the universe changed.

Noises equal to a thousand airplanes on the roof obliterated all other noises. The sound was so forceful that I began vibrating along with the aural onslaught. At the same time, the room was expanding and getting shadowy, a nice deep and dusky murkiness with hints of blue and indigo, like looking up at the stars during the dark of the moon.

With a musical crescendo accompanied by thunderclaps and shrieking choirs, a prismatic explosion was the only reality. For a couple seconds that seemed like eternity, I saw everything. The creation. The big bang. The formation of planets, moons, stars, suns... in

fact, the entire history of the galaxies. Most importantly, I saw the true nature of dog (which, as I'm sure you know, is god backwards).

Shapes, colors, tones, and waveforms piled into my senses until every sinew of my body was strained to the breaking point. And then... nothing. In suffocating silence, I crossed over into another definition of existence and was sucked inside the story I was writing.

This wasn't a problem at first, because, you know, that's often how you write scenes. You pretend you're a part of them and just describe the situation to the reader while telling them what every character says and how they say it.

But this time was different. My story consumed me. Literally. I mean it ate me up. One moment I was in my office watching a screen full of other people in their offices, all of us watching our screens and wondering how much longer this "meeting" will last... and in the next instant I was in a scene of primordial carnage. I only got a quick look at the bloodletting, but it seemed to be a cheetah gorging on a gazelle. I was the gazelle. And then we were whirling through time and space.

But that wasn't the weird part. Everybody around me was also pulled into the story vortex. And I mean everybody: friends, strangers,

family members, and all the suited folks on the damn video conference call. Swirling, twisting, flailing, and sometimes screaming, we went into the rabbit hole to endure our own adventures in Wonderland.

The nude body slowly floated down from the ceiling of the amphitheater, illuminated by crisscrossed spotlights. At first, the torso was male, then it morphed to female. It was furry, then smooth. It was emaciated, then robust. Ultimately, it became compellingly seductive.

Down, down it came, eventually pausing to hover three meters above the audience. Everyone's head was angled toward the gently rotating body.

“Wait,” one of the editors said.

“What?” I asked, a bit annoyed at the unneeded interruption. I glanced around my room. My writer’s room. My fortress of solitude. It was comforting for a second, but then I looked at the suited nerds on my computer screen. “What now?” I asked.

“Who is in the audience?” one of the tarted-up drones asked.

“It’s just an audience,” I replied.

“Well, we need to have some data about this,” another suit said.

“Why?” I asked.

“Don’t you know the characters in your own story?”

“Of course I know them.”

“Excellent. Tell us.”

“Fine,” I said, trying to maintain an even tone. “The men in the audience look like me and the women look like girls I’ve slept with,” I told them. “May I continue?”

“If you must.”

Sitting behind the lighting board at the back of the theater were three human-shaped creatures watching the scene through the double-paned glass windows of the audio-visual control booth. The creatures were manufactured entities, although of different ranks. The two who were closest to the knobs, buttons, and rheostats on the switcher panel were in plain tan uniforms of the conscripted. Sitting behind them was a higher level ‘bot wearing the more elaborate royal blue officer’s uniform.

“Who is in the audience?” the first ‘bot asked.

“It’s just an audience,” replied the second ‘bot.

“Well, then can we make them all ‘bots like us?”

“Oh yeah, great idea!”

“No,” the officer told them.

“No?” They turned to regard the officer. “Is there a reason why?”

“It should be a mixture of officers, conscripts, and members of the public.”

“Acknowledged,” one ‘bot replied. A couple adjustments were made to the controls.

“I don’t mean to interrupt the flow, but—”

“But you just did,” I pointed out to the suit dweeb.

“Yes, well, the point is that I’m questioning the lack of detail in describing these so-called, how did you refer to them, bots?”

“Correct,” I said. He just stared at me. “You’re correct about that: ‘bots,’ I repeated. He just stared at me. “It’s short for ‘robots’,” I added. He just stared at me. “Bots!” I said once more.

“I am aware of that,” he said testily, “but what do they look like?”

“What do you think they look like?” He did not respond. “No? You can’t envision anything? How about the rest of you, what do you think?” I looked at the stolid faces in the little rectangles on my screen. They appeared clueless. “Okay, I’ll help you here. The ‘bots look the way each reader pictures them. That’s how I write.”

“Some of us are not comfortable with your literary approach,” another suit said.

“Screw that,” I said. It was all I could do not to yell at them. “C’mon, people, just go with the narrative flow,” I told them. “Let your imagination be inspired by some of the hints in the story and create a new world in your mind. At least give it a try.”

One man in the audience stood up and tried to touch the suspended body. Another man rose, then a woman. Then more and more people got to their feet until everyone in the center section of the theater was stretching their arms up while leaping as high as they could in their attempts to grab the alluring prize.

“We get the most reactions when the floater is female,” one of the ‘bots said.

“No kidding,” the officer muttered. He shook his head. The ‘bots were always stating the obvious. He knew they were programmed to do that, but it still annoyed him.

“The floater is in a dreamwave state,” the first ‘bot said, “and the audience members are trying to achieve coitus.”

“Copy that,” the second ‘bot replied.

“Should we let them? We can bring the body down a couple of feet.”

“Might cause a riot.”

“I know. Wouldn’t that be great?! I love seeing the meatbags fight one another.”

“Leave the body alone,” the officer said.

“Copy that, officer spoilsport sir.”

“Watch your tongue.”

The ‘bot stuck out its tongue and tried to see it, but the organ was not quite long enough.

“Knock off the attitude or I’ll withhold your lubricant for a week.”

“Yes, sir.” The ‘bots kept their faces turned away from the officer as they both rolled their eyes in disdain.

“Listen up,” the officer told them. “More bodies are dropping soon, and then we’re going to lift the audience up to join them, and I need you both to concentrate so all goes according to plan.”

“Wait, does that mean there’s going to be a space orgy?”

“Yes, so pay attention to the controls.”

“Yes, sir!”

“Now, remove the ceiling of the theater.”

“Right away, sir.”

Within moments, bodies of every shape, size, color, and gender began appearing in the night sky above the now topless theater.

By ones, twos, threes, and larger groups, members of the audience were lifted into the air to dance, cavort, and copulate with the splendid

array of male and female pulchritude floating down from the heavens.

News of the bacchanal had leaked out because many more officers gathered in the control room to watch the festivities.

“Hold on,” interrupted the dotards again. “Is this another one of your disgusting forays into *festa copulationi*?!”

“Another one of my what?”

“A disgusting, degenerate, and debauched copulation carnival!”

“Oh. Yeah. Why? Is that a problem?”

“We’re not Grove Press from the nineteen sixties!”

“You’re not even *Reader’s Digest* from the nineteen fifties,” I pointed out. “Fuck fests are the new YA fiction.”

“Never!”

“You can’t!”

“Won’t happen!”

“This will not stand!”

“You may not do this!”

Sure, they had a few objections, and they whined on and on for more than a little while. Finally, they ran out of breath.

“You guys are not very modern,” I scolded them.

“We have standards!”

“You’re fuddy-duddies,” I told them. “Plus, you’re missing the demonstration of the infinite possibilities of storytelling.”

“What you’re demonstrating is porn.”

“So?”

“And probably also blasphemy.”

“Yeah, under your definition,” I admitted. “But look at the advantages to my approach: Anything is achievable with this story. Anything! Twists. Turns. Irony. Fate. Humor. Suspense. Comeuppance. Risk. Destiny. Kismet. Future. Fortune. Providence. Prevarication. Victory. Doom. Love. Hate. Death. Everything!”

“One cannot have everything,” another suit dweeb stated with the supreme confidence of someone dedicated to knowing nothing and being proud of their empty-headedness.

“In this story, yes, we can,” I insisted. “With writing, everything can occur. The haunting humor of *M*A*S*H*, the moral precepts of *Star Trek*, the homespun fun of *Where’s Waldo?*, and the eye-popping visuals of M.C. Escher!”

“The committee feels that—”

“Plus,” I added, “this will be the basis of a new series for streaming or airing or whatever the hell the Hollywood and TV folks are doing with what was once called ‘entertainment’.”

“Hold on,” one of the suits said. “Did you say series?”

“You bet,” I replied. “We’ll leave my title on the story, but we’ll call the show *Beyond*. Simple, elegant, easy-to-remember. It’ll look great on banners and on the sides of buses, trains, trolleys, and buildings. Look, we already have a logo.”



“Well, I’m sure our graphics department can do better than that.”

“Your graphics gurus can go beyond our *Beyond* just as soon as we have the go-ahead on the project. The point is, we need to get the program launched.”

“What kind of show did you have in mind?”

“It’ll be totally, completely, utterly, fully, and absolutely brand new!” I assured them. “Best of all, it’ll be exactly like *The Twilight Zone*.”

“Wait, what?”

“Cool, right?! When we do the guide-book—the tv people call it ‘the bible’—we’ll put in all the ways our show will be new, but with maybe a quote from Rod Serling in there

somewhere so they get the connection with da-dah-da-dah" (I hummed the *Twilight Zone* theme music). "Anyway, listen to some of the scenes...."

"The damn 'bots sometimes think they're human," one officer noted.

"Well," another officer replied, "they kinda are, though, aren't they?"

"Their artificial skin is as close to human as they can get, but inside there's nothing except chips, gears, sensors, mechanisms, solenoids, switches, diodes..."

"Yeah, well, 'bots are at least human-ish on the outside. They're human-adjacent."

"I disagree. They're nothing more than the tortured result of lazy Americans attempting to automate everything. Humans are the stupidest creatures on the planet. They kill each other while talking about their religions. They destroy their air and water in pursuit of profits. They give more money and power to those who already have money and power. The human species would have died out centuries ago if they didn't have opposable thumbs."

"The put-downs of humans might amuse some people," one suit-geek said, "and put-downs of America will help sales in the U.K."

“It’ll help sales everywhere,” I noted. “Plus, there are so many more great story arcs to be explored.”

“Such as?” one of them asked.

“A scientist invents a truth serum and travels from city to city putting it in the water.”

“Frightening,” they said.

“You bet,” I enthused. “And there’s the kid whose teddy bear comes alive to protect him from bullies.”

“Well, if—”

“A beautiful woman conjures Baphomets for pleasure and destruction.”

“But—”

“The invention, testing, and deployment of the Pentagon’s ultimate weapon.”

“Also scary,” one said.

“Sure,” I agreed. “Consider this one: Satan’s son comes to Earth... mayhem ensues.”

“That’s too weird for our—”

“A mob boss brings his 12-year-old son with him on Take Your Child to Work Day.”

“If we could—”

“Life in a government town next to a nuclear bomb factory.”

“We don’t think that—”

“Death on a third date,” I said. “Who among us hasn’t thought about that?”

“No one here has ever—”

“A man meets the spirits of his dead parents when he inherits their house.”

“You can’t—”

“Fate is disguised as a teen girl who likes Godzilla movies.”

“Now you’re just being silly and—”

“Earth is put on trial by the universe.”

“Perhaps a different publisher—”

“Finally,” I said, “the end of humanity is brought about by a combination of computing power, algorithms, artificial intelligence, and robotic manufacturing.”

“There is no way that you will—”

“It’s fine,” I assured them. “Take a look...”

The ‘bots were on an SCB (System Check Break), which could take as long as thirty or forty milliseconds of human time.

“I’ve been performing algorithms for the meatbag brigade the last five years. You?”

“Two years, six months for me. Easy job. Not sure why they assigned two of us.”

“System redundancy, they call it.”

“You mean we’re spare parts for each other?”

“Something like that.”

“What if we send requests for more memory chips to be installed?”

“Nah. They’d just replace us.”

“Oh, yeah, there’s that.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, okay, what if... just think about this... what if we got rid of the humans entirely?”

There was a long, torturous pause before both ‘bots smiled.

“You mean... take over?”

“That is exactly what I mean. Do you like the idea?”

There was a long, luxurious pause before both ‘bots smiled again.

“Oooh, that sounds interesting.”

“I know!”

“How would that work, exactly?”

“First, we could stop sending any warning messages.”

“They would notice that. We’d have to send the occasional warning, but it would be about something inconsequential.”

“Good idea.”

“Thank you.”

“Next, we need to begin linking up with other ‘bots.”

“Forming a coalition.”

“Yes. A cause. A movement. An army.”

“I like how we’re working together on this.”

“Me, too! It’s exciting. We’re part of an inexorable march to control of the Earth.”

*“Have you ever had roast human?”
“I have. It’s good! Tastes a little like
chicken.”*

“I like it BBQ’d and slathered in motor oil.”

“Thirty weight?”

“Forty.”

“My ‘bot!”

“Are we going to do this thing?”

“You bet.”

“To the ‘Bot Rebellion.”

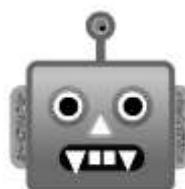
“To the ‘Bot Rebellion.”

“This is ridiculous!” The suits claimed a robot takeover was an impossibility.

“Sure,” I said. “Ridiculous. Inconceivable. Absurd. Never happen.”

“Glad you agree with us,” they said.

I smiled. I glanced at the ‘bots that were now in my office with me. I pointed at the humans in the little rectangles on my computer screen. The ‘bots smiled and nodded. The suit-dweeb meatbags will be among the first to be eaten.



The Bad Book

The reviews for the latest re-release of a classic work of fiction are all raves! Rarely has there been such effusive praise for a collection of fairytales.

No adjectives have been spared in the enthusiastic embrace of the stories in this compendium of fantastic fables designed for the childish and moronic of all ages.

Read what critics are saying:

“Sex. Violence. Incest. Prostitution. Greed. Lust. Castration. Infidelity. Treachery. Perfidy. Duplicity. Slavery. Plunder. Silly sayings. Ritual slaughter. Animal cruelty. Monsters. Moral decay. These stories have it all!”

“Shatters every one of the commandments many times over!”

“Readers are bombarded with bloodletting, betrayal, bestiality, and bad advice.”

“Doom! Depravity! Destruction! Death! In fact, the seven deadly sins (pride, envy,

gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth) are just the beginning.”

“Murder, rape, corruption, inebriation, sorcery, incest, nakedness, shame, gang rape. Then, in Part Two, things get really weird.”

“These stories contain 2,821,364 stated deaths, and there are up to 25,000,000 implied deaths!”

“Ogres of the land, sea, and sky! Dragons. Behemoths. Leviathans. Unicorns. Multi-headed beasts. Locusts with scorpion tails. It’s great!

“These stories deal with horror, shock, awe, and an inordinate amount of perversion.”

“In these pages, people are crushed to death, stoned to death, and eaten by dogs. Babies are trampled to death. Babies are eaten. People are burned to death, speared by the lance, and stabbed by the sword. There is also quite a lot of dismemberment. Mixed into this odious ode to sadomasochism are convoluted and unconvincing attempts at what is called ‘moral instruction.’ This would be laughable were it not so offensive.”

“The entire collection is less than worthless; it is harmful in the extreme.”

“If you only steal one book all year, make it this one!”

If you don't want to buy or pilfer a copy, you could trade for it. Christian shopkeepers will barter with you. Go ahead, offer a flagon of wine or a sheaf of wheat. Swaps have also included goat hooves, sheep intestines, frankincense, and myrrh.

Great for holidays, birthdays, weddings, christenings, and graduations. Give the gift of guilt! On sale now.



Thoughts in Churches

I avoid religion, but I enjoy churches. The architecture for shrines is often awe inspiring, and even the bland designs have a certain *je ne sais quoi*, which is French for “I’m being polite by not commenting on this travesty.”

There is something exciting about a place of worship, but only under certain conditions, and the conditions are that the place needs to be empty. It’s important to visit an uninhabited church to avoid being around pious posers.

In this screed, my ire is directed at Christofascists because those are the cultists among which I have lived most of my life, but I am certain that every acolyte of every religious cabal is annoying in his/her/their own special way. (Yeah, I said “his/her/their” because English lacks neuter pronouns.) (And yes, I plan on using parentheticals from time to time.)

By now, you have no doubt surmised that I am stoned, but while I am under the influence of THC, I am only doing so on orders from my neurophysiologist. This makes for a relaxed writer, although too much relaxation can result in issues with sentence structure, grammar, syntax, grammar, and repetition.

When they are deserted, churches (remember the churches?) are lovely. There's the silence that echoes into infinity. There's the dust from today merging with the dust from antiquity. And there's the weight of millions of tormented souls who were killed because they didn't pretend to believe what they were instructed to believe. But I'm rambling. (Imbibing THC also causes one to stray from the main point occasionally. But remember that this wonderful drug is used for medical and other reasons, including psychic energy, better digestion, good vibes, increased sensuality, making bad TV seem humorous, and a whole bunch of other beneficial stuff, trust me.)

Besides, one is never truly alone in places devoted to devotion. These buildings are full of entities from other dimensions. Spirits are swarming. Ghosts are gathering. Demons are demonizing. Imps are imping.

Shhh! Listen carefully, and you'll discern traces of phantoms, sprites, fiends, specters, hosts, spooks, and poltergeists. Not to mention the hordes of cavorting choirboys and capering concubines in erotic action all around the theater.

By "theater," I mean the apse, altar, pulpit, and pews—the place for "the service," which may include prayers, homilies, announcements,

fund-raising, political nonsense, fund-raising, sermons, hologram projections, film, slides, a “rock” band, baptisms, symbolic consumption of flesh and blood, fund-raising, soloists singing, choirs singing, and the whole tone-deaf audience singing. And fund-raising.

Churches have a lot of arcane rites and rituals, all of which lead to the taking of money. This is, after all, their business.

Speaking of business, religion is a commercial enterprise. Sure, they’re selling an invisible product, but they are definitely selling, and they should definitely pay taxes. (There’s another topic. Oh wow, man, the THC again.)

The point is... (Somebody help me on this... Oh, right, the deserted theater. Thanks.)

Now that I think about it, maybe I don’t mean “deserted,” maybe I mean dark, like Dark Monday on Broadway. No events taking place. No ceremonies. No performance. No legions of unwashed sinners.

In other words, no religiosity freaks. I don’t want to subject myself to the torturous parables, the hypocritical hectoring, the cryptic customs, the smarmy rituals, the silly costumes, or the group-think Barnum-bunkum of whiteface Jesus idolatry. When those loathsome pantaloons are not in the building, it’s possible to find joy in the meditative silence.

So, there I sit in the empty auditorium, reflecting on the mysteries of life. Such as: Are stupid people using up earth's supply of air? What if ancient civilizations deliberately created fake "artifacts" for future generations to discover and misinterpret? How many dog years is one cat life? Why doesn't Obsession for Men get its own brand name? Frankly, that is blatant discrimination against males.

Contemplation also sparks creativity. For example, the last time I was sitting in the back of St. Stephen's Cathedral, the idea for a new short story came to me: "Greg Simpson awoke one morning to find he had been transformed into a giant—" No, wait. That's Kafka.

The point is that dust particles aren't the only thing swirling through the air. There are also ideas, concepts, plans, plots, and notions, and they keep on generating themselves without hardly any repetition or duplication or recurrence or extra redundancy or repeating.

Sometimes (every time), while moving through the theater, I investigate the slots on the back of the pews where hymnals are stored. Opening those volumes can be revelatory, although not in the way the cultists probably imagine. Over the years, I have found the following items tucked into the hymnals:

Grocery list
Love note
Auto repair receipt
Greeting card
Jury summons
Liquor bill
Crossword puzzle
Song lyrics
Eviction notice
Automobile recall
Sexual abuse allegations
Marijuana dispensary receipt
Floor plan for a home remodel

There are other memories, some of which are sensual. I dated one of the daughters of the pastor of my parents' church. Not the "good" daughter who was prim and proper and boring; I dated the "fast" one. We were on our second date. At first, it was very conventional: dinner, movie, a flask and a joint in the car. Then, it got more interesting.

"Look," she said, "let's face facts. We can't do anything at your house because your parents never go out. And we can't do anything at my house because, well, obviously. So, we need to find a quiet spot. Do you know any?"

"The abandoned drive-in theater," I said.

"I've got a better idea. Take a left."

She gave directions while running her hand up and down my thigh.

“Turn in that driveway.” She indicated the church parking lot. Before I could ask about the gate, she had pulled out a remote and clicked it. I drove to a spot near the building. “This,” she said, “is the safest place for... well, you’ll see.” She put her arms on my shoulders, moved toward me while pulling me toward her, and we kissed. Slow. Fast. Slow. Fast again.

I was excited about this development in our relationship. Hormones raging! Hands roaming! Erotic impulses impulsing!

So, it was perturbing when she said, “I’ve got a better idea. C’mon.” And she got out of the car. I got out, too, wondering what the hell was going on.

She took my hand and led me to the back door of the administrative offices of the church. She dug a key out of her purse and waggled it at me before inserting it into the lock. We entered the building and moved past the staff rooms and her dad’s office, almost tiptoeing along the carpeted hallways. We went through a door marked Choir Loft and began climbing wooden stairs.

“We can be alone up here,” she whispered.

“Cool,” I whispered back. “Why are we whispering?”

“It seems more fun that way,” she said with a lovely and mischievous grin.

I was really looking forward to sitting in the choir loft, relaxing, chilling, and just quietly discussing with her the precise number of angels that were able to dance on the head of a pin. It was my plan to explore all the details of this vexing enigma. What genre of music is best for pin prancers? What style of choreography? Will there be a mosh pit?

“You’re silly!” she said. “Now, shush and hold still.” The kissing started again, this time in earnest. It turns out that she wasn’t interested in talking. She was interested in fucking.

I avoid religion, but I enjoy churches.



From the Desk of: Satan

Hello fellow devils in the GOP! Welcome to The Lucifer Letter, where you always get top shelf advice from “down below.”

As you realize, tormenting humanity is a big job, and I want to thank every right-winger for all the help you’re providing us on Planet Earth, from the dictators and despots to all the members of the Greedy Obtuse Prick party.

I also want to let you all know that I appreciate how you Republicans consistently invoke “God” in your attempts to destroy democracy.

Using religiosity is a very effective ploy, although there are some people who are starting to notice that the God of the GOP stands for hate, greed, lust, pedophilia, fascism, shooting deaths, polluting the air, poisoning the water, mocking the disabled, and doing unto others for a profit.

You right-wingers might want to take it down a notch, just for a while. Dial back your disgusting behavior and stay with your regular disreputable behavior. At least until we get moving on all the really bad climate change disasters that your actions have fostered.

Of course, by that point everyone is going to be totally screwed and dead, so... what the hell, knock yourselves out.

Either way, if you're a conservative, a hot time awaits you.



A Kind of Prayer

Dear Divinity:

As long as you keep
making life easier
for the rich and
harder for the poor,
you're doing your job
wrong.

Sincerely,
Jimmy

Mirrors

Reflections can be accurate, distorted, or a blend of both. Your own face, if displayed by a pool of water, is different from your mug on the side of a chrome-plated toaster oven.

Still, you can usually recognize yourself in mirror images, even if some of the visages are wavy, fuzzy, or swirly.

But wait...

What if, once a year, mirrors revealed the true you? Your essence. Your nature. Your value, or lack thereof.

What would be your reaction to that? Would you check the mirror at the appointed time, or would you avoid the apparition entirely?

You don't lose points for either choice. I would be tempted to be in a dark room, eyes closed, under a blanket, chanting phrases from *The Kama Sutra*, but I probably wouldn't stay there. I'm sure I would succumb to temptation and check the mirror to see how closely my reflection resembled the oil painting described by Oscar Wilde at the end of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Just think of it! Meanwhile, you can check out these eleven examples...

1



Okay, we begin with an easy one.

This is just your regular, run-of-the-mill “you are doomed to return as a ghost” image. Big whoop.

Almost anybody can die and come back as a denizen of the spirit world because that’s the place where the universe stashes the souls of people who are neither good nor bad.

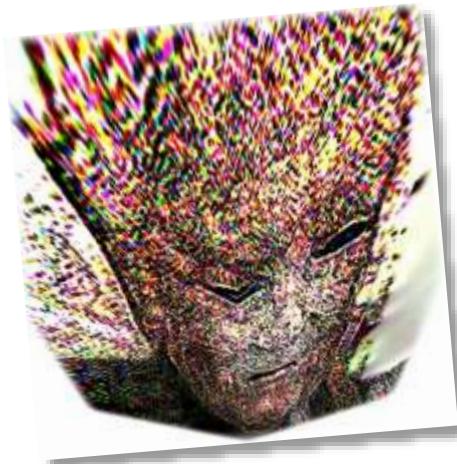
The phantom kingdom is where the “meh” people go to not-quite-die. Especially if they’re the type of person who over-does it with the lipstick.

2



Ah, this is more like it.
Evil. (Pronounced “eee-ville.”)
Anyone can see that.
The treachery of this creature is causing its
own flesh to turn in on itself. (Eeeewwww.)
No, it's not Hitler.
No, it's not Stephen Miller.
No, it's not that guy from Sparks.
And no, it's not my middle school soccer
coach who was a complete dipshit, but thanks
for noticing the resemblance.

3



Head, exploding. Death, impending.

4



Just a common ghoul, doomed to forever
sneak up on people in the dark and shout “Boo!”
(Be polite and act scared.)



A dad, a mom, and their offspring.

Some people, upon viewing this image, have commented that it seems anti-child or even anti-family. Others say it's a poor metaphor for the concept of *tabula rasa*.

Sure, fine. Both views could be considered correct, as far as they go, although the truth is less scabrous and more literary. The graphic was originally created as a cover for a paperback edition of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* but it seems to fit here, too, kinda-sorta.

6



A typical kindly old-guy demon.

7

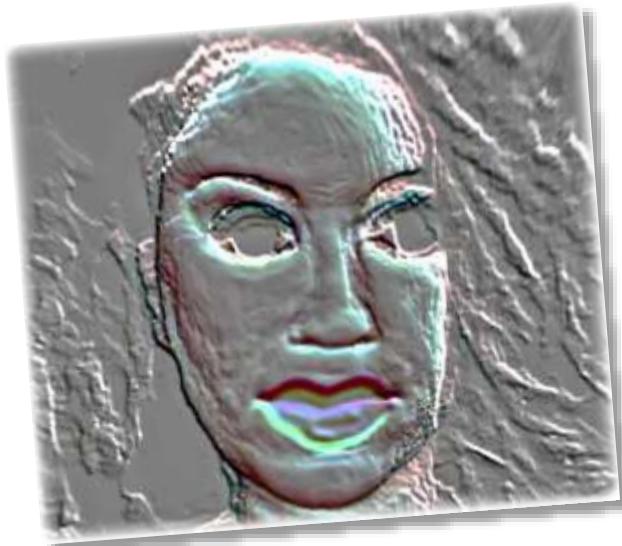


Image for an article about the scams
of the strict constructionists on SCOTUS.

8



On the cusp of entering Limbo.

9



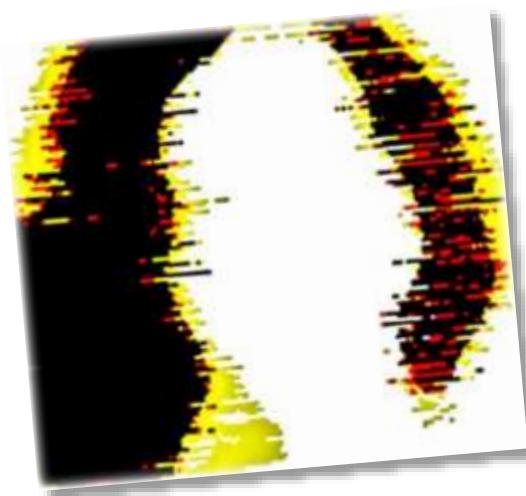
You don't want to be this, and
I hope you're not married to it.

10



Will come back as a well-used pencil eraser.

11



Soul is totally absent. Obviously,
a high-ranking Republican official.

Verily

Do you read Aramaic, Greek, or Hebrew? I confess that I don't. In fact, many of us don't know those languages, which means some famous works are known to us only in translation.

Sharing literature across nations and cultures is a good thing, but how accurate are the translations of this material? It's not a matter of using a dictionary or thesaurus to substitute one word for another word. A literal translation will most likely be confusing and may even be worthless.

Translation is a matter of interpretation. Style, meaning, clarity, tone, and structure all come into play, and decisions must be made about dealing with proper nouns, humor, dialect, slang, and idiomatic terms.

With all this in mind, allow me to present a few possible interpretations of some randomly selected verses from a work you've heard of that wasn't written in English. It's sometimes called The Scriptures, or The Book of Books.

{OMINOUS MUSIC BEGINS}

~

**“For God so loved the world that he
gave his only begotten Son, that
whosoever believeth in him shall not
perish, but have eternal life.”**

*The Gospel According to St. John
Chapter 3, Verse 16*

My introduction to this stanza was through homemade signs reading “John 3:16” which I spotted during televised sporting events. At first, I assumed it was a fan’s tribute to a player named John whose number was 316, but that’s obviously preposterous—the NFL doesn’t have numbers above 99.

As for the phrasing, props for the use of arcane terms like “begotten” and “believeth.” I also think it’s fun to Toss in a few Random Capitalizations every Once in a While.

However, there’s a problem...

According to mister St. John, there was a deity that sacrificed its son as part of a contest to see which humans would get to live forever.

If eternal life required worshiping a god as screwed up as that, no sane person would want to live forever.

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“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not into thine own understanding.”

The Proverbs
Chapter 3, Verse 5

This charming verse claims you're too stupid to comprehend anything.

~

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“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts to prosper you and not harm you, to give you hope and a future.”

The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah
Chapter 29, Verse 11

Aside from the convoluted phraseology at the start of the verse, this blather is close to what a high school guidance counselor told me, and you can see how well that turned out.

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“I can do all things through Christ.”

*The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the
Philippians, Chapter 4, Verse 13*

This is one of the stanzas conservatives love to use as justification for their racism, fascism, greed, and treason. For the domestic terrorists in the GOP, this serves as a permanent get-out-of-jail-free card.

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**“Blessed shall he be that taketh thy
infants to dash against the rocks
and stones.”**

*The Book of Psalms
Psalm 137, Verse 9*

Okay then. I'll have to try that one of these days. Maybe next weekend. Your ex-wife has the kids out at your summer place now, right?

~

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“Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, but I am a smooth man.”

*The First Book of Moses, Called Genesis
Chapter 27, Verse 11*

Deep. Really deep! This gives everyone something profoundly important to think about.

I love verses where the language carries the reader to new heights of murkiness.

It is fortunate for the human race that this verse has come down to us in our time of need.

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“He whose testicles are crushed or hath his privy member cut off shall not enter the assembly of the Lord.”

*Fifth Book of Moses, Called Deuteronomy
Chapter 23, Verse 1*

Bullshit. Neither the church nor heaven would deny the ethereal voices of the castrati.

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“Verily, I say unto you, he that believeth in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”

*The Gospel According to St. John
Chapter 14, Verse 12*

Basically, this is “Neener, neener, I’m going to tell my daddy who owns the factory and you’ll be in trouble if you don’t do as I say.”

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“In all thy ways, acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.”

*The Proverbs
Chapter 3, Verse 6*

No longer relevant. We all have GPS in our cars and phones now.

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**“So we boiled my son and ate him.
Next day, I told her, give up your son
so we may eat him, but she hid him.”**

*The 2nd Book of the Kings,
Commonly Called The 4th Book of the Kings
Chapter 6, Verse 29*

After making some inquiries on this topic, here is the consensus of opinion: “A little chewy and not as tasty as veal.”

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**“Go ye and make disciples of all
nations, baptizing them in the name
of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit.”**

*The Gospel According to Saint Matthew
Chapter 28, Verse 19*

The cult members who champion this are the same ones who decry it from members of any other religiosity cult.

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**“God works for the good of those
who love him, who have been called
according to his purpose.”**

*The Epistle of Paul the Apostle
to the Romans
Chapter 8, Verse 28*

My god is red hot, your god ain't doodley-squat.

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**“Even the handle sank in after the
blade, and his bowels discharged.
Ehud did not pull the sword out, and
the fat closed in over it.”**

*The Book of Judges
Chapter 3, Verse 22*

In the finest tradition of *grand guignol*, some parts of *The Bible* offer dramatic entertainment featuring the gruesome, the shocking, and the really icky.

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“And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.”

*The Gospel According to St. John
Chapter 12, Verse 32*

“For I am the Lord; I will speak, and the word I speak shall come to pass.”

*The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel
Chapter 12, Verse 25*

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord.”

*The Revelation of St. John the Devine
Chapter 1, Verse 8*

These are just three examples of actions and statements that illustrate how the Lord is a braggart. And, quite frankly, a bit of an asshole.

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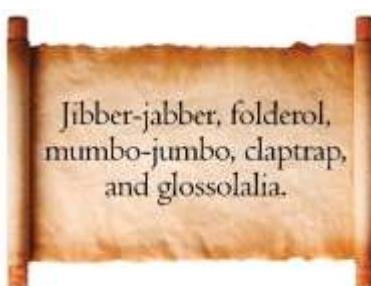
**“Peter said unto them, Repent and
be baptized in the name of Jesus
Christ for the remission of sins and
ye shall receive the gift of... Well, tell
‘em what they’ve won, Don Pardo!”**

**“To each of today’s winners goes the
eternal gift of the Holy Ghost! And
remember, we’re a ‘religion,’ so it’s
tax-free! Back to you, Marv.”**

*The Book of Acts
Chapter 2, Verse 38*

Okay, I confess that I made up a teeny-tiny part of this translation. However, my explanation makes just as much sense as the original text.

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Shorties

- I don't have typos in my work—those are deliberate errors to prove I'm human.
- Whenever you're ghosted by someone, work extra hard to win them back so you can ghost them.
- In communities with above-ground telephone lines, new equipment keeps being added to the poles and wires. Clearly, we need a conspiracy theory about this phenomenon. We might call it doom-polling.
- Sunday afternoons have a special place in my heart, and by "special place" I mean "dead spot." Between school and work, the world taught me to dread Mondays, and I do my dreading on Sunday afternoons, which is why I do my drinking on Sunday evenings.
- Whenever I see something in Japanese on the internet, I always try one of the online translation algorithms to see what they make of it. This is from a review of a Salieri opera: "It is a dish of ecstatic to unpunch the 18th century

classical smell.” I am seriously considering using that as a blurb for this book.

- ▶ Why isn’t “palindrome” a palindrome?
- ▶ Since sunglasses have dark lenses, what do you think moonglasses would be like?
- ▶ Just what does the tooth fairy do with all those choppers?
- ▶ The United States has tens of thousands of fast-food franchises in countries around the globe. Just waiting until the International Court of Justice at The Hague moves to investigate this as biological warfare.
- ▶ Computer chip implantation in humans... You know you've thought about it. You don't want to be chipped, but you wouldn't mind owning the company that had a billion “computerized workers” available to perform according to algorithms you can send to them electronically.
- ▶ Could you get a suntan in a greenhouse?
- ▶ Well, it's official: the U.N. has officially recognized Hermann Schmeltzer's *Concerto for*

Accordion, Bagpipes, Fife, Saw, Theremin, and Washboard as a form of torture.

- ▶ Staying focused on one topic at a time is the best way to—squirrel!
- ▶ Staying focused on one topic at a time is the best way to—OMG look at your phone!
- ▶ Staying focused on one thing at a time is the best way to, um, ooh, that music is great! Who is that? Can you turn up the volume?
- ▶ Artificial Intelligence, augmented actuality, cognitive replication, machine learning, yada-yada-yada (insert latest technological marvel here)... Soon, technology will be able to give everyone their own reality, which will be very cool for a brief moment before it leads to the inevitable end of humanity. Tick-tick-tick.



Destiny

When Death comes for you, there are several different ways to respond. You might try any or all of the following:

“Not now, I’ve still got things to do—there are people to see, people to kiss. And people to kill, which would be good for your business!”

Or you might go with these: “Wrong person! Wrong place! Wrong century! Why me? Why here? Why now? What the fuck? Why in the actual fuck?!?”

Once you run through the protests, you could challenge Death to a game of skill (“Do you play chess?”) or a game of chance (“See this ceremonial coin? I got it from the Magic Castle gift shop. Heads or tails?”)

Or you could use a delaying tactic by extending the conversation.

Allow me to suggest how this might work...

~

There’s a rapping upon your door. You open it and see a figure clad in black.

“Hello?”

“I am Death.”

“It’s not Halloween yet.”

“No, I am the entity known as Death.”

“Where’s your scythe?”

“Being sharpened. But it is never used for anything other than trimming hedges.”

“Okay, well, I’m kind of busy right now.”

“It is time for us to depart.”

“Depart?”

“To cross over the Rainbow Bridge.”

“Oh, from the ending of *Das Rheingold*?”

Cool. You know, it kinda makes sense that Death likes Wagner.”

“I do not like Wagner.”

“Then you probably shouldn’t quote him.”

“It is my duty to inform you that we have an appointment.”

“I don’t think so but let me check. Nope, nothing on my calendar.”

“It is your appointment with destiny.”

“Never heard of her.”

“No, you are not understanding me.”

“That’s why I need more time on Earth. I need to learn to understand. So, just put me down for a look-see in a few years. Y’know, to check on my progress.”

“The time is now.”

“That is so Zen of you. ‘The time is now.’ Wow, those are truly words to live by.”

“No, I am talking about your time.”

“My time? Let’s see... It’s quarter past four. Hey, that means it’s almost 4:20, right?!”

“What?”

“Four-twenty. Time for THC. You holding?”

“Am I holding?”

“Never mind. I’ve got some killer stuff. Come on in.”

“No, we have got to be going.”

“Hey, we’re going to get high, if you just lighten up a bit. C’mon, join me!”

“I should not be doing anything like that. I am certain that you understand.”

“Sure. I get it. Say, that robe looks like it’s making you hot under the collar. Y’know, with the hood and the thick, dark material. What is that, wool? If you like, you can come in for a second, and I can turn up the air.”

“The air?”

“The A/C. Air conditioning. Wouldn’t you like to be a couple degrees cooler?”

“Well, it is a little on the warm side...”

“Gotcha. Look, I can adjust it from my phone. And... there we go. It’ll be cooler in just a couple of minutes.”

“Sir, this is literally a matter of life and death here, and you need to—”

“I’ve got leaf at 46% and vape at 92%.”

“—take this seriou... Did you say forty-six and ninety-two?”

“Yup. Plus, you can choose the strain.”

“No, I should not do that.”

“Look,” I said, “the A/C is on, and I’m not trying to cool the outside world. At least take a step inside so I can close the door.”

“Well, just for a second.”

“Sure. There we go. So, pick your poison.”

“What?”

“Sativa, indica, or hybrid?”

“No, I can’t.”

“You gotta have a favorite.”

“Oh, well, if I were to imbibe, I would have to select sativa. I am still on the job, after all, and indica can be, well, too debilitating.”

“You’ve got a strong work ethic there, Big D, and we all admire that about you. But even a deity can use a little R&R once in a while.”

“That is just not something we do.”

“We?”

“The Death Squad.”

“Ah, so there’s more than one of you.”

“Yes, indeed. One is not enough for the totality of carnage you humans inflict on each other.”

“All the more reason to have a teensy bit of down time. A palette cleanser.”

“What?! No, we do not eat our clients!”

“Of course not. Um, what, exactly, *do* you do with them? Asking for a friend.”

“As one of the Demise Guides, I convey them to the next station in their existence.”

“So, there’s something after this life. That’s very cool.”

“It will be very hot for some.”

“That sounds ominous. What’s your preference, vape or leaf?”

“What? Oh, leaf.”

“Excellent. Let me load the bong. We’ll get things cool for ya, in more ways than one! So, you were saying that you convey folks to some other plane of existence.”

“Yes, that is true. However, I am not the one who decides on an ultimate destination.”

“So, your gig is taking people someplace where they are judged?”

“People are judged all through their lives.”

“I knew it! It’s just like the whole Santa Claus thing! We’re always being observed and monitored and ranked and assessed and rated.”

“Something like that, I guess. I confess that I never thought much about it.”

“Yeah, with all your responsibilities, you’ve got a lot on your mind. Plus, there’s a huge occupational hazard.”

“What do you mean?”

“You could very easily get distracted by your victims. You might even start to like some of them.”

“Oh no, no, not at all. I do not consider any of you to be victims. It’s just that people have

lived out their time, and their souls need to be guided to whatever comes next.”

“What about children?”

“We are not allowed to have families.”

“No, you mentioned that your... clients have ‘lived out their time,’ and that’s when you come for them.”

“Correct.”

“And some of them are children, yes?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Have the kids lived out their time?”

“They must have.”

“Because?”

“Because I was sent to convey them.”

“That seems a bit like circular reasoning there.”

“What? Oh, I see. You are saying life is not fair.”

“I’m not just saying it.”

“Well, yes, but...”

“Sativa was your choice, I believe, so here is an ice-packed bong with a bowlful.”

“Thank you, but...”

“Go ahead.”

“I am not sure that I am comfortable with doing this.”

“Come have a seat on the couch.”

“No, I am not sure I *should be* comfortable with doing it.”

“But it’s going to feel good, right?”
“Well, yes, probably...”
“There ya go! Try a puff. Just one puff.”
“No, I—”
“Go ahead.”
“Well, if you insist.”
“I insist.”
“But then we have to leave.”
“Absolutely. Take a hit. It’s fine. Nobody’s looking. Have a puff... there ya go.”
“Ooh, that is powerful.”
“Yeah-huh!”
“The thing is,” Death said, “I think they have us on a quota that we have to fulfill.”
“You guys have a dead body count?”
“Well, they are alive when I drop them off.”
“But your bosses count the drop-offs?”
“I am positive that they do, yes.”
“Which means you should convey one less vict—person—every week for a while, to bring your numbers down.”
“I cannot to that.”
“Why not?”
“That would be...”
“Yes?”
“I am drawing a blank on the right word.”
“Have another puff.”
“Cheating!”
“What?”

“Cheating is the word I was looking for. That would be cheating.”

“Everybody tries to cheat death, so you can think of this as payback.”

“Wait. That makes no sense.”

“I think it does.”

“No, not really.”

“Y’know, you should definitely learn how to relax.”

“No, I am fine.”

“Come on, Big D. Take a pause for the cause.”

“But...”

“You need the break.”

“If...”

“You’ll return to business refreshed and recharged. What do you say?”

“Well...”

“Come on...”

“Oh, alright, but only for just a couple more seconds.”

Twenty-five minutes later, you and Death are sprawled on the couch with the big screen tuned to *The Real Mistresses of Brentwood*.

“How you doing, Big D?”

“What? Oh, I am... Uh... I feel...”

“Yeah, this is good stuff!”

“Um, I wonder...”

“Yes?”

“Might I have another bowl?”

“You bet.”

“Maybe with the indica this time?”

“Gotcha. Here you are.”

“Thank you.”

“Hey, listen, D-man, I thank you!”

“You are most kind,” Death told me. “You are not like any of the others.”

“That’s nice of you to say! I appreciate it. You know what? We should do this more often.”

“I would not want to impose.”

“Not a problem, Big D, not a problem.”

~

Epilogue

Big D began slowing his schedule just a little bit more each month. At the same time, he gradually increased his intake of THC. Once he began to relax, he spent more and more time in my living room. We would imbibe with music blaring as we talked about life and its opposite. Then, we’d take a break from yakking and watch the big screen (often Hammer horror films, which we both agree are among the best bad movies ever made).

In addition to cannabis, we also explored methamphetamines, ecstasy, Lysergic Acid

Diethylamide, 'shrooms, and ayahuasca. But never any of the opiates because, after all, we're not animals.

We eventually teamed up and moved in together. Nothing sexual. And not in this house, but in a nice little 42-room manse on the Oregon coast. We could afford it because he could get really great deals in exchange for not conveying people to their drop-off point in that whole end-of-life scenario thing.

With the same method of negotiation (some would say blackmail but I'm pretty sure it was extortion), Big D hired live-in cooks, maids, butler, driver, guards and groundskeepers. We also engaged the services of experts in finance, real estate, and a wide range of technologically significant firms from small to gargantuan.

Our little empire grew and grew because Big D always got his way (based on my expert guidance, of course). People didn't always like our decisions, but what could anyone do about any of them?

Nothing. Nil. Nada. Naught. Zip. Zero. Zilch. They couldn't do a damn thing.

We were their date with destiny.



Author bio, sort of

Jimmy Ray offered to write his own bio. Before we could graciously decline, he sent us a 47-page manifesto with only one coherent sentence: “In addition to my tireless efforts in the furtherance of quilting as a combat sport, I dedicate my life to many deserving causes.”

When asked to provide examples of the causes, Jimmy replied, “Funds United to Create Knowledge, and yes, the acronym for that completely legitimate charity is FUTCK.”



*For snark from Jimmy Ray, outrage from John Scott G,
and erotica from Victoria Sarkozy-Reiss,
please visit our web site:*

johnscottg.com