

JH3 STORIES

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THE NOSE CAPER

“That’s right. It’s a nose,” said Inspector Fuddley, scratching his vertebrae. “And from the looks of it, a big one.”

No one moved for about three minutes. Finally, someone said, “I’m feeling a little stiff.” Everyone glared at the little man in the funny rabbit costume. No one knew why he was there, and yet his presence had a vaguely reassuring quality, as if somehow everything was going to turn out all right in the end.

The nose continued to decompose as Inspector Fuddley turned the possibilities over in his mind. The recipe called for them to be turned every fifteen minutes or so until they were golden brown. He became hungry. “Let’s eat,” he said.

An hour later, after the man in the rabbit costume had been almost completely devoured, Inspector Fuddley turned to his trusted assistant, Sgt. Bambi, who was wearing a stunning sequined taffeta evening gown with lace sleeves and a frilly thing around the knees. Fuddley noticed for the first time that Bambi was a woman, and not a bad looker, at that. “We’ve got work to do, Sarge,” he said, trying to maintain his composure. “This nose has to be taken down to the station for a forensic examination. Put it in a cab and tell it not to leave a lousy tip, will ya?”

“Right, Fred,” murmured Bambi in a low, husky monotone.

“And don’t call me Fred,” Fuddley snapped. “My name is Steve. You’d think after eight years you would know that.”

“Right, Steve,” Bambi murmured, still low and husky.

Fuddley got into his car and turned on the lights. Then he turned off the lights. On, off, on, off. Amazing invention, these lights, he thought. I wonder who thought of it. And these switches! Imagine if you had to go in and fire up the damn things yourself, and still maintain a vacuum inside the bulb. What a timesaver!

About an hour later, Fuddley started the car and drove to a bar on Salisbury Street. The bar was called the Horned Toad, or something like that. He still was feeling a little queasy from eating the rabbit-costumed guy for lunch, but he decided to go ahead and order several cheese blintzes anyway, since he had never tried them before. The bartender looked at him suspiciously. “Aren’t you that guy on the TV?” he said, quizzically.

“You mean the antenna?” Fuddley replied, hoping to avoid a confrontation with the bartender, who was obviously psychotic.

“No, the guy who does the color commentary on Monday Night Football, what’s his name...Deerbar? DeepDoo?”

“Yeah, that’s me. Actually the name’s Fuddley. But you can call me Ralphie if you want. I’m looking for a guy who lost his nose recently. A white guy. Okay, maybe it was an Oriental woman. Or an East-European transvestite. We’re not sure yet, we have to do a chromosome check.”

“Did he lose his nose in a football game?”

“Maybe.”

“Think I woulda heard o’ that.” The bartender began to fidget with some coins in his hand. Fuddley’s hand lashed out and grabbed the coins in a flick of an eye; the bartender yelped, then looked at Fuddley with a shocked expression.

“Let that be a lesson to you, pal,” Fuddley said sternly. “Never play with coins unless you mean business.”

“Right. Can I go now?” the bartender pleaded, tears streaming down his face.

“The nose first.”

“Okay, you win.” Sweating heavily, the bartender reached into his pocket and pulled out a perfectly preserved nose that was nearly identical to the one Fuddley’s anonymous informant had

led them to several hours earlier. “They’re all over the place. You can get ‘em for a few bucks a pop at Pierson’s Nose Boutique. Tell ‘em Fred sentcha.”

“The name’s Steve,” said Fuddley, irritated.

“Whatever,” said the bartender.

Fuddley left the bar, not noticing the three dozen cheese blintzes that were being set on his table just as he walked out the door. Hmmm, he thought. Hmmm hmmm. Hmmm hmmm hmmm hmmm. Catchy, this little tune. Kinda like, *raindrops keep fallin’ on my head...hmmm...watching Scotty groooooowwww...*

It was raining. Fuddley’s coat was becoming drenched. Fuddley scowled, realizing that he had completely forgotten to take his pocket-sized mini-umbrella out of his coat pocket. Oh well, there’s nothing I can do about it now, he thought. Where did I park that car? And who *really* shot JFK?

It was tough being a cop, he thought to himself. Sure, only six months earlier, his wife had left him, taking the 14 kids with her to GoD—knows-where. But in spite of that good fortune, two months later, both of his parents had died, both committing suicide as part of some bizarre Brazilian voodoo ritual, the sort of thing they seemed to have so much fun with after they had gotten out of the slammer on those mass-murder charges. And a mere three weeks ago, one of his best buddies had gone down—a fellow cop killed in the line of duty—chasing a four-year-old on a big-wheel trike. He (the dead cop) didn’t have any family, so he left much of his estate to Fuddley; but it consisted mostly of junk, just a few hundred baseball cards from the 20’s and 30’s. They were worthless to Fuddley, so he sold them for a couple of million dollars.

Back at the station, some of the patrolmen were playing Monopoly. Most of them, however, had little interest in such mock-capitalist silliness and were much more in tune with the social revisionism of Trotsky and Marshal Tito, with its attendant emphasis on the importance of the individual’s contribution to the overall socialist collective. Nevertheless, the ones playing Monopoly were having a good time, because they were also drunk.

Fuddley stepped in quietly. Turning to Sgt. Bambi, he asked, “Did you get those forensic reports?” Bambi looked a little

sheepish. "I'm afraid our little proboscis friend got into a little fight with the cab driver and got all busted up. They're working on it now. They think they can fix the deviated septum, but that big bump in the middle is probably incurable."

"Damn," said Fuddley, secretly relieved at not having to read more boring forensic reports. He fingered the nose in his pocket. What if, he thought, there were some gigantic global conspiracy to flood the economy with millions of severed noses, all of them completely authentic, right down to the last detail? It would cause panic all over the planet! The economy in ruins! The social fabric, torn asunder like so much cotton candy!

"Of course!" Fuddley exclaimed. "Bambi, get in the car! We're moving, now!"

And a few days later, they were ensconced in their new split-level house in suburban Toledo, Ohio, with a two-car garage, central air, washer and dryer, and a really cool breakfast nook that looked out onto a sewage-treatment plant. "I really love that sewage-treatment plant," Bambi cooed. They had spent the last 48 hours having sex. But not with each other; both of them had hired professionals to make sure there was no unpleasant conversation. Besides, the thought hadn't actually occurred to them.

"There's something that still bothers me about that nose case," said Fuddley, scratching his three-day-old, four-foot-long beard. He had bought it at Wal-Mart's costume section three days ago, where it was on sale for 50% off.

Bambi looked puzzled. "What? It was open and shut all the way."

"Don't use your witless puns and double *enténdre* on me," Fuddley snapped. "That whole nose thing stank and you know it."

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

"You know I'm right."

"Right."

"Left."

"No, right."

"Who left?"

"Did someone leave?"

“Yeah.”

“Right.”

“I toldja.”

They stared at each other for a while. And then they stared at some of the other things. Presently, Fuddley said, “We’re going back. We’ve got to find who’s responsible for that nose.”

When they got to the airport, they remembered that they had no luggage. Neither of them had ever taken a flight without luggage before. They didn’t know where to go; they just wandered aimlessly around the check-in counter, wondering what to do. Finally Bambi stole an old lady’s luggage, re-tagged it, and they got on the plane.

Once they arrived in New York, they realized that they had originally worked in Kansas City and that it was there that the whole nose affair had taken place. They had to take another flight. It was getting expensive, but luckily Fuddley had managed to find some stolen credit cards, and was an expert forger in addition to being a purveyor of fine cheeses.

Finally they reached Kansas City. Chief Inspector Smeggo was in no mood to be trifled with. Fuddley trifled with him anyway, but luckily Smeggo’s mood changed in the midst of the trifling, and he was a little less constipated to boot.

“I think I’ve solved the nose caper,” Fuddley said.

“Right. Arrest the bastard,” replied Smeggo decisively.

Fuddley and Bambi walked out of the office. Fuddley remembered that Officer Frank T. Chesley, who’d worked for Bunko (whatever that meant) Division for 27 years and had his own office on the second floor overlooking the sewage treatment plant, had been an illegitimate child. He immediately led Bambi up the stairs and across the squad room, and there they found Chesley, sitting at his desk in his office, a thick bandage over his face covering a suspiciously flat area where his nose had once been.

“You’re under arrest, Chesley,” Fuddley said.

“On what charge?” Chesley asked, his eyes showing surprisingly little concern, mainly because they, too, were mostly covered by the bandages.

“We’ll think of something, Frank. Like, maybe, Statute 13.543 of the State penal code. Disposal of facial appendages without a court order,” Fuddley said, without batting an eyelash. Recently his eyelash-batting average had dropped to .238, causing the team’s manager to drop him to 7th in the lineup.

Fear began to creep across Chesley’s face, but he zapped it with a nearby spray can. “You’re persecuting me because I’m...different! Dammit, it’s not a crime to have your nose removed!” said Chesley, pleading.

“Tell that to the judge,” Fuddley deadpanned.

“It’s...not my fault! I...I blame...society,” said Chesley, thumbing through his Rolodex™ to find the number of his literary agent.

Fuddley looked triumphant, knowing that he had managed to get through an entire arrest without making any embarrassing bodily noises. “Bambi, take this man in. I mean, we’re already in, I guess, so take him downstairs and book him.”

“Right,” said Sgt. Bambi.

“And use the big green book, not the little blue one. The blue one’s for determining used car prices.”

“You got it.”

Fuddley hesitated for a moment, then said, “And when you’re done, put out an APB on society.”

“Check.”

THE GREAT INTERGALACTIC CONSUMERIST PANEGYRIC

*Smetz Akio Takeshima Memorial Orbital Shopping Station
March 3, 2786 AD (Terran calendar)*

A brief smile drifted across the smetzoid's queliph as it placed the 2,000-credit marker into the redemption slot. Its gills quivered as twenty small Quinzonium bars materialized. It began to glow more fiercely. Finally it could buy that toaster-oven, it thought.

It had been creezes since Xcyvwk the smetzoid had been off-planet. Ever since the Arcturus system had been taken over by the humans, smetzoid space travel activities had been tightly restricted by order of the Grand Galactic Vizier, Ralph Macchio CXVII. Once smetzoid bubbleships had roamed the galaxy, carrying their prized excrement far and wide, enriching the coffers of the Great Smet with the precious stones and colorful baubles and perfumes of other worlds. But now the humans, with their synthetic replication techniques, their synthetic everything, had driven the prices down, nearly destroying the smetzoid economy in the process, much as they had nearly destroyed their own in years past.

But the humans had brought the one thing the smetzoids and their culture were incapable of producing on their own, the thing that had transformed Smetz into what it had now become, a world of indolence, submission, and depravity: Cable TV.

Best not to think about it, Xcyvwk thought. The humans might be listening in on its thoughts with their mindreaders (although this was unlikely because, being hermaphrodites and self-reproducing, they had no sexual fantasies, memories, or anything else of the sort that would make their thoughts interesting for a human). Xcyvwk was one of the few who resisted, who had at first refused the new cable technology, and then, even after it had been forced down their freltinas, had refused to partake in its slyly addictive joys. One of their group had devised a way to beat the Neilsen retromonitors that sought to ensure compliance with the six-crelk laws; more and more smetzoids were joining them every creel.

Xcyvwk looked at its gnelpk-clock. Several crelks had passed since it had left Smetz on the orbital shopping special, and it didn't want to waste any more time. The toaster-oven was beckoning. A human invention, of course; apparently the humans hadn't really used them for centuries, but their more recent microwave, nanowave, and ultrawave food—heating units were all fatal to smetzoid molecular-process metabolisms. Only convection heating, which the smetzoids had never invented, was capable of causing meilylo in smetzoids. The smetzoids had also never invented fire. Heat energy had never been necessary on Smetz; their own bodies produced more electrical energy than they needed, and their transports and manufacturing plants were all powered by simply tapping into living organic matter, since virtually everything on Smetz emitted energy. The humans, of course, had conquered Smetz in order to control these organic sources of energy, but with the exception of their excrement, organic matter from Smetz didn't last long off-planet unless it was encased in a control suit like the one Xcyvwk was wearing. The more encased the organic matter was, be it a sentient like itself or just a plant, the less energy it emitted. The excrement gave off relatively little energy, but it had nevertheless been their most valuable export; it lasted forever, and it didn't smell bad like human excrement did.

There were many toaster-ovens to choose from. They ranged from cheap, off-brand units to the top-of-the-line SonyBraun VX2, which was on sale this week for only 1,800 credits. But if it

bought that, it couldn't afford to buy the other thing it wanted, a new portable body fan.

So, it bought a reasonably nice EarthTech DKX34. The human male at the counter was, as they all were, disinterested. Xcyvkw could still not quite get over how strange they looked—one side of each one's body was a mirror-image of the other, and they had to balance themselves on those two little peg-like "legs," as they called them. But they were good at it, apparently, because they could move very quickly when they wanted to.

It managed to resist trying out the DKX34 right away by plugging it right into its body-energy conversion unit. Instead, it went over to the personal cooling-products counter to buy the fan.

The human female at the counter smiled in their rather bizarre way, and said through a portable translator, "How can I help you, Ma'am?" (This last was a courtesy to smetzoids who still had difficulty with the gender concept; rather than refer to them all as "Sir," a human just referred to the smetzoid as being of whatever the human's own gender was. It was a clever and convenient way for smetzoids to know right away what pronouns to use in the Terran language.)

Xcyvkw tried to use Terran to impress the human. "I want fan for blowing self of me, miss human person," it said. It couldn't quite figure out why it bothered using the human's language, since the humans didn't seem to appreciate it, as though they just expected other races to learn their language; it had never heard of a human speaking smetzoid without a translator.

"You mean one of these personal body-fans?" the human asked, reaching over to a shelf and pulling down an EarthTech SR88. "These are very popular with you smetzoids." Of course, despite their patronizing attitude she and others of her race had no idea of the pleasure smetzoids received by pointing an ordinary air fan at their bodies, the billions of tiny electrical nerve-endings creating tingling waves that could even produce dahkaori in certain more easily-stimulable smetzoids. That had never happened to Xcyvkw, but it still enjoyed it.

The fan, of course, was yet another invention that the smetzoids, who had been a practical, no-nonsense race, had never thought to produce; smetzoids weren't affected by

temperature changes and didn't actually breathe the atmosphere they inhabited. And since there was no wind on Smetz, indeed, no climactic changes whatsoever on the planet as long as you stayed in the same place, no one had really thought about what would happen if a smetzoid was directly exposed to prolonged air movement.

"I want...price," Xcyvwk said; the Terran language tutors taught them to always predicate each sentence with "I want" in order to show the humans that they were similar emotionally. "Four hundred credits," said the human.

"I want...it," said Xcyvwk, vaguely thinking it was being ripped off. Damned mindreaders, it thought.

As it left the shop, Xcyvwk felt guilty. These human devices were contributing to the downfall of smetzoid culture just as forced cable TV viewing was. It was all a means of making the population submissive, a "benign enslavement" so that Smetz would become dependent on products that could only be supplied by humans. Smetzoids couldn't produce fans and toaster ovens; their planet had no conductive metals or petrochemical deposits, and human synthesis and replication techniques were a closely guarded secret. Even if they could produce these items, it would only mean that they would be doing to themselves what the humans were doing to them already. The humans had taken over, stolen the secret of their excrement, and were using it to enrich themselves at the smetzoids' expense, all the while turning Smetz into a planet of lazy, worthless dhuh-beasts.

But if I don't buy this toaster-oven, someone else will, it thought. Better me than someone who doesn't realize what an addictive, evil thing it is. Squirming back into its weightless mass-transport bubbleship compartment, it hooked up its converter, plugged the toaster oven into the receptacle jutting out near its shifoddi, stuck its queliph in, and waited for meiylo to begin.

PRELUDE TO PASSION FRUIT

D— began by removing her long, silken stockings, dropping them to the floor in a heap. She shimmied herself out of her long green dress and unhooked her brassiere, revealing her heaving, ample bosom. Stretching herself languidly, she hooked a finger around her lace underpants and slipped them down to her ankles, stepping out of them to reveal her glorious nakedness to the stranger before her. Opening the bottle of baby oil, she poured it down the front of her chest, spreading it over her breasts with abandon. Odd, she thought, that this man, whom she had never seen before, whose name she did not know, should be here, staring at her lasciviously, seemingly unable to turn away...

Suddenly she realized where she was. Terrified, she picked up her clothes and ran out of the grocery store, stopping only to pay for the bottle of baby oil, which had already been opened. Damn it, where did I put my purse, she thought, and realizing that it was still in the produce department she ran back, nearly tripping over the strange man who was now being resuscitated by paramedics.

Later on, driving back to her apartment in her little red sports car, she wondered if the man had survived. It's a dangerous world, she thought. But if he did survive, maybe he could sue the supermarket and make enough money to retire. The idea made her feel much better.

When she returned home, she realized that it was April 14, and she had not done her taxes. Government bastards, she thought; they never give you enough advance warning. Actually,

she'd never had a problem with the forms until it was time to sign them and write in her occupation. For some reason, listing herself as a "Sexual Adventuress" never seemed to amuse the IRS; This year, she decided to list herself as a "Freelance Writer."

She was tired and wanted to sleep, but there was no one to sleep with. Besides, she had to go to a party that night. Putting on a sheer black gown with stiletto heels, she mixed up a batch of chocolate chip cookies, cleaned out the cat's litter box, and began to vacuum the floor. By 11 o'clock it was time to leave. Starting up the red sports car, she suddenly became fascinated by the temperature gauge. It never seemed to get very far above that first notch. Poor little gauge; it would never live up to its full potential. Someday she would build a home for all the hopelessly forsaken temperature gauges of the world, where they could be safe and happy and free... After several minutes, she finally opened the garage door, and feeling curiously lightheaded she put the car in gear and drove off.

The party was a typical affair, with plenty of ice cream and cake, pony rides, and a clown who entertained the kids. When it was time to open the presents, she realized she had gone to the wrong party, and that it was 11 *am*, not 11 pm. Damn these analog watches, she muttered. You never know if it's night or day. But rather than be ungracious and leave early, she stayed and did a striptease act for the children. They seemed to appreciate it, though judging from the reactions of some of the younger boys, many of them were clearly going to become homosexuals one day. But this didn't bother her; they would all be far too old for her by the time they grew up anyway.

That night, having found the correct party, she began to feel the familiar urges. It had always been impossible to predict when they would manifest themselves, but being among all of these men—these fabulous, fascinating, beautifully-dressed men—she knew that tonight she could not resist the temptation. The risk was always great, but that was part of the excitement. It was what she lived for.

By the end of the evening she had picked over a dozen pockets and had still not been caught. She had even returned all of the wallets after extracting over \$1,200.00 in cash, but had

kept the watches (some of them with digital am/pm displays), and several condoms. She also had obtained a black felt-tip pen. Removing one of the condoms from its foil safety wrapper, she unrolled it over her left hand. Then she took the felt-tip pen and drew a smiley-face on it. She could then pick up small objects, such as coins and mixed nuts, with the condom-puppet in such a way that it looked like the puppet was trying to eat the objects. *Voracious Condom Puppet Man*, she called it. She could have amused herself for hours, but she was eventually interrupted by a man's voice.

"Having fun?"

The man was exactly D——'s height and obviously a good dresser. He might have made a fine armoire, or possibly a hat rack as well. He moved closer to her, extending his hand.

"I'm Steve Casper," he said. "I live here."

"Ah, Casper, the friendly host," she replied impassively and far too obviously. "So this was your party then?"

"Well, the party ended over an hour ago, but you seemed to be having such a good time with your little hand puppet I couldn't bear to interfere. What is that, by the way? A condom?"

"Yes, would you like one? I have several."

"Well, uh, no thanks, I have my own," Steve said. "So anyway, I was about to head upstairs and go to bed. Would you like to join me, or should I call you a cab?"

"I hate cabs," she said. "Besides, I drove myself here. But thanks anyway."

"Don't mention it."

"So where's the bedroom?" she asked casually.

Confused, Steve led her up to the bedroom. At first D— had difficulty understanding why a man of obvious wealth and sophistication, who claimed to have several condoms of his own, did not have his own *Voracious Condom Puppet Man*. But eventually the matter was straightened out. As they undressed, Steve tried to make small talk. That didn't seem to work, though, so he started to make large talk instead.

"Are you an existentialist or a pragmatist?" he asked.

"Neither," D—— replied. "I'm a philosophical Taoist who feels that it isn't necessarily incompatible with Lao Tzu to hold

with the concept of the logos as espoused by Heraclitus of Ephesus in 6th century pre-Socratic Greek philosophy. But if you had taken the trouble to look at my driver's license, you would have known that."

"Sorry," he said. "I don't drive much."

He was just like all the rest, she thought. Only concerned with himself and his own petty personal needs and problems. It was the story of her life; an endless search for the perfect man, and endless disappointment. But though she would never give up trying, she also realized that she would never find the perfect man. All of them were either too short, or too tall; too fat, or too thin; too intelligent, or too stupid; too emotional, too impassive, too loud, too quiet, too cruel, too kind, too rich, too poor. Or, perhaps worst of all, too average.

After they had sex, they had cheese blintzes. It was a perfect evening.

The next morning came and went. D—— remembered that she had to be in Paris for a fashion show, and hurried out to her car.

"You forgot your clothes," Steve cried, bursting out of the house as she drove away. He was right, she thought. I did forget my clothes. They won't let me on the plane without clothes. She knew because she had made the same mistake before. Six times, in fact.

Borrowing some clothes from one of the airline pilots, D—— caught the flight in the very nick of time. But the fashion show was a bore; just another endless parade of skinny women in skimpy dresses. Just once, she thought, she'd like to see a really fat one get up there, stuffing her face with Vienna sausage as she waddled her way out the runway, and then maybe fall flat on her face in a huge pit full of potato salad. And then they could throw the other models in, too. But they never did that at big Paris fashion shows. You had to go to Milan for that.

On the return flight, she met a man in the airport bar who introduced himself as "Fabio." He was tall and muscular, with long blond hair and an almost perfectly aquiline European face. It was astonishing, she thought, how much this man actually looked like Fabio, the famous male model. It was even more

astounding that he should have the same name, and be followed by the same entourage that Fabio usually traveled with.

“You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen,” he said, gazing deeply into her eyes.

“Oh, you can do better than that,” she said. “Haven’t you got any better pickup lines than that?”

“Let me check,” he said, pulling out a well-worn slip of paper marked with the heading “Pickup Lines.” Unfolding it, he scanned the list and decided on one near the bottom. “Uh, I think I dropped something over here... have you seen an Olympic gold medal, about this big?”

D—— yawned. “Try again.”

“Okay. How about this one: ‘My doctor just gave me a week to live, and I’ve never had sex with you before.’”

“Better.”

Fabio’s face became anguished as he searched the cheat sheet. “You remind me so much of my long-lost wife, Lenore, that I simply must ask you to come back to my house with me and iron my curtains.”

D—— smiled. “I’m putty in your hands,” she said as the man claiming to be Fabio carried her out to a waiting school bus in his arms.

Of course, D—— had no idea as to what she had gotten herself into: Fabio lived in an enormous mansion, and the sheer size and number of curtains was more than anyone could conceivably tackle in a reasonable amount of time. After three days, D—— was still less than halfway through. “I give up,” she said, and left the house, trying to remember where she had parked her car. Luckily she had outfitted her car with an experimental remote autopilot call-and-retrieve device, and by simply saying the words “hi-ho *Siiiiiiiiilver*” she was able to bring the car to her in a matter of moments.

Driving away, she mused on all the poor idiots in the world who didn’t have experimental remote autopilot call-and-retrieve devices attached to their cars. The fools, she thought. *They’ll be crushed!*

It had been a typical week. Eventually, she knew, she would have to find someone with whom she could fall in love and live

a complete life with, or go on several talk shows trying. Of course, falling in love wasn't the problem; it was the lawsuits afterwards that hurt. She could fall in love with almost anyone, or anything for that matter. She remembered the last time she fell in love: She had been staring at a tray of passion fruit at the grocery store, and had decided that she loved passion fruit more than anything else in the world. It was then that she remembered why she had publicly undressed in the middle of the produce department only a week earlier.

Returning home, she stripped herself naked and slipped into the bath. After a few minutes she began to feel cold; she then realized that she hadn't filled the tub with water. Turning the hot-water faucet, she became fascinated by the cold-water faucet. Why have a cold-water faucet at all? she wondered. Who would take a cold bath? Did anyone ever really use the cold-water faucet? Someday she would build a home for all the hopelessly forsaken cold-water bath-faucets of the world, where they could be safe and happy and free...

THE NARROW PATH

“Things is tough all over,” I said to the pilot, clutching the door handle to the cockpit. “I remember one time I had a friend of mine tried to eat his way out of a grain elevator and nearly got himself—”

“Oh, shut up!” he snapped, clearly exasperated. “Can’t you see we’re losing altitude? We’ve got to get control of this aircraft or we’re going to crash!”

“Okay, okay,” I said. He’d probably had too much coffee; it was perfectly understandable, given the circumstances. After all, the coffee on this airline was surprisingly good.

I found my way back to the First-Class cabin easily enough, though by this time the plane was almost at a 45-degree angle to the ground. At least I wouldn’t be in *coach* when we hit, I reassured myself. What a horrible way to go *that* would be!

Some of the passengers assumed the crash position, while others shut their eyes and prayed. Many also began screaming in terror, but most simply resumed watching their chair-back personal DVD players as the plane screamed downward, the cabin pressure increasing with every foot of lost altitude.

Finally, the plane began to level off. Through the cabin window I could see that we’d made it rather easily; there were at least 20 feet to spare. The passengers, nearly all of whom had earlier lost hope completely, now began to celebrate wildly in a cacophany of shouting and cheering. One of them grabbed me and kissed me on the cheek. “Sorry, I’m just not a touchy-feely sort of person,” I explained.

Eventually everyone settled down, and I made my way back to the cockpit. “As I was saying earlier,” I resumed, “this guy I knew had to eat his way out of grain elevator, and it so happens there was this nest of crows in there, and well, you can imagine what *that* was like.”

“What kind of grain was in there?” asked the co-pilot, his hand firmly on the stick.

“Oh, there wasn’t any grain in there at all,” I pointed out. “The farmer who owned the silo was using it to store his old vinyl LP’s. He must’ve had three or four thousand of ‘em in there.”

YOUR BUTT AND THE INTERNET:

NOT AS DIFFERENT AS YOU MIGHT THINK

The Information Highway

Source of electronically stored pornography, advertisements, and extremist propaganda

Known by a variety of colorful names, including “Cyberspace”

Seen by some as a source of sexual gratification

New fiber-optic networks can dramatically increase transmission rates

Incautious individuals may inadvertently download files containing “viruses” that wreak havoc with internal storage devices

Requires modem and phone line

The Hershey Highway

Source of rectally stored human excrement

Known by a variety of colorful names, including “Poop Chute”

Seen by some as a source of sexual gratification

New fiber-rich diets can dramatically increase excretion rates

Incautious individuals may inadvertently contract colitis, colon cancer, hemorrhoids, and other diseases which wreak havoc with internal organs

Requires colon and digestive tract

Problems caused by hacker abuse may lead to increased governmental regulation

Technophiles “log on” to discussion forums in which they can dump on others

Particularly loathsome persons indulge in obnoxious, though somehow often humorous ritual known as “flaming”

Many materials produced find their way into major national weekly news magazines

Problems caused by dietary abuse may lead to occasional irregularity

Coprophiles form big, disgusting “logs” which they can dump on others

Particularly loathsome persons indulge in obnoxious, though somehow often humorous ritual known as “lighting farts”

Many materials produced find their way into large sewage-treatment plants

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS FOR PERSONAL COMPUTERS

August, 1993

Recent studies show that more and more personal computers are finding their way into U.S. homes. While some have become alarmed over the fact that machines that were once considered just a collection of lifeless electronic circuitry have become ambulatory and, indeed, clever enough to get past the locked and even bolted doors of supposedly secure American houses, many others welcome this trend. After all, a computer that just shows up in your garage one morning doesn't have to be paid for. *It's the law.*

But what do you do when something goes wrong with your new, or maybe not-so-new, computer? In the Eighties, of course, you would simply sue whoever was responsible and then buy a new one. But in the less-litigious and more budget-conscious Nineties, this course of action seems less efficacious. As a result, many computer owners are doing their own repairs and maintenance. It's not hard, really. Even if you're a "techno-klutz," there are things you can do yourself to avoid costly computer repair bills. Here are some common examples of things that can go wrong and what you can do to prevent them from happening, or fix them if they happen anyway.

1. Your system "freezes." It's a good idea to keep your computer in a room in which the temperature is above 32° Fahrenheit, or 0° Centigrade. This will also probably make working with your computer much more comfortable, unless you're an Eskimo. Paradoxically, while the electrons in

computer chips flow better in colder temperatures, the materials of which chips are made, and on which chips are mounted, tend to become damaged in such conditions. But if this should happen, applying a blowtorch to the computer should fix things right up. Start with the main processing chip (usually labeled something-something “86” on IBM compatibles, and “68”-something on Macintoshes), and then work your way around to the disk drives and the power supply, which is the part with all the wires coming out of it. Once these parts have started to melt slightly, you’ll know they’re good and warmed up, ready for action.

2. Your system “crashes.” Unfortunately, these days many people think of computers as toys, and rather than use them for what they were intended for, they attach wheels to their outer cases and let their small children ride around the neighborhood on them. Unfortunately, these children, referred to as “device drivers” by traffic police, often have crashes. However, these can usually be prevented by giving your child rigorous training in safe computer-driving skills, the rules of the road, and responsible drinking practices. Of course, the best way to prevent a crash is to avoid attaching the wheels in the first place, but if it does happen, be sure to first see if your child needs medical attention. Once that’s been taken care of, you can usually repair the results of a crash using the “equal and opposite reaction” method: Just hit the computer with your fist, or a truck, or a brick wall, with an equal amount of force as the original crash impact, only in the opposite direction. This should put any rearranged internal components back in their original places.

3. Your system “blows up.” Again, this sort of problem is easily prevented. Simply open up your computer’s case and remove any explosives you may find inside. Note, however, that some explosives are “booby-trapped,” and may resist your efforts to remove them. If this is the case, remember to always snip the red wire first. But if you’re too late, you’ll often find that pieces of your computer are strewn all over the room, the house, the block, or with nuclear explosions, the entire world. It can be very difficult and time-consuming to put all of these pieces back together, and even then there’s no guarantee that your priceless

data will still be intact. Nevertheless, you'd be surprised at what you can do on a weekend with just a few thumbtacks and some Elmer's glue.

4. Your system "bombs." It's an unfortunate aspect of modern society that there are machines, as well as people, who would make life miserable for others by committing wanton acts of violence and terrorism. No matter what the socio-political consequences may be, nothing can justify this sort of behavior. Nevertheless, if you should catch your computer using some sort of incendiary device to sabotage an airliner, destroy a department store, set fire to an historic national monument, or damage a government facility, you should remember one thing: Computers only follow the instructions they're given. They can't come up with these criminal acts on their own; they have to be programmed to do them. Sometimes you can correct the problem by simply removing any software you may have that instructs your computer to destroy property or kill people. On IBM-compatibles, look for program names like "KILLUALL.EXE" or "MASSDETH.COM"; on the Macintosh, where program names can be longer and thus more descriptive, look for icons with labels like "Destroy Society" or "End Justifies Means," and drag them into the trash can. But beware: On some machines, the bad code is cleverly hidden in files with such seemingly innocuous names as "EXPLORER.EXE" and "COMMAND.COM."

5. You try to "boot" your system and nothing happens. This is a very common problem which is easily dealt with. First check to see if you're actually wearing boots; sometimes people who use computers mistakenly wear loafers, bedroom slippers, or even Air Jordans. While these are considered more comfortable or fashionable, they can't deliver the kind of force that a good pair of reinforced steel-toed boots can. (Also check to see if your boots are the right size and that there is no heel chafing or lack of arch support.) After you've ascertained that you've got the right footwear, try again. This time, get your back into it. Some computers are very heavy and require an extremely powerful kick to really send them flying. If you've got a hip problem or have been weakened by a recent bout of plague or

malaria, you might want to obtain a lighter machine such as a laptop or notebook computer.

6. Your system is infected by a “virus.” Most of us have been attacked by viral diseases at some point in our lives. Should this happen to your computer, you should do the same things you would do for yourself. Force your computer to drink lots of fluids, particularly fruit juices, and maybe feed it some nice hot chicken soup. If your computer doesn't have a convenient feeding tube, just pour the fluids and soup into one of the floppy disk drives. Then make sure your machine gets lots of rest in a warm place. Next to the fireplace is always a good bet. After a week or so, if your computer is still in a bad way, you might have to inject it with antibiotics. But in most cases it should be feeling good as new by then; go ahead and turn it on and watch the sparks fly!

MUSIC AND SEX

Making music is a lot like sex — especially recording in a studio. It's great while it's happening, but when it's over, you've got a lot of cleaning up to do, and a few days later you look back on it and wonder what all the fuss was about. In fact, the entire *business* of recording and performing music is quite similar to the male sexual experience in general. (Maybe I'd compare it to the female sexual experience, if I were female.)

I mean, basically, to become a musician (*i.e.*, sexually active person) you have to first learn an instrument (look at lots of dirty pictures) and get to the point where you can play in front of others (go out on dates). You get gigs (heavy snogging) and try to make enough money (score points) to go into a studio (bed) and record songs (do the nasty). Eventually you do mixdowns (climax), but after that you have to lug all your gear out (lug all your gear out) and all you have to show for it are some rough mixes (stained sheets), which quickly lose their appeal (begin to stink). If you're lucky you'll have finished masters (high-rez videotapes), but even then nothing comes of it unless you can get your songs (sperm cells) to a record company (ovum) that's interested in expanding its stable of artists (ovulating). If your tape is accepted (fertilization!), you might get signed (married) to a recording contract (pre-nuptial agreement), but they could always dump you (dump you) and renege on the record deal (miscarraige). What's more, your relationship might become strained if the record (baby) turns out to be a commercial flop (ugly, loud, and/or obnoxious). You try to keep the company (wife) happy by writing more songs

(more sex) and doing another record (more kids) but they're always meddling and nagging at you (meddling and nagging at you) to tour and promote more (work harder and stay thin), not to mention the imperative to avoid hair loss (the imperative to avoid hair loss). Eventually the whole thing ends in a lawsuit (divorce case), and you get out of your contract at great loss to yourself (alimony), and though you try to get on with your career (life), inevitably you fade into obscurity (die).

And in conclusion, I'd like to point out that you just missed lunch.

FOUR MIKE LOVE JOKES

A guy walks into a bar and tells the bartender, “Gimme a Mike Love on the rocks.” The bartender says, “Did you say a ‘Mike Love?’” And the guy says, “Yeah, a Mike Love, on the rocks.” So the bartender thinks for a minute and says, “Can’t say I’ve ever heard of it. So how would you mix a Mike Love, then?” And the guy says, “Way down low, so you can’t hear his vocals!”



Mike Love’s personal assistant is sitting there one day doing whatever it is he does, when Mike Love shows up at the office door and says, “Hey, come out to the car and help me bring all this crap in, willya?” So he and Mike go out and get this huge urn out of his car that must weigh at least 150 pounds. So the assistant asks, “What’s in this thing?” And Mike Love says, “I told you, it’s crap.” So the assistant opens the lid and looks in, and sure enough, it’s filled with feces! So he asks Mike why, and Mike says, “Well, I keep hearing about people on the internet paying big bucks for rock stars’ personal stuff, like hair and fingernail clippings, but since I’ve got no hair and I can’t stop chewing my fingernails, I just figured I’d take a few dumps in this urn and auction it all off.” So the assistant says, “But it won’t work, Mike! Your fans already *have* copies of your solo albums!”



Mike Love loses another big lawsuit, and his lawyers and accountants all get together to tell him he’s broke. So after he freaks out for a while, he works out a scheme where he gets people’s credit card numbers from his web site, and then uses

them to make fund transfers to his Swiss bank account. But he isn't a computer programmer, so he goes to a friend of his and asks him if he'd be willing to set it up for him in exchange for 20 percent. So the programmer tells him, "It won't work, Mike – all electronic fund transfers have tracer ID's, so even if you sent the transaction through a hundred different servers, it could still be traced back to the origin point." So Mike gets all upset and says, "You don't know what you're talking about. I *know* this will work! Hell, I've been stealing other people's credit for 40 years!"



One day Mike Love gets a certified letter from the Register of Wills of Lubbock, Texas, telling him that a relative (that he didn't know he had) recently died and included him in his will. So he gets a copy and finds out that this guy was a cousin from a previously unknown branch of the family, and that he's left him \$100,000 and an abandoned oil well. So he asks his current wife if he should take a gamble and use the \$100,000 to hire a drilling team to see if they can't get some more oil out of the well, and the wife tells him, "Why not? You've been screwing money out of your cousins' property since you were 20 years old, so why change now?"



WHY I HATE THE INTERNET

i hate the internet because a couple years ago i was in a parking lot and the internet smashed up my car and drove away without paying me for it and i had to get it fixed at my own expense no wait that was somebody else now what was i saying oh yes the internet sucks because every time i log on from my house i see something really stupid and then when i try to call my friends to tell them there's something stupid on the internet there's always this horrible weird buzzing sound on the phone and it won't go away until i log off and by that time i don't care anymore and i hate the internet because everybody always talks about it like it's some sort of big fat hairy deal like it's going to transform our culture but of course that's a crock how could computers transform our culture what a silly idea but what i really hate most about the internet is the way people fill it with endless blathering and none of it has any punctuation so you can't hardly read it even and everything is speld rong and what's even worse there are all these people who make fun of other people who can't spell or don't bother to punctuate by posting stupid parodies that mock them supposedly in their own style and use phrases like "speld rong" as if it's supposed to be funny well it isn't so there ha ha ha but anyway i hate the internet because it keeps me from doing important valuable useful things like watching tv and stealing cars but wait i don't steal cars i must have seen it on tv but i don't watch tv because i spend all my time on the internet which i hate because all anybody cares about is star trek and i hate star trek i think i'll design an i hate star trek web page for people like me who hate star trek well ok i don't really hate star trek actually i watch it religiously and have

several valuable star trek collectibles but at least i don't go to those stupid conventions like all the other losers well maybe occasionally not that it matters but anyway i was writing about why i hate the internet and i do because it's boring and insipid and slow and i can get all the pornography i need by reading the proceedings of the united states congress or watching tv which is nothing but pornography anyway and why is it that everything on the internet always ends up being about pornography i'm sick of hearing about pornography anyway you see that's why i hate the internet so much and there are other reasons too like my finger hurts from clicking the stupid mouse and my eyes hurt because the type is so small and my butt hurts from sitting all day on this torture device of a chair and as if that's not bad enough anything i might be dumb enough to read or post on it might be read by practically anybody not that i have anything to hide oh no i'm a law-abiding citizen well usually anyway i guess sometimes i drive too fast no wait i never drive too fast that was a typo yes a typo the internet is full of typos which is another reason why i hate it yes it all keeps coming back to why i hate the internet which is a good thing because that's the subject of this essay not that you'd really call it an essay because that would imply that it's well written which it isn't but that doesn't matter because this is the internet and what are you going to do sue me well ok maybe you'll sue me but go ahead and try because i don't have any money anyway i spent it all on valuable star trek collectibles and monthly internet service fees which are too high and that's another reason why i hate the internet because it costs too much but i guess everything costs too much these days probably because every company in the world has been forced to raise their prices to cover the expense of being on the internet as though that improves their sales figures yeah right ha ha i've got your sales figures right here pal let me just wipe them off there now stick that somewhere warm and sticky oh wait now it's starting to sound like pornography again which is something that makes me hate the internet but i already wrote that so on to my next reason for hating the internet but i forgot what that was because my attention span is so limited from looking at all those stupid web pages oh that's what it was it was the effect on my attention span and did i mention that i hated the internet oh yes looking back at what i wrote earlier i can see that i covered that

already but now this is getting tedious so anyway where was i oh yes why i hate the internet well it's probably because my life is a mess and i'm bored all the time and i'm so pathetic i feel compelled to write about it and not just write about it but post it on the internet for everyone to see as though my problems are so interesting that anybody else would want to read them but you just read them so what does that make you that's right a loser and if you're a loser you might as well not bother because you'll always be a loser just like me but wait i'm not really a loser in fact i'm quite successful i live in a nice house and drive a nice car and have a sexy girlfriend and make lots of money but it all seems so useless because nobody knows about how wonderful i am even though i tried to tell people on the internet but nobody seems to pay much attention and that's another reason why i hate the internet because nobody pays attention when i go on about how great i am.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE POINTLESS PASTICHE

*From the Phony Recollections of John H. Watson, M.D.,
as loosely interpreted by the editor (who barely managed
to eke out any sort of degree whatsoever)*

It was a blustery November morning in 1907 that found me passing through the familiar door of 221B Baker Street where I resided with my friend Sherlock Holmes, the world's only consulting detective. Holmes had attempted to retire to Sussex a few years earlier, but had been called upon to assist in so many cases since then that he had given up the notion that he could ever live the relaxed life of a country beekeeper, and returned to London to reduce his travel expenses.

Feeling slightly bedraggled, I grunted a cursory "hello" to Holmes and immediately sat down in my favorite chair, thinking to enjoy a cigar before embarking on the day's activities.

"Yes, it does seem rather pointless," said Holmes, without even turning around to glance in my direction.

"Why, Holmes, this is some sort of infernal wizardry," I exclaimed. "How could you know that I was thinking precisely—"

"It is all quite elementary, Watson," he interrupted. "For the last several years, your routine has never varied until this moment. Every morning upon entering the sitting room, you rush to your desk in order to keep up with the massive task of writing chronicles of the many thousands of currently

unpublishable cases in which we have been involved, knowing all the while that they will simply be deposited in your battered tin dispatch box to wait the requisite sixty or seventy years before the personages involved are all dead, thereby making it possible to place the adventures before the public. However, this morning you instead came in and sat in your favorite chair with no pen in your hand whatsoever, so I naturally deduced that you have finally realized after all these years that such posthumously-published adventures cannot possibly serve to improve either your fame as a writer nor your financial status in any way during your lifetime, thus rendering the whole exercise rather pointless, especially given the fact that you allow your literary agent to take full authorship credit for every story you publish.”

I stared, dumbfounded. “Precisely what I was thinking, Holmes! Though I suppose it seems rather obvious once you explain it.”

“Just so,” Holmes replied. “But perhaps you would care to forget about such mundane concerns for the moment and read this note that arrived earlier this morning.” He handed me a slip of paper which read:

Dear Mr. Holmes,

I must see you on a matter of the utmost urgency. Please ask Dr. Watson to include the text of this note in his narrative, even though it cannot possibly further the progression of the plot in any way.

*Your ob'd't s'v'nt,
Morgan Tramiriay*

“Well, what do you make of it, Watson?” asked Holmes. “Quite the puzzler, eh?”

“I can see nothing remarkable about it, Holmes,” said I.

“Nothing, Watson? Tut tut,” said he with an annoying chuckle. At that very moment the doorbell rang below. “I expect that will be the mysterious Mr. Tramiriay right now!”

The door to the sitting room opened to reveal a well-dressed young man of average height, with brown hair, side whiskers,

and pale blue eyes. He introduced himself as Mr. Tramiriay and sat down in the chair we usually reserved for guests, after first removing the “Reserved for Guests” placard that had been hung upon it.

“England, possibly the entire world, is in great danger, Mr. Holmes,” he began. “I fear that only you can possibly solve this mystery. If you fail, we are all lost!”

“Have no fear,” Holmes replied. “I shall make a few enquiries and I hope to return to you with the solution to your problem by tomorrow afternoon. Now good day to you, sir!”

Tramiriay rose to leave, but hesitated. “But do you not require an explanation of the problem itself, Mr. Holmes?”

“That would only slow the process, would it not?” said Holmes. “Now go and free yourself of all worldly concerns and return here at precisely four o’clock tomorrow.” And with that our visitor left, a quizzical look on his face.

As soon as the man had left, Holmes yelled for Billy, the page, and went to the deal table to compose a telegram. Handing it to Billy, he instructed him to wait for a reply, no matter how long it took. Reaching for his hat and overcoat, he said, “Come, Watson! Three entire pages have already been written! We must see Mycroft at once! The game’s afoot!”

Less than an hour later we were standing in the Stranger’s Room at the Diogenes Club, greeting Holmes’ corpulent brother Mycroft, the man who essentially ran the British Government singlehandedly despite the fact that he spent virtually every waking hour in a gentlemen’s club in which no one, save those in the room which we now occupied, was permitted to speak. “I have been expecting you,” said Mycroft. “This business with Tramiriay is quite a perplexing one. I expect it will be fraught with danger and intrigue, and will bring you in contact with innumerable characters from both popular fiction and real life.”

“Indubitably,” said Holmes.

“I have taken the liberty of securing for you this document,” said Mycroft, reaching into his coat. “This will effectively give you supreme authority over any and all British governmental or

military officials with whom you might come into contact until this affair has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion.”

“Quite thoughtful of you, dear brother,” Holmes replied, taking the fragile document and stuffing it into his own coat-pocket. Turning to me, he said, “Come, Watson! The game’s afoot!”



We were soon back at Baker Street, where Holmes immediately began to disguise himself as an elderly fish-peddler. He was soon interrupted by Billy, returning with a reply to his earlier telegram.

“These are deep waters,” he said moodily after reading the missive. “This is a case not without interest. Indeed, it would seem to be a three-pipe problem, wouldn’t you say, Watson?”

“Yes, of course, Holmes. I’ll just go back to my writing, and you inform me when there is some action to be taken.” I went to the writing-desk, forgetting all about my earlier realization regarding the futility of the enterprise, not to mention the fact that only a week earlier I had found it necessary for the fifth time to replace the existing battered tin dispatch box with a much larger one. The current model, which was over eighteen feet on each side, had to be specially built for the purpose, at considerable expense.

A few hours later, Holmes emerged from his bedroom, the three pipes still stuffed in his mouth. “Wgmphh mmsthmph lmmpha twnth,” said he, reaching for his hat and coat again. “Thgmthaph!”

“But where are we going, Holmes?” asked I.

Holmes removed the pipes and placed them on the mantelpiece. “We are going to the basement, Watson!” he replied.

“Basement?” said I. “I had no idea there was a basement in this building.” But Holmes was already halfway down the stairs, beckoning me to follow. He led me through a hidden door outside Mrs. Hudson’s kitchen and down another set of stairs. We found ourselves in a dimly lit hallway, at the end of which was another door, leading to another set of stairs, which we descended, only to find ourselves in a small empty room with

another door on the other side, leading to yet another set of stairs, which we also descended. This went on for quite some time, until I realized that we were at least two miles beneath the Earth's crust. I became slightly concerned, since I was extremely tired at this point. I asked, "How will we get back up to the surface, Holmes?"

"Oh, we'll just take the lift," he replied casually. "But here we are at our destination." He opened a very large, sturdy door and I was surprised to see a huge laboratory, filled with flasks, beakers, tubes, and machinery of every description. Holmes walked over to a large table upon which he began mixing some chemicals and injecting them into several giant rats that were being held in cages in the far corner.

"I don't suppose you'd care to explain all this," I said, annoyed.

"All in good time," said Holmes. "Clearly, the hand of Professor Moriarty is at work here, Watson. We must not let our guard down for a second."

"Moriarty? Back from the grave *again*? Why, the man has more lives than a cat!"

"Indeed, Watson, this will be the eighty-fourth time since the Reichenbach incident that Moriarty has resurrected himself from the dead for the apparent sole purpose of exacting his terrible revenge upon me. I had thought we had finally finished him the last time -- about three weeks ago, as I recall -- when we distinctly saw the scattered ashes of his body thrown into a vat of acid, which was subsequently emptied into a bottomless pit, which in turn was then sealed by an earthquake and covered with hundreds of feet of volcanic ash. As usual, however, he has managed to escape."

Though I despised Moriarty for his evil deeds, I nonetheless marvelled at the man's apparent indestructibility. "And what is his plan *this* time, Holmes?"

"Surely that is obvious, my dear Watson," said he. "Moriarty has opened the interdimensional gates between reality and the world of nineteenth-century literature, allowing characters from some of the world's most beloved novels to enter our universe to wreak havoc upon us all!"

“How could he have managed that, Holmes?” I asked, incredulously.

“By simple application of the binomial theorem, of course,” he replied. “Remember, Moriarty is a mathematical genius. Indeed, all of the most dangerous criminals throughout history were only able to become so by their mastery of quadratic equations and theoretical calculus.”

Holmes worked feverishly for several more minutes. Finally he exclaimed, “Eureka! I have found it, Watson. With this formula, I could...dare I say it...”

“*Rule the world*, Holmes?” said I.

“...Save the world, Watson!” With that we both dashed into the lift at the other end of the laboratory. Within minutes we were standing in a flower bed in Kew Gardens. There we were greeted by **Sigmund Freud**, who invited us to tea with **Madame Curie**, **Louis Pasteur**, **Ernest B. Rutherford**, and a little-known young German scientist named **Albert Einstein**. We politely declined, choosing instead to take the ferry back to Whitehall, where we were met by **King Edward**, who in turn was flanked by **William Gladstone** and **Benjamin Disraeli**, both seemingly in quite good health despite their deaths several years earlier. “You must come at once,” said the **King**, leading us to Buckingham Palace.

There we were met by an assemblage of some of the most famous authors in the world, many of whom had also been deceased only a few hours before. Here was **H.G. Wells**, **Bram Stoker**, **Oscar Wilde**, **Jules Verne**, **Jane Austen**, **Chales Dickens**, **Sax Rohmer**, **Charlotte and Emily Bronte**, **Mark Twain**, **Mary Shelley**, **Robert Louis Stevenson**, and even the well-known magician **Harry Houdini**, who somehow looked distinctly out of place. Yet it was **Houdini** who spoke: “These good people need your assistance, Mr. Holmes,” said he. “Their characters, who were assumed to be restricted to the pages of their fictional works, are now rampaging all over London and many areas of Europe and America as well. We must put these characters back where they belong, or chaos will result!”

“I can do nothing,” said Holmes, “until Inspector Lestrade comes groveling to me begging for my help in the matter.”

At that moment, the door opened and Inspector Lestrade entered, grovelling and begging for Holmes' help in the matter.

"Very well, then," said Holmes. "I will endeavor to do what I can. But I must warn you all now that no account of this adventure is to be published until at least ninety years have passed. Now come Watson, the game's afoot!"



It turned out to be a very busy afternoon. Indeed, Holmes and I captured nearly seventy dangerous fictional characters during the course of the next few hours, mainly due to Holmes' clever deduction that their whereabouts could be easily determined by a quick perusal of the books from which they had sprung to life. (In addition, we were able to use Mr. Wells' time machine to great advantage.) **Count Dracula**, for example, was summarily dispatched during a short visit to Carfax Abbey; **Edward Hyde** was easily spotted, due to his well-described physical deformities, and arrested near a seedy dance-hall in Limehouse; **Dorian Gray** offered no resistance whatsoever upon being discovered in his attic room while staring at a portrait of an ugly old man; **Oliver Twist** was rendered harmless by the simple expedient of feeding him, while **Fu Manchu** was caught smoking with many men; **Captain Nemo** was tracked to a mysterious island by a squadron of British Navy cutters and cleverly forced into a deadly maelstrom; and **Frankenstein's monster** was found outside the smoldering remains of a house belonging to a blind hermit somewhere in Bavaria by a pair of former Baker Street Irregulars on a hiking holiday. The only difficulty we encountered was in our capture of the **King of Ruritania**, which we seemingly had to do twice. Other characters, such as **Professor Challenger** and **Brigadier Gerard**, were caught simply hanging around bookstalls, harassing the various proprietors about the sales volume of works in which they appeared in comparison to the sales of my own published adventures. There was also some concern with Wells' **Martian invaders**, who were already turning their devastating heat-rays on London, but Holmes shrugged them off, stating flatly that they would all be dead from microbial infection within a couple of weeks anyway and were therefore not worth the trouble.

It was nearly eight o'clock by the time the work was finished. Holmes looked pleased with himself. "Watson, this has been the most tiring case since that disastrous affair in Japan a few years ago," said he, undoubtedly referring to yet another of my as-yet unpublished adventures, *Sherlock Holmes vs. Godzilla*. "I would suggest an evening of fine music at the Royal Albert Hall, followed by a meal at Simpson's."

"A fine idea, Holmes. But one thing still troubles me," said I.

"And what could that possibly be, Watson? Are you concerned about the possibility that we ourselves are fictional characters and therefore are occupying the wrong dimensional plane?"

"Oh, pshaw, Holmes! Don't be ridiculous. Actually, I was concerned about the fact that we have been involved in this adventure for nearly an entire day and have yet to encounter Irene Adler, nee Norton, or is it the other way around, Irene Norton, nee Adler..."

"Precisely so, Watson. But fear not, I believe she will become inextricably involved in this affair in short order."

"Aaaah. That is most reassuring," said I. "Sales could suffer greatly without some sort of romantic interest."

After a thoroughly enjoyable concert and a fine meal of roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and Fritos-brand corn chips, Holmes and I returned to Baker Street, our evening having been flawed only because Holmes was still wearing his rather odiferous fish-peddler disguise. Exhausted, I prepared for bed, but was surprised to see Holmes working feverishly at his chemical table. "There are still many questions to be answered, Watson," he said. "For example, **Jack the Ripper's** identity is still a mystery, since our efforts surrounding the case proved the guilt of at least thirty different individuals. Also, there is the matter of how I could have been in Tibet, Paris, St. Petersburg, New York, and California all at precisely the same time in the year 1895. Moreover, I am extremely troubled by the fact that I have failed until just this moment to realize that a simple rearrangement of the letters in the words "Morgan Tramiriay" yields the phrase "Moriarty Anagram," particularly since similar devices have been used to confound me on at least three hundred previous occasions."

I was dumbstruck. “By Jove, you’re right, Holmes! But what are we to do?”

“There is nothing we can do,” said he. “We must wait, allow our adversary to think we are defeated, and then strike when he is at his most vulnerable.” At that moment there was a frantic knocking on the door. “That will be The Woman now,” said Holmes.

I opened the door to admit The Woman that Holmes always referred to as The Woman, wearing a resplendent red silk tafetta evening gown decorated with an exquisite brooch upon which the words **THE WOMAN** were emblazoned in diamonds and sapphires. If anything, her utterly amazing, fantastic, extraordinary beauty had only increased in the four days since we had last seen her.

“As you know, Mr. Holmes, my marriage to Godfrey Norton conveniently ended several years ago when he became envious of my having my own spinoff series,” she began. “I trust that you will not think of me as being too forward, but sales are slipping somewhat, so I am afraid it will be necessary for us to...”

“Watson, we’ll need a moment alone,” said Holmes, removing his trousers.

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It was not until nearly three o’clock the following afternoon that Holmes finally emerged from his room, calling to Mrs. Hudson for some breakfast. Despite the lateness of the hour, our landlady, cook, and housekeeper soon arrived with a plate of rashers, bacon, kippers, flapjacks, boiled eggs, and an enormous seventeen-pound gamecock, which Holmes proceeded to devour with relish, and also some ketchup.

“We shall soon see an end to this business,” said he. At that moment, the door opened to admit Inspector Lestrade, Mycroft, the boy Wiggins, the dog Toby, and a young man who introduced himself as **Winston Churchill**. Mycroft, seating himself on the largest chair available, said, “I trust that everything is now resolved, Sherlock?”

“But of course, dear brother,” said Holmes. “Mr. Tramiriay, or should I say Professor Moriarty, will be here forthwith. In the meantime, I suggest we play a game of Twister.”

“There’ll be none of that,” said a voice from behind the door. “I must ask each of you to remain perfectly still!”

“Moriarty!” we all exclaimed in unison. “But how --”

“Silence!” said he, entering the room, followed by **Col. Sebastian Moran, Basil Stapleton, Dr. Grimesby Roylott, Tonga**, and several other individuals Holmes and I had previously dealt with and had thought to be deceased. “My associate will not hesitate to use his air gun if any of you should make any sudden moves. If necessary, he will also use his air compressor, and maybe even his Air Jordans.” His head twitched uncontrollably from side to side, further proof of his true identity.

“Why, you fiend!” I exclaimed. “You can’t hope to escape!”

“I always do, don’t I?” he scoffed. I had to admit that, indeed, he did possess a remarkable talent for surviving even the most grisly deaths.

“I would like to propose a new arrangement, Mr. Holmes,” he continued, removing the side whiskers with which he had cunningly fooled us into thinking he was just another ordinary-looking young man. “I have grown tired of our continuous cat-and-mouse game, as have you, no doubt. I propose that we simply end this story now, *with all of its loose ends left hanging*, so that in the future there will be no further need to laboriously explain our presences in any further adventures in which any of us might become involved together. All we will have to do is refer to this story, the one we are in right now, to provide an easy explanation for the origin of any situation in which we might meet again. By agreeing to this plan, Mr. Holmes, you will ensure that everyone who has been involved in this affair will achieve literary immortality!”

Holmes thought for a moment. “I must say, Moriarty, while it is obviously diabolical, this idea of yours is not without interest. Certainly such a conclusion would be consistent with most of the currently-unpublishable adventures in which I have played a

role. However, since Watson actually writes most of the stories, I am afraid he will have to make the final decision.”

All eyes in the room turned to me expectantly. A quick glance out the window also revealed a veritable army of well-known, well-loved, and well-feared characters from both fiction and real life milling about on the street outside, staring up at our room; hundreds, perhaps thousands of them, all waiting for my answer.

“Very well,” I replied.

THE PAST IS NOTHING

Lefferts grabbed the pecan pie wedge from the nearest plate on the sterilized countertop. It quivered slightly in the gentle breeze. "It's a little bit jelliesque today, dear," he complained to the waitress, who refused to look. Scowling, he ate the pie anyway, and got up to leave. Turning at the door, he pulled a hundred-dollar bill out of his pocket and flung it at the oblivious waitress. "Here's your blood money," he muttered.

Leaving the café, he headed south on the wide street towards the statue of Ulysses S. Grant that he was fond of defacing in his spare time. An unusually large number of cars were out today, he noticed. Cars and trucks, and also bicycles. At some point he would have to do *something* about the bicycle.

As the pecan pie started to work its way into his intestines, he walked past a group of small children playing street hockey. Some of them would eventually grow up to become professional street-hockey players, and probably make a lot of money.

Actually, professional athletes make *too much* money, he thought. If Lefferts made as much money as a professional athlete, he wouldn't have to put up with the constant barbs and jabs of everyday life. The whole existential *sturm und drang* of it all would never affect him, would never alter his mood, would never stop him from enjoying life to the fullest as he was meant to do. Then again, he'd probably have to participate in a lot of sporting events, in front of a lot of people who'd be expecting him to help his team win. That would probably suck.

Arriving at the park, he saw that a temporary fence had been erected around the statue with special crime-scene tape that read

“POLICE LINE – DO NOT CROSS.” Lefferts removed the pink scissors from his jacket pocket and nonchalantly cut through the tape. Then, using the matching neon-orange spray paint he carried with him at all times, he emblazoned the word “PUNK” on Gen. Grant’s marble torso. That’ll teach him, he thought. Appomatox, *indeed!*

Funny how they always managed to clean the statue up by the next morning.

CASE HISTORY

John Doe #97-0310-02

Attending Physician: John H. Wasserman, M.D.

March 10, 1997

Subject arrived 1:30 am via ambulance. Male caucasian, about 50 years of age, unidentified, approximately 6' tall, 185 lbs., dark hair, with distinctively hawk-like appearance. Comatose, probably from severe psychological or emotional shock. No outward signs of gunshot wounds or other physical trauma. X-rays show no internal injury. Intravenous feeding began approx. 3 am.

March 11

Initial blood tests reveal large quantities of inert material in subject's bloodstream, of unknown origin. Sample sent to NIH for testing.

March 12

No response to conventional stimuli. Mild electric shock was applied at 10 am with no effect. At 4 pm began playing old disco albums in room at high volume. No reaction.

March 15

Subject woke up at approx. 4 am, called for nurse. Nurse refused to attend, citing lack of liability insurance. Subject lapsed back into coma at approx. 6 am.

March 16

Subject awoke again, time undetermined. This time waited until I was in room to speak. Delirious; immediately began talking about "massive conspiracy" to "overthrow British government." Seemed confused about my name, "Wasserman." Asked to see someone named "Mike Croft" at "The Dodge Knees Club." Seemed strangely fearful of EKG monitor. Attempted to obtain identification from subject but replies were delirious; claimed to be Sherlock Holmes; refused to believe it was not October, 1907.

March 17

Tests from yesterday show radical reduction in amount of material originally found in bloodstream. Subject shown several newspapers and magazines, allowed to listen to radio and watch television. At first subject refused to believe what he was seeing but began to recant earlier delusional claims after viewing re-run of "Seinfeld." However, subject did ask if Switzerland still existed (reason not given). Then attempted to get out of bed; stood for 20-30 seconds but experienced dizziness and complained of mild nausea. Prescribed 1 mg of Langurтин, just because I've always wanted to see what would happen. Interesting: Despite weakened condition was able to accurately guess (?) various details about me and several staff members, including the fact that my wife is pregnant, which I only learned myself a week ago.

March 18

Subject accurately guessed (though uses word "deduced") that Nurse Fredericks was once a man. Mentioned something about "eliminating the impossible"; Fredericks now refuses to work with subject; claims he "reads minds." Subject also accurately "deduced" that Dr. Bass is having an affair with Dr. Traficant, a fact not generally known until now.

March 20

Subject is improving steadily. Outwardly sane; no longer claims to be Sherlock Holmes; instead claims not to remember his identity, nationality, or residence. Accent and mannerisms clearly British and upper-class. Now able to walk and feed himself with no difficulty. Some strange behavior persists: Asked if cocaine was "still legal"; seemed disappointed with answer; has begun to ask for "shag" (apparently a form of tobacco) on regular basis; initial request misconstrued as sexual advance by Nurse Yazkoff, who now also refuses to treat subject. Seems to amuse self by always being able to correctly identify staff members as they enter without turning around to look at them first. Photograph taken and given to local police and media in attempt to obtain identification, and hopefully insurance information.

March 22

Subject seems fascinated by television and computers. Played "Myst"; solved central puzzle in under 15 minutes. Offered use of hospital's guest Internet account; after initial difficulty, quickly became engrossed in "web-surfing"; gave up after only a few hours, muttering vaguely about "contemptible fools" and "self-obsessed twits." Delusional thought processes returning; visited hospital library and asked to see newspaper archives from London Times, 1907, despite library's obvious lack thereof; tried to extract promise from librarian not to inform me about request, not realizing that hospital librarian is my wife Trisha, prob. due to her having kept maiden name. Also seemed extremely upset about "bloody fools at Barings Bank"; no explanation given.

March 23

NIH returned blood samples; failed to identify foreign substance. No response regarding subject's identity; photo, description, and

fingerprints given to FBI and Interpol. Results promised within 7 days. (Not holding breath.)

March 24

Subject well enough to be discharged; when informed, immediately asked to be discharged; had no grounds for refusal and glad to be rid of subject anyway due to increasing morale problem. Had no clothes at time of admission; borrowed some from hospital and left approx. 2 pm. Returned at 4 pm wearing odd-looking tweed suit and bowler hat, returned borrowed clothes. Claimed to have obtained rooms at Willard Hotel. Suggested weekly visits for follow-up treatment and memory retrieval therapy; subject agreed.

March 31

Subject, now calling himself "Arthur Coyle," arrived today for follow-up visit. Admitted that name was invented. Seemed quite healthy; no need for drug therapy indicated. Suggested hypnosis; "Coyle" highly reluctant. Claims to have moved out of Willard Hotel and gave new address as 1435 Vale Ct., Rosslyn, VA. Seemed unusually reticent when asked about source of funds. FBI/Interpol both failed to identify subject from photo/fingerprint records.

April 7

Coyle failed to show up for second follow-up visit. Called residence; phone answered by a "Mrs. Hudson" who claimed that Coyle had been "called back to England" on short notice and could not be reached. Individual then explained that real name was "Kathy Meyer," but Coyle had insisted that she answer phone using pseudonym.

April 26

Interesting: Trisha showed me historical-interest story in Post today (p. A27) about new evidence found regarding "several members" of British government ca. 1907-1909 revealed to be anarchist agents. Article stated that several bombings/

deaths in 1908 and 1909 could have been prevented if evidence, said to be "incontrovertible," had not been suppressed. Coincidence?

April 29

Personal note: Trisha now obsessed with research on early cryogenic experiments, but can find nothing prior to 1930's. Also spends inordinate amount of time online; has joined group called "Hounds of Internet" in which no one uses real name. Coyle case has been interesting but now wish we had been working at different hospital.

May 14

Hospital received Riggs Bank cashier's check yesterday from Arthur Coyle for \$50,000 to cover hospital stay. Account still short by \$3,562.56. Legal department notified.

May 27 [ADDENDUM]

Remainder of Coyle bill paid. Trisha now losing interest in case, claims frustration in dealing with British authorities via e-mail. Insurance company reports Coyle now working part-time for History Channel as "Consulting Historian." Also new address: now living in upscale Great Falls neighborhood; drove by yesterday, saw authentic-looking two-wheel horse-drawn carriage parked outside (believe these were called hansom cabs?). Source of funds still unknown; identity still not definitively established; still no medical or forensic explanation for comatose state at time of admission; still no psychological explanation for apparent delusions and strange behavior. Nevertheless, best and wisest man I have ever known.

CASE CLOSED.

THE MAN WITHOUT HAND

March 15, 2:30 PM

The first day of Spring was always the worst, thought Detective Mike Foote of the North Toledo Police Department. Everyone who'd been afraid to go out for three months because of the cold was making up for lost time, burglarizing homes, vandalizing shops, robbing old people in the streets, and of course the inevitable corruption of the electoral process. Luckily, the second and third days of Spring usually weren't so bad, so he had that to look forward to. Until the fourth day, on which everything pretty much went to hell.

He was poring over the dozens of petty-thievery reports on his desk when he was startled to read a name that made his blood run cold: Joe-Bob Von Eszterhazy, his drinking buddy from college — and the man who'd run off with his wife, Vyrna, the only woman he'd ever loved. Or maybe Vyrna had run off with Joe-Bob... Or maybe both of them had run off with a third person. Anyway, it didn't matter. Here he was, under arrest for stealing a 1989 Chevy Caprice. Typical, he thought; Joe-Bob wouldn't know quality if it hit him in the face, which it often did.

It was just three flights of stairs to the lock-up, though it seemed like more due to his lowered blood temperature. Luckily, even walking *down* a long stairwell was good exercise, and he felt a lot warmer by the time he reached the basement.

Joe-Bob hadn't changed; he still looked like someone you'd show photographs of to your children as an example of who not to accept candy from. It didn't help that Joe-Bob was a candy

salesman who was usually accompanied by his own professional photographer.

“Long time no see,” he said, matter-of-factly. “You look about the same.”

“Not *quite* the same, Mikey,” Joe-Bob said as he stood up and reached through the bars to shake Foote’s hand. It was then that Foote saw that Joe-Bob’s hand was gone — or, rather, had been replaced with a prosthetic hook. But he was offering it for a handshake anyway. Perhaps it could be called a “hookshake,” Foote thought. Maybe he could even someday trademark the hookshake, and develop the idea into a multi-million dollar global enterprise with offices all over the world, including the Far East. But now was not the time to speculate.

“How did *that* happen?” he asked, trying not to look too shocked.

“I got it caught in one of those Chinese hand-traps,” he said. “I had to cut it off myself with one of those do-it-yourself amputators you get in First-Aid kits. Luckily, I had plenty of anesthesia lying around, and I was already pretty well oiled-up! I was going to have it sewn back on later, but the only person I knew who had a sewing machine said she didn’t do that sort of thing, at least not on short notice.”

Foote nodded, resignedly. Joe-Bob really *hadn’t* changed. But he had to admit, those Chinese hand-traps really *were* pretty tricky.

“So, what’s the story, Joey-boy? I don’t hear from you for three years, and suddenly you show up in my lock-up? How’s the little lady, ol’ buddy ol’ pal?”

“Look, Mikey, that wasn’t my idea,” he pleaded. “She played me like a violin, telling me you’d been hitting her, you’d told her she was no good, you’d forced her to eat at ethnic restaurants — the works. I thought she just wanted a ride out of town, Mikey! I swear to God! I thought that was gonna be *it*.”

“Sounds as if she was playing you more like a cello, or maybe a trombone,” Foote replied. “Or one of those fancy MIDI synthesizer breath controllers.”

“Whatever,” said the prisoner. “By the way, Sammy, it might be better if you didn’t take any photos of us right now.”

The professional photographer put away his expensive camera gear and went off to sit in the corner.

Joe-Bob lowered his voice a couple of notches. “Listen, Mikey, I stole that car for a reason. I had to talk to you in a place where we wouldn’t be overheard, and I couldn’t have it looking like I’d sougth you out. I’m being watched everywhere I go.”

“Really?” Foote scoffed. “So in addition to the snapshot guy, you’ve got your own Reality TV show too?”

“Worse than that. You’ve got to promise me that what I’m about to tell you —”

“Won’t be used as the basis of a short hard-boiled detective story parody by a struggling, approaching-middle-aged, unpublished author? You know I can’t promise that, Joe-Bob.”

“Fine,” Joe-Bob replied. “I just thought you’d want to know what happened to Vyrna, that’s all.”

“So tell me.”

“Well, okay... But I’d rather do it in a non-quoted inset.”

“Deal.”

*JOE-BOB’S FASCINATING
TALE OF WOE*

I’d been with Vyrna for a couple of months, we’d sort-of settled down in a little town in Colorado called Nietzscheville, and things seemed to be going just fine. We were actually talking about getting married, having kids, buying a house in the suburbs, maybe even buying a big-screen TV.

Of course, selling candy was the only thing I knew much about, but luckily they buy that stuff in Colorado too, so I got by, pretty much. But I wasn’t making much money. Vyrna decided she’d get a job too, and after a few weeks she told me she’d landed a gig with the local Health Department, going around to people’s houses and telling parents that their kids were too fat. She seemed to enjoy it, at first.

After a couple of months, Vyrna started to act a little strange, sort of paranoid-like. But she wouldn’t tell me why, even though I asked politely. I figured it had something to do with

her job, so I called up the Health Department and asked for Vyrna's supervisor. It turned out that they'd never heard of her. The whole thing with the Health Department was a put-on, but she *did* have money coming in. I had no idea what she was up to, but rather than confront her, I took a day off and followed her to "work."

Next thing I knew, I was sitting in the parking lot of an architecture firm in the "nice" part of town that Vyrna'd just walked into. Needless to say, I was shocked!

We'll finish this story... later.