

Episode 36

By

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1. The Set-Up

Entertainment is a tough gig...

Don't pretend that the fantasy is the reality. Don't assume that there's "good" and "bad" - it's all bad. Sure, some of it seems less bad - like Disney - but don't let that fool you either. Behind every magical tea party, held by lions and antelopes, is a different grouping of structure, sign, meaning, and (of course) money. Lions and antelopes don't hold tea parties.

Stop pretending! - That's for kids.

My name is Randy Suits...

Actually, my name is Frederick "Freddy" Halligan, but the other name sounded better - so I changed it.

I've been a talent agent inhabiting the bowels of Hollywood (Hollywood Boulevard to be precise) for about 2 decades.

I started out as a marketing major from UC Berkeley, with dreams of making the big money, packaging fantasies in the form of boobs, butt, and legs. I really wanted to work for CAA, or ICM, or one of the other big guys, the legit talent agencies. I didn't necessarily want to be an agent as much as I wanted to get into the field of "image consulting" and branding. Ah "branding" - a really fancy name for manipulating the public's psyche into buying a PRIUS.

A good friend of mine once said:

"The marketing genius can package the Bhopal chemical disaster as a humanitarian outreach project, the idiot can't sell Pamela Anderson to a sex-fiend, locked up in jail for 30 years"

I was pretty good early on ... I ended up being "good" in the wrong part of town ... just too good too fast, in too

sleazy a place.

Folks think that "hey, it must be fun to be a talent agent, a producer", a "coordinator", to find that next big star, the big "hit", go to parties, get laid, snort coke ... right. It really isn't as much fun as you might think.

The first big party you go to you realize something - just because it's a "big party" doesn't imply the partiers are "big" or important or "legit" (whatever "legit" means these days).

Some of the most raucous parties I've ever attended, the craziest most decadent celebrations, are those held by movers and shakers in the porn industry.

Now, in terms of total revenue - pornography wins (news flash - it always has). Heck, the most popular book in France, just before the revolution in 1789, was the "Dirty Monk goes to the Estates General" - not some intelligent treatise by Diderot, sorry. I remember one of my history teachers telling me that, and how "shocked" all of his freshman students were - I was not that shocked.

Porno (and also violence) has always been a cash king, and that has not changed, in aeons of time ...

You know, those cave paintings, the ones depicting the "great hunts" of our ancient forebears? Yes - that was food and violence porn. It just went downhill from there.

In terms of legitimacy, as far as Hollywood is concerned, porno is still the "slutty cousin no one will invite to their wedding" - violence has been mainstreamed (however). Some of this has changed recently - but not significantly.

We are ok with the killing, we even inject violence into children's cartoons - but God forbid they see something dirty, something messy, like sex. That would be going too

far.

So, yes - I've been to parties that would make the Emperor Caligula blush, but I can't say I've ever met someone most of you normal everyday people would recognize. I had the bad luck of being good at my job before I realized WHERE it was, what part of entertainment, and it turned out it wasn't the "real" Hollywood. It was the seedier place. I could find the most innocent looking for the "shame-porno", and I could detect the damaged, those willing to do anything to make up for how they were harmed, beaten, abused - all buried in memories of some past life best left untouched. The talent I found only had a talent for bad luck - for porn, for shame, for degradation.

The porn industry loves beautiful, damaged, sub-par actors and actresses - they usually age well for the industry (it's the nature of sex). If someone says, "hey, 45 year old porno star, will you shove a 3 inch wide 16 inch dildo up your anus", well - the damaged ones just take-it, and keep taking it, until they die of a drug overdose or find Jesus or drive their cars into a concrete wall at 90 MPH. And yes - more than a few "find Jesus", usually in the their mid to late 30's. One wonders how Jesus finds them.

When I first got into the business, in 1994, I started out finding pretty girls for pilots (TV programs that were still in their early phase) and extras for B-movies - which means exploitation movies mainly.

I found sex-ploitation films silly, sexy, charming - I loved the oeuvre of Jack Hill and just about anything starring Pam Grier. Whether you like Pam Grier or hate her - her boobs defied gravity and man did she do a great shower scene.

As a teenager, in the late 80's, I often rented one of

Pam's films from the Video Depot, just down the street - I had my own VCR, in my room, with my very own 20 inch color TV.

My parents were strict Catholics, they never knew what I was watching and I doubt they would have wanted to know. My dad, well - he partied a LOT before he got married. As my "father" he was a strict and almost puritanical prick - but the stories of his youth were a contrast study indeed.

Exploitation films are mainly crappy soft-core porn. A person doesn't watch "Women in Cages" because of the plot - the name pretty much gives the plot away. You watched films like "Women in Cages" to see women, sweaty, wet, dirty, scantily clad, in cages - and to observe them being ravaged by nasty prison wardens, or to be entwined in some really sexy lesbian love scene, or cleaning off their dirty, busty, bodies in a shower scene. But you didn't watch these films because of their "artistic values".

So, I watched a lot of soft-core and exploitation as a teenage boy - and who didn't? Be honest!

You know you stayed up late, in 1989, to watch CINEMAX "After Dark" films! You know you did! And if you didn't - you missed out. Man were those films great. They had "plots", but the plots were barely meaningful and were mostly an excuse for rating the film R VS X. Throw in some plot, avoid any camera shots of penetration or cunnilingus or cock-sucking, and you can sell the trash to the cable companies.

Yes, I loved me some "SKINEMAX". But, the cable did not run to my room and that meant I could only watch if my parents were asleep, or if they were away on a trip or something (bonus). I will leave the rest of this to your imagination - because I'm classy.

Now for a digression, background.

2. My Dad

Dad signed-up, at 17, to fight in World War II - the year was 1943...

His parents allowed him to go, I suppose they felt patriotic - they were the parents of the "greatest generation" after all. My dad joined the U.S. Navy, fought in the pacific and skippered a landing craft used at the Battle of Iwo Jima (1945). He never talked much about the war, and I understand why. His generation had trauma, lots of trauma, but folks left them alone in their PTSD, to marinate. There were plenty of soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and navy guys who came back damaged - but there just wasn't a desire, in the 1950's, to be that reflective, to dwell. "We won the war", and so people pretended that we did it in some sanitised way and every battle was "John Wayne style" - and if the truth wasn't all that pretty ... well ... no one wanted to know.

When my dad got back from the war he enrolled at the University of Washington in Seattle on the "G.I. Bill" (yes - my family is from that cold, damp, place) and he tried to finish his BS/BA degree - despite not having finished high school (different days). He spent most of his nights at the "Blue Moon" tavern on 45th - an establishment that is still there, to this day. He drank, and I suppose his drinking binges were his way of processing - I don't really know.

My dad died in 1993 from a rare blood disorder - the kind you don't generally get unless you've been exposed to radiation at some point in your life. I don't know for sure, but I found out later that he may have been involved in "Operation Cross-Roads" - the first series of atom bomb tests following the war, conducted at the Bikini Island

Atoll. He did tell me a story once of cleaning off equipment, coming from "somewhere" or "someplace", and standing in muddy-ash water for hours on end - he didn't know, but the equipment had come from aircraft carriers with Jeeps, live pigs, and other objects strapped to them, well within the shock-wave and the fallout range of the atomic tests. The government was experimenting with their new toy, and they needed to know what it could do - how it maimed, murdered, destroyed.

My father stood in fallout water (radioactive sludge) inches deep for hours on end in the summer of 1946. After a few weeks he got his orders to go home - "thanks kid, for serving your country". The radiation exposure manifested itself as a gift, a token for his service, arriving many decades later - he died in September 1993.

DAD PARTIED after he dropped out of the "U-DUB". He drank, he had girlfriends (many), and he started a small logging business. He made good money. Back then - Washington State in the 1950's - there wasn't a whole lot to do with your hard earned cash. Sure, Seattle was kind of "urban" - but not Sedro-Woolley (WA). So ... my dad made his own fun.

Dad drove a newly purchased car into a lake once (and yes, he was inebriated). He road water skis through Deception Pass - a treacherous opening between two bodies of water in the Puget Sound and it took on the form of the most dangerous set of river rapids you could imagine, twice a day (not a place to water ski).

Being in war was dangerous, being a logger (especially back then) was dangerous too - my dad compensated for his "war trauma" by becoming a risk taker, 24/7, all the time.

When my dad eventually got married this madness never really ended - it simply mutated. He became stern,

controlled, obsessive, cold, angry, and frankly a dick - but a dangerous dick. I used to think that there was a version of my dad I would have loved - the crazy, party-guy-version.

I worked for him, my dad, as a teenager - up in the woods. I stomached a couple summers of setting chokers (steel cables you wrap around logs) and then I couldn't stand it any longer. I was glad when I won a scholarship to U.C. Berkeley - I was glad to have several hundred miles distance between myself and him.

I found out about my father's death from my uncle - Uncle Richard. I received a call, late at night, and the caller said, "Freddy, you need to come home, I've bought you a ticket". I flew back to Seattle, my brother Alex picked me up at the airport. We didn't talk, we couldn't. We both had very confused feelings about our old pappy. Sure, your biology, your culture, your upbringing reinforces "love" for one's parents as an immovable absolute, but there wasn't really a lot of love there.

My brother and I feared my dad - therein lay the tragedy of it.

I felt like my dad had cheated me out of something, something impossible to define, something that makes the difference between a boy and a man - the price you pay for passage.

I'm an adult now, I make decent money (most of the time), but I can't say that I ever made the transition. One divorce, and several hundred gallons of whiskey, later and my life is proof of my misadventure, my failure, my foolish corruption.

My dad would have hated - he would hate (proper tense

right) - what I do for a living.

My dad would see the sin and forget the sinner. Sure, in his judgment lay his own hypocrisy, but that never stopped anyone.

George Halligan, the dude that existed before my dad arrived ... that guy would have loved me - and we would have been good friends. I wish I could see that guy again. I wish I could listen to him, to his stories he kept buried deep inside.

I've read about Iwo Jima, the horror of it. I think men like my dad didn't come back "OK" from that "just war". And Afterwards? - No one was there to listen and no one wanted to hear about it. It was the 1950's and everything was just great, super, and splendid. George Halligan needed something that was missing from his life as well - and I guess that's the inheritance, the thing we share, the cold emptiness of the missing transition from boy to man.

My dad ended up being an adult who killed, for his country, but I don't know that anyone was there to help him understand why - so he stood still, frozen, unfinished.

I was barely 21 when my dad died, and my transition to manhood was permanently fucked.

I was asked to eulogize my father at the funeral mass - I did my best to make everyone feel comfortable, to be "the little Freddy" that made everyone laugh as a kid, the cut-up.

I lied a lot that day.

3. The Video

Enough of that negative BS...

As stated - I work in that part of the "entertainment

business" that mostly involves sex-ploitation. I've done some work in the crazy world of shock-u-mentary (documentaries about aliens, big-foot, Lochness, the hollow-earth, Nazis on the Moon, autopsies, serial killers, Hitler's lovers, white-slavery, etc.), and that is always fun.

I must say, shock-u-mentaries are the least sleazy part of my work - it mainly involves me filtering through "project abstracts" or summaries to find something an "investor" (a drug dealer) would be willing to launder their money through. Sorry - much of porn and low-budget cinema is a vehicle for money laundering ... really ... sorry you were too stupid to know that.

However ... my main gig is finding "talent" for soft-core and hard-core sex films (porno). That is, until a few weeks ago.

A few weeks back I was surfing YOUTUBE and I found myself intrigued by something really amazing - amazing in the sense that it was grainy, poorly shot, badly produced, hideously provocative.

The show, the show most of you know now as "People Time" (that title does sound ridiculous), had the general "feel" of a 1960's TV broadcast, in crappy low-res colour. The actors spoke in some made-up language, and the words you could see weren't really words - or if they were, they were words in some language from some place not far from the edge of bum-fuck nowhere ... like Afghanistan or some shitty place like that.

"People Time" show had only 10 episodes uploaded when I first came across it - it was all seemingly recorded from some analog broadcast. The fuzzy, non-digital, analog feel made it even weirder.

Despite the crappy nature of the show in terms of broadcast quality, the dress, the style of the clothing looked like the 1970's - wing collars, gold chains, bell-bottoms, elevator shoes.

I was convinced, after the first 2 episodes, that it was some kind of experimental film project being produced by a group of film student ass-holes at NYU - edited in some basement, using a MAC or whatever.

The acting wasn't terrible, despite the fact that I couldn't understand anything they were saying nor could I read any text when it did appear - cuz not text, more like Klingon (hence the film student assumption). But, it still sucked me in.

The story line or plot of "People Time" seemed to revolve around a family of 4 - a mom, a dad, a son and a daughter. They looked like a "white family". They looked, to the casual observer, like a compact version of the "Brady Bunch" - smaller, and hella more twisted.

"People Time" did have sub-titles - but they really sucked. Character names were like "Girl 1" and they said things like "hey Mr, how is dinner" or "Man 2: work was good, drive was not good" or "Wife: husband, should we go to the town to do something?" - kind of like that, really crappy subtitles.

I've watched a lot of Kung-Fu films over the years, so I've seen terrible dubbing and badly written sub-titles - this was the worst I'd seen so far. It was almost as if a non-native speaker, with a child's understanding of the language, was doing the translating.

If you could get past the bad translation in "People Time", what was up with the "Girl 1" or "Wife", seems like the

names of the characters should have been easy enough to translate or just pick names for fucks sake.

"People Time" was a 32 minute program with commercials - and the commercials suffered from the same defective production quality, meaning they must have been part of the show as well. The commercials were easier to understand, despite their bizarre nature, because that's the nature of advertising - more or less assume your audience has the intellect of a coke addled monkey. I could pick out drug advertisements, and commercials for fast-food or cars. The car's, in the commercials, looked a little off - but if this was a student film project, that would make sense too.

"People Time" had only a few subscribers when I first noticed it but that changed rapidly.

The channel author/uploader for "People Time" was anonymous.

The digital name of the author was NED_99876, but when you drilled through to the author's youtube page there was really no information at all - not a website link, no email, no twitter, facebook, nothing. The show looked interesting, and I thought it was weird enough to show my "investors" (drug dealers) and maybe get something together as an offer to the students - 20 grand or something. The thing that really caught my eye was the sex - and man, was it dirty, nasty, sex ...

"People Time" showed lots of people "doing-it", definitely in violation of many if not most cultural norms, taboos (even by today's lax standards).

I can't verify, because the translation sucked, but it seemed as if mothers were having sex with sons, dads were having sex with daughters. There were snippets of torture, vignettes of child and spousal abuse, random beatings, and

some fairly graphic scenes of murder and execution (and a lot of heinous shit that was implied - left to the imagination). If this were a show being broadcast today, then I did not want to know where (or visit any time soon). Shows like this can be found on YOUTUBE - usually not this strange, but strange enough.

Youtube is great for people like me - it is usually a fairly easy way to troll for talent, for the truly borderline and disgusting and thoroughly narcissistic spirits. Sure - actual x-rated crap gets deleted by GOOGLE (they're so nice about doing that), but there is still a lot of proto-porn on YOUTUBE, a lot of edgy stuff.

What do I mean by "proto-porn"? - I mean video shorts that show a lot, but not everything, not the money shot, not the minge or the muff or the cock.

On YOUTUBE, you might find something showing two women doing the "scissor" (which no lesbian has ever said really works), but you won't see their nasty bits (their vagina). You might see some dude balling some voluptuous looking babe ... but you won't see his dick, and you definitely don't get the "money shot". You can find spankings, but no angles showing a hanging vag. You can find other stuff too, but there are limits.

"People Time" had a weird feel to it - "[Videodrome](#)" weird ... as if the limits were removed.

By the way, random - I LOVE David Cronenberg ...

"A History of Violence" might be one of the best explorations of environment and choice exposed to cinema ... I love that guy, Cronenberg. "Dead Ringers" might be one of the creepiest movies in history and that film definitely started me down the road of an almost

instinctual fear of identical twins. Now, when I see twins, I think of that film - icky.

"People Time" felt like something "Maxx Renn" would have plugged into, and that is what got me thinking about the film students and the true source of this YOUTUBE series.

I watched all 10 of the first posted episodes over a weakened of weed and wine. I took notes, tried to identify faces - since the YOUTUBE identity was a dead end. I googled the FUCK out of every little trace of information I could uncover - and every path on the web went nowhere fast. I was creeped-out by some of the body language, I was really freaked by the taboos that apparently were broken in almost every episode. One episode, episode 5, was particularly weird, creepy, dangerous, and arousing - if I am honest ...

Episode 5 started out in banal enough way, a "family dinner" trope. The sub-titles helped a bit, but I began to get a feel for the implicit meaning buried in the body language - so episode 5 looked to be about the father losing his job, and confessing that over the roast beef and potatoes ...

About half way through Episode 5, a guy shows up, he looks to be playing the role of "former boss" and apparently offers "the dad" a deal, a way of getting his job back - but there was a catch ...

The dad could have his job back, but his daughter, who looked to be 13 years old at best (maybe a little older), had to be given to him - and the father and mother, with very little apparent concern or moral anguish, handed their daughter over to the grim, muscular looking, well dressed, older man - "the boss" then proceeded to pull the young girl, upstairs, to her room - she struggled, that looked

authentic enough.

The sex scenes between the old man - about 50, not bad looking, muscular, but old - and the daughter were violent, miserable, degrading, and hard not to watch if you have any kink in your brain. I don't support child exploitation - I have lines I won't cross, which is hard when you work the dark side of the porn industry, but I did watch - in a self-hating way.

Even if this girl, the daughter, was actually 18 in real life, she was obviously chosen BECAUSE she looked young and that is almost as bad as the real thing.

If you don't know this, I will clear it up: "legitimate" porn will not exploit children, but "legitimat" porn has no issue casting 18 year old women in younger parts - especially if they look very young. Think about the keyword "teen" and what that implies? It is child-exploitation, even if some 18 year old does the work - but it is technically legal. The fiction is the exploitation, the message is the real crime.

Towards the end of Episode 5, the gratuitous sex completed - not without whips, rope, and a lot of sobbing on the part of the young girl. I wanted to vomit. I wanted to watch more.

At one point, the old man had tied this young girl to her bed ... stretched her out, arms, legs, using a very coarse looking rope. She had nothing on, and she looked even more under-age naked - with barely any pubic hair, and breasts that were still developing. Her contorted, struggling, stretched out body made the form of a sad-X - as if she were being crucified like St. Andrew (St. Peter's brother, as I barely recall from Sunday School). She had light coloured hair - the broadcast, being grainy, didn't provide

enough detail to be that precise. She was beautiful - but a girl, not a woman. Just someone's kid.

The old man, the "boss", took one of her dolls, it looked like a Barbie Doll - but wasn't. He tore off the arms, and used the head and torso as a dildo, and repeatedly, painfully ... well ... you either can or can't fill in the blanks on your own ... his is where the description ends.

I could tell you more, but more would be as evil as watching - and you can't un-watch that fucking shit, nor unread any telling of it.

She was 13, or 12, or maybe 16, who knows - but she was just a girl, a daughter, a human being - and her father, mother, at the end of the episode, were apparently happy that at least the "boss" gave the "dad" back his job.

Alls well that ends well on "People Time" ...

Episode 7 was bad too.

There was a recurrent elderly character on "People Time" - could have been grandma, could have been an old aunt, could have been some nice old lady from across the street. The subtitles were so bad that it was hard to know who she was. She was just some old lady, who said funny things, because the "laugh track" would trigger every time some indecipherable noise came out of her, as if she said something clever or was being mocked. I have no way of knowing if it was the laughter of shared humor or the laughter of ridicule - Episode 7 cleared that one up for me real fast.

This "old woman" in Episode 7 was concerned about something; something she discussed, over dinner, with the main characters (the family).

FYI - by Episode 7 the impact of Episode 5 on the daughter

was apparently erased, as if nothing had happened, as if no trauma, no rape, no abuse had occurred - that was almost as creepy as the "incident" itself.

The old woman had something troubling her and the family looked concerned as well ...

The father went into another room, by himself, and made a phone call. Before dinner was finished, a knock on the door, and 3 men dressed in black, wearing helmets, with strange looking symbols on their jackets, grabbed the old lady and took her away - who knows where they took her ...

I imagined some "body dump" in some horrible part of a lost city ...

I imagined a shallow grave, or maybe even some pit ...

I even remember thinking about that scene from "Soylent Green" - where E.G. Robinson had his final farewell conversation with Charlton Heston and he tells old Chuck the deal about "what's in the food".

I imagined the worst, and didn't need to see it - that's the sign of great story telling!

The family didn't laugh after the old lady was taken - they just sat there, in silence, for a few moments. Then, the "dad" said something (again, I have no idea what he said) and it must have been funny, because the laugh track was triggered and the family - mom, dad, daughter and son - all smiled, coyly. Episode 7 was over.

For the rest of the 10 published episodes, "nice old lady" was nowhere to be seen - she was replaced by "nice old man".

I finished those episodes that long weekend, and I felt miserable afterwards - but still compelled to discover its creator.

This wasn't the first time I'd seen horrible people doing horrible shit - I've been working in porno. No - it wasn't the gratuitous exploitation, violence, or even murder that was disturbing - it was the idea that this show was apparently a sitcom, a situational comedy, a nice, funny, program for the "family" - and the acting didn't suck.

The thing that protects your soul, even when watching some of the worst porno, is the acting - it's shitty. The shitty acting allows you the persistent reminder - "this isn't real, this isn't happening". The production quality of "People Time" might have been crap, but the acting wasn't crap - it's why I could understand so much of it without understanding the words, the language.

Lots of sitcoms push the limits, even today - and certainly the adult cartoon craze has pushed the envelope further. But even a show like Southpark, which I love, has boundaries - and an absurdity that allows one to escape.

"People Time" bespoke a general cultural perspective - twisted, jaded, messy and without remorse. I can stomach a lot, but I usually expect some release from the fiction - and "People Time" didn't provide that.

I was confused. I couldn't guess at the origins of such a show.

For those of you who don't know - Russia produces a LOT of edgy, unregulated, horrible smut. It's why I suspected, initially, that this "show" was really being produced somewhere, over there, in Russia.

If you see "rape" or "faux rape" on the internet, and it depicts "white people", more often than not it was made in Russia or some former Soviet state (or somewhere in Eastern Europe). To do terrible things to humans, human life must be cheap - so find where life is cheap, and you find the

origins of a show like this.

Sure - there is nasty stuff produced in other parts of the world, the ethnicity is usually a give-away, a tell. There is nasty stuff produced in the United States, but that is harder given the stretch of our current police state - harder, but not impossible. I didn't know where that thing was produced - after the long weekend of watching each episode, taking notes, etc, I was left with 2 valid possibilities:

A) Russian Mob produced it.

B) Some kind of nihilistic NYU student film project was behind it.

The film project angle seemed possible, if only because of how dejected the current generation is - how disenfranchised, how lost. And the acting and the sets - sure, the video quality was bad, but even that seemed "artsy" to me.

It's no mystery that there are no jobs, or very few, for the young these days - college degree or not.

It's no mystery that the "enlightenment view" of humanity is no longer the popular view taught in university courses. Students are taught by professors that they are "victims, objects, machines, without dignity or freewill" - so it wouldn't have surprised me if a bunch of film-school graduate students made this thing in some Soho (NYC) basement, using a cadre of teachers and freshman (very young looking freshman).

By the end of that weekend, the YOUTUBE channel hosting "People Time" had 20K visits - which was a lot, in such a short time.

"People Time" was going "viral".

"The true authors of this show would soon reveal themselves", I thought, because that bizarre notoriety would at least lead to talk-shows, book deals, etc. I wanted to get ahead of that. I didn't love the content - it went too far for me - but the concept was intriguing, and I knew how degenerate the public was.

The idea of a show produced, in a dystopian world, could be just enough "meta" for the hipster crowd and maybe the kind of thing HBO would pick up - and tame, a bit. Fact is - it was the kind of show, as gritty, disgusting, as it appeared to be, that could allow me an entrance into the world of "legitimate" entertainment. I so wanted to do work that wasn't just porn, all the time.

I needed to find that show ...

I spent time that Sunday night, after finishing those 10 episodes, practising "foot tricks" - I would try to do stuff just using my feet. One of my weirder fetishes.

Ever since college - I would attempt to open doors, type on my computer, dial phone numbers, with just my feet. I wouldn't call it a "talent", just something I did when I was drunk/high and bored. I began surfing the web, looking for info on this creepy show, using nothing but my right and left feet. I even drank my wine, a few glasses, just using my feet - and then I passed out.

Everyone has at least one skill - my feet had more than one.

4. My old friend Kurt

Since I had no good information on who or what made "People Time", I decided to speak with my old friend Kurt ...

When you work in entertainment long enough and you are smart or lucky enough, you will get to know those select

few who are in "the know" - almost like rhizomes spreading below the muck, to everything, everyone.

Kurt was one of those well connected people - but if you saw him, walking down the street, you would think he sold life insurance.

Kurt Morgan had started out, long ago, in the 1980's, as a public defender.

Kurt had scruples, he had values, back then. He was one of those "anti-Reagan, anti-Capitalist, Christic Institute" liberal douche bags - and then life, as life often does, hit Kurt at 50 MPH while he was walking down the side-walk.

Kurt got involved, in 1987, with the wrong crowd. He had taken the case of Nathaniel Trent - a C.I.A. contra/drug-runner - and he believed it was a "good case". Arguably, the case against Nathaniel was fabricated, the Federal Prosecutor was charging him under RICO (for racketeering) but there were no co-defendants. After serving in Vietnam, Nathaniel had decided to do a little work for the CIA and the CIA repaid him by planting 2 pounds of semtex (plastic explosive) on his twin-engined Beech-craft - along with a kilo of cocaine. Nathaniel was arrested when the bomb didn't go off, and since all his assets had been seized he requested a public defender. Kurt took that job.

Kurt did his best to defend Mr. Trent.

Kurt prepared a solid brief and he was definitely a man gifted with persuasion. Kurt was very close to winning the case for Trent ... and then suddenly ... quite inexplicably, his client (Nathaniel) backed out and plead guilty.

Later, in 1989, Nathaniel was murdered at Lompoc prison (California) while awaiting sentencing. Kurt's situation

only got worse from there. Sometime in 1990, he never told me the full story, Kurt was taken to an unknown location with a bag over his head, beaten for several hours, and asked politely to forget about Mr. Trent and to change his practice, give up on being a lawyer. It took several weeks for Kurt to recover from his injuries, the savage beating, which included bruising to his liver, spleen, and spine. Even to this day Kurt has a way about him - a door opens, a phone rings, a firecracker goes off, and he simply freezes for a second ... it's as if Kurt is having a seizure, more likely the effects of that beating.

The criminal underworld attracts two basic types of people: the broken and the sociopathic.

Kurt was a broken, wounded, man in the early 1990's.

After recovering from his CIA provided beating, Kurt spent a few years on disability, drinking too much, and letting himself sink deeper into self-loathing. After a while he found himself hanging out in those strange places that only the scum get to know - those bars, those holes, those dimly lit caves, in E. Los Angeles and along Hollywood Boulevard.

One day, Kurt was talking to a guy at one of these bars ... let's call him "Marcel".

Marcel recognized that busted, broken, little boy in the body of a 39 year old man.

Marcel offered Kurt a job, an easy one - "just be a lawyer on call".

The job was really about passing messages to the Mexican mob in prisons across California, but Kurt was being paid \$10K a month (off the books) to do this. Kurt couldn't say no and Marcel (being a sociopath) knew how to get wounded people to say yes. This is how Kurt ended up becoming who

he was/is - or perhaps it's just a story Kurt tells. There are a lot of liars in L.A. - it's the foundation of our local economy.

I met Kurt after an incident involving "ecstasy", a porn star, and a porno-flick gone bad.

It was 1998, I was still new to the "industry" but definitely pigeon holed in the porno/exploitation/b-movie world.

I had worked with a local drug dealer/rapper named "Q-T" to put together a project for some investors from Northern Mexico (cartel-Mexico to be more precise). The plan was simple, as it always is - take the cash, open the accounts (you always opened several bank accounts for several fake investors), purchase the equipment and licenses (licenses make everything seem legitimate) and hire the directors, production team, and actors (porn stars). You usually took out loans - back then it was "Yen" from some local Japanese investor, at very low rates. You didn't use the money for the movie - this was one of two mechanisms for laundering money back to the cartel. The second mechanism was the money made off of the porno film itself. We usually took out, in Japanese loans, no more than 300% of the films budget - any more would have been too obvious. Since so many business people used the "yen carry trade" (using the Yen's low interest rate to purchase assets in other markets), the regulators steered clear of us - we were simply doing what Wall Street was doing ... just using porn instead of "real estate".

This was my first project where the title "producer" might be applied, if such terms had meaning in the world of porn. My name was never in the credits, but I coordinated the whole thing - and I was kind of proud of it.

The movie, the version that was finally edited, was called "State-Pen-IS" - it was about a beautiful computer nerd (woman) tasked with setting up internet, in the prison library, for a bunch of muscular, depraved, desperate, well oiled, male prisoners ... want to know the rest of the plot? - figure it out for yourself.

This first big movie of mine had issues, though - and the main issue came in the form of an actress named "Shelly" (who knows what people's real names are in that world).

Shelly really enjoyed "X" or ecstasy, and she had an undiagnosed heart defect.

At that time "X" was the thing to do amongst the young, the "rave" purveyors, and especially amongst the gay-fetish-porn underground. Shelly did a lot of "X" and she didn't really take care of herself. She was 25 years old, not bad looking, probably beautiful if I'm honest - I balled her one night, after a shoot, and it was good. Her breasts were untouched by a surgeon, her body was soft and firm, she simply had great genetics - and no tattoos (I hate tattoos).

But ... well ... Shelly was also a drug fiend ...

Shelly couldn't wake up in the morning without dropping "X".

One night, while hanging out with the cast of "State-Pen-IS", Shelly had gotten bad "X" and had a stroke (or an aneurysm - I don't really remember). She could have been saved, but one cast member, Neal, gave her a very crude version of CPR and broke her ribs - shoving one of her ribs into her lung. She died in seconds; the party ended.

"Q-T" was not pleased ...

Shelly was "property" according to the "Jalisco Clan", a

very brutal cartel from Tijuana (Mexico).

Shelly had gotten into a lot of debt while studying at Ball State in Indiana. Her "X" habit began as a freshman and by her junior year she had amassed over \$50K in debts to people who didn't renegotiate on interest. At first she kept the local university dealers under control with sex - but eventually this ballooned into a "cartel situation" and the cartel had other plans. She became property - a pretty, voluptuous, brunette, piece of property. She was shipped to California, placed on her first porno set at 21, and the rest, as they say, is history mother fuckers.

"Q-T" was now responsible for her debt, and he figured that meant I, Randy Suits, was responsible.

I did not have 50K dollars (actually, it was \$100K at that point because that's how the world of underground banking and compounding interest and penalties work).

I definitely did not have 100K dollars.

Luckily, "Q-T" had a facilitator who saw value in my talents - that guy was Kurt. Kurt and I met over some drinks at Corry's Bar - not far from the flashpoint of the riots in L.A. (1992) - and we hashed out a plan. I would get the porno finished, period, or I would "end up with my nutz stuffed in my mouth". Part of the deal meant the cartel would have the right to seek pro-bona work from me, periodically, for the rest of my life. This deal kept me alive - and alive was good for someone who had just turned 25.

The Monday following my "People Time" binge I gave Kurt a call.

Kurt didn't own a computer or a smart phone.

Kurt had one very old, crappy, Panasonic word-processor for

any paperwork he needed to do - but usually he had a part-time secretary for all the paperwork. Kurt didn't even take notes - not really. He figured, and in hindsight I get why, "if it's worth knowing, people like us need to memorize it". He would, periodically, scribble shit on a napkin and stick it in his pocket - but I found out that this was just one of his mnemonic techniques Kurt used for remembering crap. Kurt has an amazing memory. None of that photographic, eidetic, bullshit - he simply remembered shit, important stuff, months ... even years ... later.

For Kurt, his "social network" was a land-line phone number that he changed every few months and an old-school answering machine. Getting his latest number was more about him, calling his "friends", after changing it. That was a quarterly ritual for him.

Sure - Kurt could be found at the public library using a computer to research something on the web.

Kurt wasn't really crazy or a Luddite - he didn't hate technology. He simply found that owning a computer was too risky for people operating in "the other economy". Some of his cartel friends would make fun of him for that ... up, and until, they were arrested ... enjoying extended stays at Lompoc.

So ... I made my call to Kurt; I left my message on his machine.

I sat around that Monday, thinking about the pitch I would use with HBO or Showtime and fantasizing about meeting with the execs from the "legitimate" economy. Sure - this was nothing but stoner fantasy, but it was the very best and highest quality stoner fantasy. I had a medical marijuana card for fuck's sake. I ordered kebabs from the middle eastern place just down the street ... had a good meal and

fell asleep.

About 2 pm I was awoken from my nap by Kurt.

"What's up?", Kurt asked brusquely.

"Nothing dude, just needed a little help with something."

"What is it?"

"Dude - it's not a big deal, just something I'm looking into as a project."

"What is it?"

"Not something I want to discuss over the phone."

Kurt was always paranoid, and he didn't smoke weed. I was paranoid, because I had just finished vaping a few hours ago. So we were both pretty neurotic at that point and well synchronized.

"Ok, lets meet at the dog park ..."

"Yep - see you there."

Kurt didn't talk long on phones ...

I know it is a mobster film cliché, but it is a cliché for a reason. After "Snowden", after all of the NSA spying revelations, I am still amazed at all the Americans who believe their conversations over the phone are "private".

Kurt understood a long time ago, going back to the 1980's, that only idiots had subversive, illegal, or sketchy conversations on the phone. America is filled with idiots these days.

The dog park was just a few blocks away, and it was just the thing I needed - a nice walk, on a February day, in Los Angeles. I showered, changed into some jeans and a t-shirt, and made my way to the street.

I rented an apartment in an old L.A. building, circa 1930's - by no means a "national landmark". There was no elevator in my building - all stairs.

The temperature outside was 66, you could almost make out the sun through the smog, and the traffic was light, despite being a work day. Kurt used the dog park with me - as our "reserved location". Kurt had other locations he used for meetings with other folks. Kurt was a compartmentalizing genius.

I got to the park and Kurt was waiting.

Kurt was one of those throwbacks who wore a suit everywhere. Now, in his 60's, he looked distinguished - but a young guy isn't really caught dead looking like that these days. He wore pin-stripe, grey, in a sheer fabric, with a white shirt and bowtie - a suit tailored for these warm, dry, climes. He wore glasses, and he usually strolled about in a panama (hat). His glasses were ray-ban prescription - the kind that could change their tint between outside and inside. He was neither fat, nor skinny ... normal looking ... and about 6 feet tall. Kurt looked a bit younger than his age, but he didn't date so he didn't care - I'm not sure I've ever seen Kurt with a woman (or a man).

"Listen, I don't have a lot of time. Raul and I have to meet later", Raul was the current street king for the Jalisco Cartel in L.A.. "Raul", or Robbie Ramirez, was a shadowy figure, someone I had been lucky enough to avoid over the years.

Raul took over local control in 2008 after a bloody series of street wars broke out in Compton - much of which concerned pirated cell phones and control of said pirating. Raul had a reputation and he was definitely on the "sadist"

side of the sexual spectrum.

Raul supposedly raped another man's woman in front of him, personally, before doing the same to his son and daughter - and then he simply left the man alone in a room with a pistol. So, no - I was glad, up that point, to steer clear of Raul.

"OK - here's the deal, do you know anything about a hard-core video series called 'People Time'?"

"Nope, not familiar - is it L.A.?"

"Nah, not L.A.. I found it on YOUTUBE."

"Yeah - I don't own a computer and I never surf videos at the library."

"I know, I know ... I was just wondering if you could put out your 'feelers' and see what's up?"

"Maybe, but I don't know what I will charge you for it ... wouldn't you be better off asking Sarah?"

Sarah was a black-hat hacker friend - an acquaintance of Kurt's and myself. She was ex-military, pretty (in a geek-emo-pretty kind of way -- a lot of porno was heading that direction), a ginger (a real ginger) and she was bi-sexual. Kurt once tried to recruit Sarah to do a porno and Sarah kicked him right in the kidney, badly injuring Kurt, Karate style. I don't know if Sarah knew Karate, or was simply in decent shape and watched Karate movies - but Kurt buckled over and never attempted to "make her a star" again. Sarah, who was 1/2 Jewish (whatever the fuck that means), made money by getting a hold of sensitive information, bank statements, phone records, and aggregating online content - to assist in shake-downs, extortion, blackmail. Sarah's code name, as a hacker, was "She-Hole" (or Sheol - that realm of darkness from the Old Testament). Her name fit.

"I really don't want to bring Sarah into this ... but I dunno ... you might have a point."

"Randy - call Sarah. I'll see what I can find out ... I've got to go", Kurt looked at his old-school analog watch as he said this.

I handed Kurt a one-page summary of "the facts" - he wouldn't take more than one page of anything from ANYONE at any time, it was just his way. I got up and walked home. I left Kurt to do his magic, which usually involved a lot of walking, a few phone calls, and many meetings not unlike the one we just had. Typically Kurt would charge about \$3,000 for something like this. In this case, I could see it being as high as \$10K - and "that wouldn't be a bad price, I could pay that" is what I thought at the time.

I took a detour on the way home and stopped at Ike's "dispensary" for some re-fills on my "prescription". I never understood the medical marijuana nonsense. I totally get that it helps people who have illnesses - I simply won't dispute that. I just don't get why they don't make it legal for everyone ... really? It seems like everyone in California has a "medicinal" card now, and the dispensary is just a store you go to in-order to get weed.

I picked up half an ounce of "Raspberry-Kush" and a dozen "cookies" for the freezer. You never want to find yourself, especially if the apocalypse hits, without weed.

When I got home I warmed up my "Vapor Brothers" unit, cracked open a decent pinot-noir from the Carneros region of Napa, and watched old episodes of Sealab 2021 - I needed that. It was like dry-cleaning for my brain. After watching those horrid, twisted, episodes of "People Time" ... well ... I needed to try, at least, to un-remember what I had witnessed.

5. Kurt is upset

I gave Kurt a week or two to work his magic.

There was no point in rushing it. Kurt was definitely the "tortoise" when it came to problem solving or "facilitation". He certainly did not have flash, he drove an old beat-up sedan, an Oldsmobile or some kind of craggy car like that. He kept his car mechanically sound, but the inside was filled with trash, fast-food cartons, evidence of Taco Del Mar, stacked copies of mass-mailing inserts and old newspapers.

Yeah - Kurt didn't have flash, but he was methodical. He had his ways "connecting the dots".

3 weeks passed and I didn't hear from Kurt. Then suddenly one night on my doorstep was Kurt - he never did that, he never showed up at anyone's place and never held a meeting without a phone call first.

"Hey - can you let me in ...", Kurt always looked a bit frantic but today was exceptional.

Kurt was sweating, the sweat was showing on the outside of his suit, kind of gross looking really. He normally didn't give off much of any body odour. Kurt didn't use "products", he simply didn't let himself get that "rank" and I'd never really seen him that dishevelled ... but he smelled too.

"Can I come in ... LET ME IN!"

I closed the door behind him.

My apartment is not spacious.

I have a couch, a nice chair, and some bean-bags - I didn't get company that often.

Kurt made a beeline for my "comfy chair" and I took the

couch.

I shut off the vape immediately, because Kurt didn't like that shit - but he actually looked at me, strangely, as if he wanted me to leave the vaporizer on.

"Can I get you something man, some water, coffee, a glass of wine ..."

"I dunno ... maybe ... I just don't really know." Kurt was scaring me now. He was always efficient with his language and avoided ambiguity. I sometimes think his ability for caginess in his speech, or ambiguity, was beat out of him by those CIA thugs so many years ago.

Nevertheless, Kurt didn't say "I dunno" - he said, "I do not know, I will find out". This didn't seem like Kurt - my visitor that evening.

"Do you have any Scotch?", Kurt asked with earnest.

"No dude - I don't drink that shit." I don't drink that shit.

"Well, I'll take some wine if you have any ...", I did drink that shit.

I poured Kurt a glass of a not-so-bad Cab from Oregon, and we both sat there, for a bit, staring at my messy coffee table and sipping our wine.

"Do you still talk to your mom?", Kurt asked.

"My mom, uh ... sometimes ... at Christmas and shit", my mom and I had not spoken in almost 10 years.

"That's good ... when I was your age, I didn't talk to my parents often ... you will regret it later if you don't", Kurt finished off his first glass and I poured another from the open bottle on the table.

"Listen, I'm really confused ... Don't we usually do the 'dog park' thing?"

"Yeah, I know ... I didn't know how to reach you ... my phone has been disconnected for a week."

"That's weird ..."

"Yeah ..."

"What happened?"

"Oh ... well ... I had it disconnected ... I'm certain that my phone was being tapped ... well, of course it is being tapped ... everyone's phone is tapped ... I just think that folks are actually listening right now and that concerns me."

"What happened ... is it related to Raul?"

"FUCK NO!!! RAUL HAS GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS THING!", Kurt yelled - Kurt doesn't do that either.

"Hey - I'm just asking."

"It's not fucking Raul ... it's something else ..."

Kurt hands shook. I think he drank, maybe he drank a lot - but it wasn't DT's or withdrawals or anything as pedestrian as that.

I've been around a lot of desperate people.

Porn attracts desperate people.

Every so often you encounter an actress, actor, editor, camera guy, or director who convincingly tells you "I'm in porn because I want to be in porn" - but, really, these are almost as rare and impossible as unicorns. Mostly what you find in porn are the busted, broken, beleaguered and abused.

Kurt was really orbiting the outer realm, the space of

"shady dealings generally", but he never seemed desperate - he didn't have that "porn industry neediness".

When I saw that Kurt's hands were shaking a tiny voice inside of me - the voice not yet deluged by THC - said something, barely audible: "Freddy, something is horribly wrong." My fake name never clued me into shit - my real name had a big fucking mouth, despite being buried in my subconscious.

Kurt was terrified - sure, he was never a "brave man", not someone to feign false courage. Kurt just never, ever, got this visibly scared - I think it was his nihilism that usually acted as a breakwater against his dread.

"Sorry, sorry ... I'm really sorry ... I'm really screwing up ... I haven't been back to my place in a few days ... I won't go to the office ... I bought a ticket on the AMTRAK, last week, just to see if anyone would follow me to Portland ... I don't know if anyone followed me ..."

Kurt looked out the window, into the night. He grew quiet for a few moments, and then turned to look at me.

"It's funny ... Randy ... When you are young, you really expect life to make sense ... eventually ... someday ... you tell yourself 'all this crazy shit will make sense' ... that's the thing about being young ... you expect there to be some explanation when you are old ... and that's supposed to make being 'old' easier ..."

"Kurt, you're losing me", and he was.

When Kurt showed up that night, I had just finished half a bottle of wine and an 8th of really good shit. I wasn't totally lost in the conversation, but I wasn't really ready for a heavy discussion either.

I remember thinking, "I should have made coffee".

"Kurt, is it something I can help with?", Kurt looked at me, queerly, like he was trying to discern the meaning of some ancient rune stone or crap to that effect. I was nervous. I've never been a fan of staring - it is simply not cool. But he just sat there staring at me and then blurted out ...

"I WISH YOU HAD NEVER HAD ME LOOK INTO THAT FUCKING GROSS SHOW ... THAT FUCKING STUPID SHOW ... I DIDN'T WATCH IT ... WELL ... I WATCHED ONE EPISODE AT THE LIBRARY ... MAYBE MORE THAN ONE ... BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS STUPID ... A STUPID, FUCKING, ASININE, GROSS TV PROGRAM ABOUT REALLY CREEPY SHIT!"

"Kurt, it's just a bunch of youtube videos - probably some college students in New York or something ..."

Kurt's hands stopped shaking for a moment, and an almost serene look came over him - like my father's face a few hours before he died.

"I'm not so sure ... I did a little digging ... I don't think this show is fake, I don't know where it's produced ... was produced ... I don't want to fucking know, but it is certainly not a product of the United States ... it's NOT fucking San Fernando porn and I really doubt some kids at NYU produced this thing."

Kurt's voice took on the tone of a parent or priest at that moment. It was blood curdling how quickly he composed himself. He stared at his hat on the coffee table for a few seconds, then completed his thoughts.

"... but it's worse than that Randy - wherever it was made, well, there is this creepy feeling I get ... It's like the 'background' of each shot was authentic too ... Like those fucking clothes the people wear or those weird commercials ... or those symbols ... words ... not in any

language I've ever seen ... to the casual observer it seems like a ruse, make believe ... but I really don't think it is ... I think that show came from some place ... and it's real."

Kurt stood up, grabbed his panama he had resting on the table and made his way to the door.

He stopped at the door and without turning or making eye contact he said the following:

"Don't talk to Sarah ... don't get her into this ... whatever the hell it is ... it's trouble fella."

Kurt let himself out. I don't know where he went.

Kurt was a compartmentalized guy - a guy used to keeping his business, and secrets, locked in his head - in neat, tidy, boxes. I got the feeling he was protecting me because that was his style too - keeping toxic information from people who have no business knowing nor use for the information if they did "know". He was withholding something - I felt it. To this day I don't know what he knew, who had spoken to him, and why he seemed to be acting like Peter Lorre from some old-timey black-and-white movie.

I assumed, after he left, that the Russian mob had paid him a visit. That's happened before, especially with porno - and man could those Russians push your buttons. He didn't really deny the Russian angle, and I've been expecting noise from that world for years.

I even thought that Raul had spoken to him, that thought gave me a shudder - Kurt would lie about that, too, just to keep me at a distance from Raul. Kurt was a buffer - he was a guy who provided me with jobs without exposing me to the nasty under-belly bullshit ... or at least the worst of it. That buffer was apparently having a nervous breakdown. Raul

could do that to people - scare them into madness.

The "Kurt angle" was a dead-end as far as "People Time" went.

I should have simply given up on "People Time" and worked a different project - I had others, though mostly more of the same porno shit ...

On the other hand, I could keep hold of this tiger's tail/tale - this weird show. Men can be very stupid - even the smart ones. Men will play catch with hand grenades just to prove how large their dicks are ... I was no different.

"Kurt's just nuts, it had to happen eventually ...", that's what I was thinking. I decided to talk to Sarah (She-Hole/Sheol) and see if she couldn't help. Sarah was tough - she'd hacked NSA servers, for real. Sarah wasn't likely to get freaked by the tawdry nature of the subject matter either, she was kind of a freak herself.

"I'll talk to Sarah - she'll track this thing down."

I never saw Kurt again.

6. She-Hole (Sheol): the She-Hacker

"No, no, no, no, no, no ... fuck you Randy."

This was Sarah's typical greeting ... at least when it came to me.

Sarah was a 29 year old university drop-out who had served 3 years in the U.S. Air Force as a networking/computer technician. Sarah was one of those airman (air-people probably these days) who worked closely with both civilian government employees, private contractors, intelligence agencies and military - her primary job was to manage operational systems for one of several drone management centers.

If I need to explain WHAT a drone is, at this point in our tale - well, I would feel convinced that you've been living in Adak, Alaska, without a TV for 15 or 20 years. But here's a quick summary: a drone is a remotely controlled device for observation OR offensive weapons delivery. Drones are used to assassinate "enemies" of the United States - sometimes while these enemies are attending weddings, funerals, birthday parties, or elementary school. Drones are used for surveillance as well - and also for support for combat troops.

Sarah made sure, while she was on active duty, that all of the critical real-time computer systems were performing optimally - and that nothing interrupted the flow of data, nothing. Drone missions depended upon real-time high-performance networking without interruption.

Sarah didn't talk about her military experience much ... well ... not that often.

One night, a few years back, she got real drunk and described a conversation she had with a drone pilot - let's call him "Chuck".

Chuck had received orders to take out some high-level operator in the Sudan. This "operator" was apparently a father, and a husband, as well. The bad guy had decided to go for a picnic, and he never went anywhere without his own wagon-train of body-guards, militiamen, and other sundry protective layers. Chuck was supposed to take out the bad guy, and to "keep other effects" to a minimum. "Other effects", according to Sarah's telling, were things like kids being blown apart by cluster bombs - or burnt to a crisp by white phosphorous. Chuck's mission was successful - from his vantage point everything looked fine. But it wasn't.

Sarah had found out that Chuck's mission was a total fuck up.

The bad guy who was taken out (along with several children) was a U.S. CIA agent - an American. Somehow the wife of this agent found out about the hit. The agent had been undercover, for a few years, with a fake family - fake, in the sense that the CIA paid the family, the widow, to pretend to be the "bad guys" family.

The wife, the real wife, found out about how her husband actually died, and then she found out (who knows how) that Chuck had pulled the trigger.

The "wife" was childless - they were holding off until the "bad guy" (excuse me), American hero, made it home. She, the "wife", the real wife, was 35 years old.

The wife showed up at Chuck's apartment with a gun.

She said she didn't blame him, Chuck ...

She said she knew that this kind of thing happens.

She said, according to Sarah's maudlin retelling, that the only regret she had was not being there when her husband, the "bad guy", was blown apart with a hell-fire missile. She didn't attack or ridicule or demean Chuck in anyway whatsoever - she just stood there ... pretty, innocent looking, crestfallen.

That woman, the real wife, the centrepiece of Sarah's drunken tale ... she pulled a .38 revolver from her pocket and blew her own brains out in front of Chuck. Likely bits of brain, blood, bone, ended up on Chuck - one never knows.

Sarah didn't tell me what had happened to Chuck - maybe she didn't know. She passed out on a stinky table, in a nasty bar, I don't even remember the name of that stupid fucking bar.

Sarah said she left the service shortly after Chuck's saga. I've pondered this second hand tale of Sarah's, over the years, off and on, while listening to the garbage on CNN or Fox News (and frankly PBS as well) - all the bullshit, empire building, will-to-power, American garbage. I wondered how many Chucks were out there, and how many end up in mental health facilities. I felt sorry for Chuck. He signed up thinking it was a game, and a patriotic one at that - cuz, frankly, that's how those fucks at the Defense Department market jobs like this. They convince you - it's a game, and it is "good for America". But what if it's not a game, what if it's not good? What if, on some deeper level, you can feel the tug of human suffering even through the digital wilderness of cyberspace? What if, and I don't know, but ... what if humans have connections that our "geniuses" don't understand quite yet? What if men and women have souls? What if killing others ravages the soul - torments, and tortures us? Maybe warfare isn't a video game, isn't cool, isn't funny. Whatever - Sarah had her own issues like the rest.

People attack pornographers ... for the filth. I think that's funny. The U.S. Defense Department uses violent video games and war-porn to make killing look "fun" - that's a kind of sleaze I would never get involved in. You've got to have standards.

"You fuck, I'm in the middle of ... something."

Sarah was indeed in the middle of something.

I had let myself in, as I often did if she left her door unlocked - which Sarah did too often for my taste. She was a voluptuous looking 5'2'' minx, red hair (actual red hair), with pale skin (an occupational and lifestyle choice for her) and breasts that screamed child bearing. I never

really beat up on Kurt for trying to coax her into porn - Sarah could have made a decent living, an "honest" living, in porn as well ... especially with that fucking red hair. But Sarah was also 50 times as smart as the smartest person I ever knew - and unlike most men, she didn't spend a lot of time advertising it.

It wasn't just that Sarah was "computer geek smart" - she was that, definitely. I couldn't write a macro in Excel to save my life - spreadsheet formulas were about as advanced as I got, but I could tell by the books that lay strewn about her loft that she knew a lot about computers, and a fair amount about other shit as well. Smart girls, in porn, exist - and are usually the most depressing lot of drug addicted misfits you could ever find. Sarah smoked weed, and that's it.

Sarah's loft was located in the "Valley" - San Fernando Valley. It was one of those rehabilitated canning plants, a building that had once housed working people when America still built and made crap. Now, the "Cannery" (and it was called that - probably to mock the ghosts of hard working men and women) was just a refab shell of its former self. Her loft was nice looking, but she kept it in utter disrepair. I used to think my interior decor sucked - hers was worse. She had a mattress that she kept wedged in the corner - no mattress frame, just the box frame and the mattress on the floor. She had a small table, 2 chairs, a worn out sofa, an a LOT of large plastic containers - and clothes, papers, and other debris all over the place. Her apartment always looked like some place ransacked by the cops and I suspect that's why she kept it that way.

She was DEFINITELY in the middle of "something" ... a young latina girl's muff to be precise.

She was bi-sexual, as noted previously, and once in a while had a guy over - that was not entertaining for me. But, when I heard the moans in her short hallway I decided to hold back on making my presence known for a minute or two - because my lecherous side demanded it.

I peaked around the corner, and her friend couldn't see me - well, she could if her eyes were not obscured by a silk scarf covering them.

Sara was deep in this girl's mound, her back and buttocks arched and pointing my direction. Sarah was stunningly proficient at cunnilingus - her tongue reverberating, touching, as fast as any piston in a sports car going 200 MPH. She was clearly bothered as well, because every so often she took one of her arms, tugged on her nipple, and fingered herself - but never getting off of task, never relenting, as that young mocha nymph writhed in bursts of pleasure.

I read once that saliva is slightly acidic - don't know if that's true.

I've often wondered, when practising the ancient oral arts myself, if there was a point - an unknowable demarcation - when this "pleasure" really became pain. It seems like any flesh would become coarse, roasted, dry, broken, by a relentless taunting of the human tongue. A man's tongue, a woman's, is rough - perhaps not as rough as a cat's tongue, but that's another story for another fetish. It just seems like the clitoris would begin to bleed at some point.

I didn't have Sarah's endurance, when it came to oral sex. I always scored satisfactory points with my lovers, but never spent more than a fraction of the time "down there". Frankly ... down there grossed me out, except abstractly. Abstractly I find it a turn-on, from a distance, especially

when women are doing it. Myself, well, I've come to see it a the deed we do to get what we want - fair exchange in the world of sexual politics.

Sarah flecked her tongue, back and forth, until this young blindfolded girl let out an almost hideous scream - and then she, Sarah, stopped.

"You want something to drink?"

The girl shook her head, the rest of her just stayed - not motionless, but trembling.

Yes - I guess I am a pervert too.

That's when Sarah noticed me, and that's probably why she had a very jaded look on her face ...

"Randy ... you know I have a shotgun in the closet."

"What about that drink?", I said with my crooked smile.

With that invasion she ran, naked, boobs and cheeks bouncing a bit - because she was nubile but she didn't really have any fat on her to speak of. She also didn't trim the muff - she left it as muffy as it could be, which was also a turn on for me. I was noticeably hard.

She had a Mossberg, I think, a 7-and-1 pump action - and she pumped it for dramatic effect. And that, to be honest, was sexy too - this beautiful, naked, woman holding a shotgun my direction ...

"Hey ... I can come back later ... I have a job for you ... good money."

Sarah's eyes became wide, she placed the gun on the table - money was a bigger turn on for Sarah than sex.

"Celia ... can you come back later?"

The young latina ripped the blindfold off ...

"My name's Maria ..."

"Oh, shit - I thought you were joking ... heh ... I call all my girls Celia."

"Fuck you bitch ...", and the latina girl, quite cross, threw on her rather flimsy sun-dress, grabbed her shoes, and made a show of stomping and clomping out the door.

"How much money? What kind of job?"

Sarah didn't like people fucking with her or interrupting coitus, but she despised "normal" work even more.

She knew I paid well, and always paid upfront - and she knew that I was discreet. She suspected I was a perv, but I don't think she minded so much - I was a low-level perv. She and I never did it, not in "reality", but I have to be honest - on more than one occasion I rubbed one out after meeting with her.

"It's a research project."

She frowned a bit, thinking I needed her to dig up dirt on some city councilman.

"Not one of those screw-jobs again, they eat at my soul Randy", she said, whining a bit, as she pulled her jeans up around her waste.

For Sarah, a "screw-job" was an extortion scheme. For someone who rarely locked her door, she really respected the idea of privacy - up to a point.

"It's not that ... it's some YOUTUBE video I need you to track down ... something really messed-up ... but still kind of entrancing ... different ... I think I can make money off of it if I can find the folks who made it."

"You're not talking about 'People-Time' are you?"

At that I was a little taken aback, but not really.

Unlike Kurt, I can't imagine Sarah surviving a day without her high-speed internet connection, her apparently pricey LINUX box, and the jumbo hi-res TV (50 fucking inches) that she used as a computer monitor. She also had some decent speakers too. When most of her compatriots were carrying around tablets, slim-books, Sarah held on to her tower - and kept upgrading it. Me, I have no clue about the innards of her computer but when it turned on it made a groan almost as audible as that chica that just left. Maybe it was the lava-lamp looking liquid cooling she bragged about, but it seemed to have some kind of animal trapped inside - a hungry, fast, furious, beast.

So, yeah ... not surprised that Sarah knew about "People Time". I guess others had to know - with thousands of views already, on its way to millions. It was popular.

"That fucking show is messed-up Randy."

She said with a large smile, handing me a beer.

"You know - they've uploaded some more episodes ..."

I didn't know that ...

I had been a bit freaked out by watching the first 10 shows, so I really didn't want to dive into more. But I assumed that would happen, that there would be more shows uploaded.

"How many are there now?"

"Oh, I think 17 ... I've watched the first 12 ... when I'm watching it, I get a bit queasy ... a bit sick to my stomach ... don't really know why ... don't think it's the content that makes me sick, more like the production methods used in making the videos. Some kind of weird interlacing or transform is being applied ... creates a

digital vertigo kind of thing ... It sounds weird ... but it almost seems like several video feeds patched together and so the audio/video is just slightly out of sync ... but in-sync too ... most wouldn't notice that ... I'm kind of OCD as you know ..."

Yes - Sarah was a bit OCD, which never quite explained the state of her apartment. She once said she had "target OCD" when it came to data, information, logic, but I suppose there are many obsessions. Her obsession came in the form of bits and bytes.

"Do you think it's on purpose ... the way it was produced?"

"Nah ... I'm not sure ... could be ...", Sarah shook her head as she spoke, "... I've seen a lot of avant-garde stuff like this in recent years, you know, film projects where the movie is shot in HD-Colour but the film maker converts to black-and-white or TV style analog for god knows what strange artistic reason ... but this doesn't seem on purpose."

"Why?"

"It's too good Randy ..."

"That's not right Sarah - it looks like shit ..."

"Not what I meant dude ... it looks 'too good' as in 'not something easily done synthetically' ... too good doesn't mean 'looks good' ... it's hard to create a noisy message where the noise is not pseudo-random."

I was puzzled by what she said. I kind of thought that it looked a little crappy, and I believed that was on purpose - someone using their Mac or some kind of thingy ... but I would never have said, "shit brah, this crap looks too exquisitely crappy".

"Listen ... I know computers aren't your 'thing' Randy, but

they are mine ... when I say 'too good', I mean that you need to have an understanding of signal theory, a graduate background in mathematics, Fourier transforms, and a lot of time on your hands to pull apart a video signal and patch it back together this way ... I guess there are noise introduction functions that can be used to make something look a little terrible ... but I just don't see it ... this wasn't made 'terrible' by design."

Sarah logged onto her computer, began typing feverishly - with an annoyingly similar expression on her face to the one when she was going down on that strange latina girl a few minutes ago.

"See here ..."

I looked, I had no idea what I was looking at - but nodded, cuz guy.

"This is the signal spectrum of a digitized analog signal, this other one is a digital signal converted to faux analog and this last is 'People-Time' ... notice that curve distortion there ... on 'People-Time'?"

"Sure ...", I lied.

"That's a hiccup that happens periodically in the signal, across multiple channels, but almost randomly ... but not quite random as well ... I'm not saying it isn't fakery, it most likely is, it just seems like a lot of effort to turn what was likely an HD video into 600x800 crap ... I don't get it ... like I said, it gives me a headache ... I can't imagine how an epileptic could watch this fucking show ... ha! That would be funny ..."

"It looks like you've already done some digging?", I was worried that she might already have a client.

"Heck no, I'm just a curious bitch ... but I could dig up

the maker for you ... if you would be so nice to hand over a heavy envelope full of cash Sir!", she said while overdoing the whole female eye-batting crap ... even over done it was enticing.

She always smiled when she said "cash", and that kind of turned me on too.

I handed her the envelope, \$6,500, and we sat and talked for a bit. Mostly about the few topics she and I had in common - lady problems. Sarah was a flirt, a bit of a tramp, but she was selective. I would even call Sarah predatory - she stalked her prey, like that young girl from the Valley who left so abruptly. Even when she's wasted, and she does get really wasted sometimes, she was still good at finding that girl (and sometimes that guy) that she wanted in her rather dishevelled bed.

I never understood that bed. It always looked rancid and she was always bringing home some fairly nice specimens, as far as that goes. I think young people, these days, are kind of hopeless - they won't admit it, especially the ones that have "good jobs", but they are. I'm in my 40's now, and should have a family, a mortgage, a nice car, a wife, dog, etc. I think I have more in common with kids Sarah's age than my own generation - I can feel the hopelessness too. A pointless pursuit of an American dream on life-support.

Sarah and I talked into the early evening, she asked if I wanted to go to a party - and I declined. I might have felt the angst of youth, but I really wasn't young any longer, and I preferred my solitude these days to the ridiculous chatter of sports, music, and other check-out line nonsense.

We said our goodbyes and I left her to the task of finding

me the author of "People Time". It was just a few days earlier I had met with Kurt and I really didn't believe anything had befallen him and I had no reason to mention that to Sarah. For all I knew, Kurt was fine - just having some kind of panic attack. It happens when you get older, especially when you start seeing the grim reaper "hanging" outside your apartment.

Besides, I wasn't sure Kurt could help me with "People Time" but I knew Sarah could do it. Beyond being smart, and messy, and a little slutty, she was also diligent - she said she would have her first report in 3 days, and I believed it. Perhaps her work ethic came from the service - who knows ...

But those red heads - don't ever fuck with them.

7. A friendly chat at the pier

The next day, after meeting with Sarah, I decided to grab my tablet and go to the beach.

I went down to Santa Monica and strolled along the pier - it was late Winter in L.A, which is like summer in many places, but the air was cool enough that eye candy and other distractions were lessened ... I needed that.

I was going to start putting together my first legitimate proposal for a show in my career - a real pitch, to a legitimate media outlet. This wasn't going to be some scheme to transform narco-dollars into "tits and ass" - no way. I had a few people, contacts, that were not underworld types and with the right presentation I felt like I could sell "People-Time" to HBO or SHOWTIME or even one of the main networks. But first I needed to get the show, buy it, from the owners - or at least coopt them.

L.A. isn't always horrible, with respect to smog - kind of

a myth.

If I am to believe Kurt, the smog used to be way worse.

That day, that March day, not quite Spring and barely Winter, the sky was hazy blue, the temperature was about 67, and there was this amazing breeze coming in from the water.

My tablet was connected to the Santa Monica WiFi ... so I could do this, work from the pier, take calls, and "do my thing" - although I didn't do it often, well, I did it enough to stay sane.

As a kid growing up in Washington State I used to spend Summer days alone out on the water, on the Puget Sound - just me, a fishing pole, and my family's 10 ft Livingston skiff. I would just sit out there, mostly trying to avoid my dad and his yelling, and just imagine, dream, think. I had a small am/fm radio tuned into whatever station I could find. I would listen to music and just peruse my thoughts as they levitated in the golden sun reflecting off that deep green-blue water. Our family spent weekends at a family cabin along the Sound, it was respite from the crap at home.

But that day at Santa Monica ... well ... that's the last normal day.

I worked on my proposal, using some template I found online, but I also day-dreamed as I did when I was a kid ...

I imagined the house I would own, the parties I would go to - not porno parties, but legit ones.

I imagined meeting Morena Baccarin or Scarlett Johansson or some other beauty ... and we would talk ... and she would adore my genius as up-and-coming Hollywood royalty ... and

we would jump into my re-built 1968 Pontiac GTO convertible (assuming such things still existed) and drive the old California highways up the coast ...

This was nice, escapist, shit.

I sat there, on the pier, on the wood bench, doing work and looking periodically out over the water for inspiration.

"Hey, Randy ..."

And then some random jerk came by, and my fantasy-bubble popped.

"Do I know you?"

"No ... sort of ... we have a mutual friend, Kurt ... Kurt Morgan ... I think you know Kurt?"

"Kurt ... nope."

The best thing to do, especially in situations like this, is to feign ignorance.

It's not just a movie contrivance, it's really about survival. In the legit world, running into people who know you and you don't know is not necessarily a bad thing, but in the other world, the darker world, it is rarely a good thing.

"Sure you do ...", that dude, wearing a rather ugly blue pastel jacket, gave me a big man hug ... a creepy one. He was a large man, and had a bit of a pot belly, but he wasn't noticeably scary looking - not in an obvious way. What made him scary was how ordinary looking he seemed, in that stalker/serial-killer kind of way. So now, with him sitting beside me, we were apparently familiar. That was great.

"What kind of a name is Randy? ... Randy ... That's a funny name ... 'Randy Suits' ... how long did it take you to

think up that name?"

"Listen ... dude ... I'm just hanging out ... I think there's an elementary school just down the road a few miles ..."

"HA ... that's funny Randy ..."

His tone changed, his fake attempts at congenial familiarity were melting away - revealing a dark inner core of woeful contempt. This guy was a freak - but he was controlled, measured, and he was pushing buttons till something paid off.

"I know you and Kurt are pals ... I'm trying to track him down, I've got some work for him ..."

"How did you know I would be here? Nobody knows I'm down here", I shouldn't have said that. Asked that question like that ... that was escalation ... making it known that I knew this was all bullshit. I was pissed and my judgement was shit. That strangely weird looking gentleman was caught off guard and his fake smile turned into something else - a flattened scowl.

"Well, heh ... that's funny ... that's a really good question ... Freddy ..."

That was bad ... only Kurt knew my real name was Frederick ... then, as if a switch had been thrown in this weird-guys brain, he grabbed my neck with his right hand, and he pressed something hard up against my ribs with his left, presumably a gun ... I dunno ... could have been a knife ... could have been a set of keys ... what the fuck did I know.

Pulling me in close, he whispered in my ear ...

"Fucker, I know you know Kurt and I know you understand me. Do you understand me ... fucker ... do you?"

I nodded, and didn't say shit.

I barely held onto my tablet, and simply went into one of those apparently catatonic states I used to, as a kid, when my dad started yelling at me.

This strange dude clenched my neck harder.

"Fucker, you tell Kurt that Daniel is looking for him ... he'll know ... I know you know him fucker because I tracked him to your apartment ass-hole ... you tell him that he either gets it to me or he won't find one fucking place on Earth he can hide. Can you do that for me fucker?"

I nodded, blankly, again.

"Good ... you see ... nice people can do nice things for other nice people ... eh, Freddy?"

This guy, well ... he let go of my neck and meandered back down the pier. I sat there, for about 15 minutes and didn't move. I used to do that, as a kid, when my dad was angry. I guess I thought if I stood still it was like playing dead - it never worked.

The afternoon was wearing thin, and I was more than a little stressed.

Side note: many years ago a doctor of mine evaluated me for a panic attack.

I was still in my early thirties and I thought I was having a heart attack ... but it wasn't, it was a panic attack.

The doc, after testing me, and doing an ECG, and putting me on the treadmill, suggested XANAX. I didn't like XANAX or VALIUM or any of that other crap. I never smoked much weed until that experience, and I began experimenting with weed after ... as self-medication ... and it did work - but not without a price.

Weed was always a danger because weed made everything, even really harsh shit, seem normal and ok.

I once told a psychiatrist friend of mine that "weed was like having a bucket of frosting you could paint the world with, but it also could give you diabetes of the soul". These days, I tried to restrict my usage, but I binged every so often - especially on weirdly dreadful days like this.

After my friendly chat, with that "normal looking" psychopath, I needed to get home and get high.

I would have preferred to just vape in a nice way, and not to vape because I was having a panic attack - but I was having a panic attack, and I needed to do something.

I stopped at the grocery on the way home, grabbed another bottle of Pinot and a frozen pizza, and just vaped away the rest of that miserable afternoon, evening, day, night.

I wasn't really worried about Kurt until this point, and I tried calling - forgetting that his phone was off the hook. I heard that message, that shitty message, the one where the phone company tells you "the number you are trying to reach is either disconnected OR is no longer in service - hang up and try again". I don't know why they tell you to "hang up and try again", I guess they assume we're all drunk fuckers or whatever and the more often we repeat the same stupid thing, the more likely it will work.

I passed out and woke up at around 2 AM.

"Freddy", my battered inner self, started talking to me ...

"Freddy" said that Kurt wasn't alive. He said Kurt was gone, was dead. He said that the man I met would be back.

"Freddy" told me to pack my shit and move back home, to WA state. Get away from L.A. ... why did I come here? This

hell-hole, L.A.?

But I wasn't a kid, a child, and there really wasn't anything left for me there, in Washington.

Sure, maybe a sibling or two who would put me up for a week, "hey kids, here's your long-lost Uncle Freddy", but they would tire of me fast or I would tire of them. Either way, there wasn't anything there for me, and whatever crap I left in L.A. would likely slither up from behind.

2 AM is a weird time of night - morning ... whatever ...

I just don't know how to classify 2 AM.

I usually slept well, but on those rare occasions of insomnia 2 AM was like some queer netherworld and not a faerie tale land or some whacked out Disney crap ... 2 AM for me was like waiting for a firing squad.

2 AM was a reminder that maybe we just die, maybe it doesn't matter that we were alive in the first place, maybe the whole world is shit.

I could get really melancholy at 2 AM.

8. Field Trip

Shaken, and kind of jaded from the drinking/weed binge the day previous, I woke up and made my way to the shower.

My cell phone ringer was on, and I usually had the volume up loud - which was good given my state. I was in the shower, just standing there, turning the heat ever warmer, when I heard my phone go off, and thought, "... maybe that's fucking Kurt?".

I didn't get out of the shower fast enough, but I could see it wasn't Kurt - it was Sarah. And she had actually txt'd me as well.

"RANDY - COME OVER"

At that point, after the previous day's fun with the puanchy stranger, I could use the company - but this time I did something that Kurt had once suggested, because of my paranoid state of mind.

Kurt had thought a lot about people following him over the years ...

Kurt had once given me some quick and dirty instructions on how to avoid being followed:

1. Don't leave via the front door.
2. Never return a phone call from the same number.
3. Turn the cell phone off, take out battery, place in plastic and wrap everything in 2 layers of tin foil.
4. Leave your lights on, TV on or radio on - but not too loud.
5. Put on different clothes - nothing heavy.
6. Don't use credit cards - just whatever cash you have.
7. Take the bus, get off the bus halfway to your destination.
8. Don't take your car - big mistake.

I left my radio on, my lights on, and went out the back alley fire exit from my apartment.

I looked around and didn't see anyone.

I walked 5 blocks, and then took the bus most of the way to Sarah's.

I got off at a bus stop 10 miles away from Sarah's place and went into a coffee shop for a bit. It seemed like no one was following me and no one was ... well ... I think no one was.

I asked the waitress if I could borrow their restaurant

phone ... it was cordless ...

I called a cab, took the cab the rest of the way to Sarah's. When I got to her place, I thought - "fuck, Kurt would be proud". Kurt would have been proud.

At Sarah's, the door was locked - this was a bit unsettling. I usually never knocked, and there was never a reason to knock - hell, Sarah didn't even lock her door when she went out.

"Randy, come on in ... quick", Sarah was frumped-out, sweat-pants, raggy t-shirt, and the body odour of someone who had been eating pizza, drinking beer, and staring at screens for hours straight.

"Randy, this is Brian - Brian this is Randy ...", Brian waved his hand and I returned his gesture with a nod.

"Brian is a friend of mine from my freshman year at CALPOLY ... he's getting his PhD in Astrophysics ... any ways, Brian is helping me with your research project."

"Did you guys find something?"

"HELLS YEAH!", Sarah smiled beneath her scraggly red hair, her blood-shot eyes.

"Brian knows where that show was made ... and it gets weirder."

Brian was non-descript, had a beard (as so many kids do these days), and wore a Rastafarian style wool cap but he was whiter than me.

I didn't think they'd been having sex, but I could see that Sarah liked him - I suppose "Brian" was her ideal match, but they were star-crossed, doomed, in some personal secret way. Not my business - I didn't really care. She sat very close to brian, rubbing her right hand on his left leg

periodically.

"Sir, this YOUTUBE channel was created at the Henlis Observatory ... you know, that private large array of radio telescopes that douche from Seattle created a decade or so ago ..."

Nick Henlis was a software billionaire.

Back in the 1990's, when the FEDs stopped "listening for little green men", Nick decided to take over and created his own private SETI project in Wyoming - up in the Cheyenne mountains, on a plateau 7,000 feet above sea level.

The SETI stuff had always seemed lame to me. I wasn't really sure what they expected to find, if anything, and even if they did - so what? The messages were coming from somewhere in the past and it was doubtful that any message was really going to be meant for us personally. Whatever - I just didn't get that crap.

"Listen Sir, this program isn't from Earth - it's from space."

I can't say I reacted to what this geek said. You have to believe something to react to it.

Unknown to me, Sarah, or the geek from CalPoly, a whole bunch of other videos had been uploaded to the YOUTUBE server - totalling 35 now.

What was a private search, on my part, was not very private any longer.

Lots of geeks, dweebs, nerds, were on snap chat, discussing this weird show. It had gone viral - and I had missed the boat. My biggest concern, at that moment, was losing the opportunity of my life - I was such an idiot. I was worried about that beach house ... that party ... that ride up the

coast with 'Scarlett'.

"Randy ... it's not a TV show from anywhere on Earth ... it's not from Russia or China or Mongolia ... tell him Brian ... tell him the cool shit ..."

Sarah looked at Brian with an almost manic expression, smiling too wide for normal, and Brian, in grand monotone contrast, continued ...

"Randy, there's a black-hole called GISA-987X ... it's not the biggest one out there, but it's pretty big and it is approximately 25,000 light years away ..."

I didn't speak geek, but I did know a few things. I knew a "light year" was roughly the distance light would travel in 1 year - I took Astronomy as a freshman ... I knew some shit.

"So what?"

"So, this signal has been travelling through space, and has been - I believe - fragmented ... fractured ... it is at least 25,000 years old ... probably not much older ... there are encoding segments on the video that are not normal for digital film ... not normal for analog signals either ... when we do star studies, using radio-telescopes, we encode our recordings with these reference numbers ... you see them here ... you can see them, right Randy?"

Brian motioned towards Sarah's big screen monitor ...

I saw what looked like row, upon row, of numbers. I nodded - but I didn't know what the fuck he was talking about.

"These entries, embedded in the video, well ... they tell me these videos didn't just come from multiple sources, but here's what's weirder - they came from multiple observation sessions, over many, many, months - perhaps years ... perhaps many years ..."

"I'm sorry Brian, I really don't get it ... are you saying these videos were sent at different times?"

"No", Brian's succinct no stung a little, like some adult telling you (the kid) that you don't understand - that patronizing undercurrent crap.

"All of these videos were sent out, from some place, at the same time ... they were corrupted ... probably by a pulsar or something ... who knows what ... it could have been a pulsar ... but something messed up this signal during its travel through space ..."

Brian could see I was confused. After pausing for a moment, he continued ...

"Imagine if you took all of your photos from youth, every single picture, printed them out, stuck them in a blender, and then periodically poured pieces of the that image slurry onto your tabletop ... little piles of pseudo-random crap ... that would be akin to these videos ... they were received by the Henlis Observatory as noisy garbage ... god knows how someone figure out there was something to it ... a feat of mathematics I can tell you ..."

"But really, a pulsar?", Sarah interjected.

"Maybe not, I don't know Sarah ... the shredding of the signal, the distortion, the space-time latent effects in the very tempo of the signal ... it all points to some kind of pulsar ... I really don't think the black hole would do this ... but it's all conjecture ...", Sarah and Brian looked at each other, smiled, and pondered that thought. I sat down on one of the crappy wooden chairs near Sarah's kitchen table. A half finished bottle of Jack Daniels was just sitting up there, so I proceeded to take a few tugs ... as the geeks "pondered".

They spoke, and talked, and I sipped from that bottle ... then I had to add something to the mix.

"There's this really creepy guy following me Sara ... following me and Kurt."

The attention of the geeks was immediately directed towards me, I was 3 tugs in, on the bottle, at that point.

"What's wrong with Kurt?", Sarah asked worriedly.

"I don't know ... I mean, I asked Kurt to see if one of his contacts knew something about this 'People-Time' show ... then, a few weeks later, he comes over to my place really distressed and tells me to not look into it ... to give it up ... I just didn't think it was anything to be concerned about ... you know Kurt ... it's just fucking YOUTUBE."

"Randy ... I can't imagine it is related to this ... I mean, there are 35 episodes up now ... and CNN just came on a few hours ago and said the President was going to do a press conference at 9 PM ... address the nation and shit ... I don't see why this would be a problem for Kurt now ... people already are talking about the Henlis Observatory ... Fuck ... It's not like Brian was the only geek to make this discovery ... Some dudes in China did a week ago, supposedly ... and some maths ass-hole in Moscow came out with his analysis yesterday ... Maybe Kurt was disturbed by the show ... he's wound pretty tight man ..."

Kurt was wound tight, but I don't think what I saw was his unwinding.

"Yeah ... you're probably right ..."

At that moment I could see my whole imaginary future ... the yacht ... the amazing home in the hills ... the "good life" ... all melting away. Whatever this show could have been for me personally was no more ... I was just one more

schmuck awaiting the great historical announcement - "there's life in them there hills ..." Or, something to that effect.

Brian could see I was a bit down-trodden, so he threw me a bone.

"Hey, Mr. Randy ... Sarah and I are going over to my lab at CalPoly ... we are going to watch the press conference from there and I was going to show Sarah some of the equipment I've been using to analyze the signal ... the signal is still out there ... perhaps a whole new episode to grab ... could be fun?"

I bet he was going to show Sarah his "equipment", but I couldn't hold it against him. If I were his age, and Sarah was looking at me that way, well ... I would show her my equipment too.

"Sure, but I can't drive ... and I'm taking this bottle ..."

Sarah jumped in the shower, put on some clean clothes, and we left on our trek.

Brian drove - he had a fucking PRIUS.

I sat in the back, twisted sideways, because that's about as much leg-room as can be found in such a horrible car. Sarah sat in front, intermittently looking at Brian. I'd never seen Sarah like this. I would have called it "love" if such a mirage were real and healthy, but it wasn't the beef-cake salivating she was known for. She looked, longingly, and had a strange spark in her eyes ... and maybe it wasn't just about Brian.

Sure, the episodes were pretty vile - but maybe it was an X-RATED channel, on some planet, far away ... and maybe we, as humans, were in no position to judge. Sure, it was

equally weird that they seemed so familiar, so like "us", human. They seemed 100% human, and that's a lot to wrap your brain around, careening down a California highway, in a PRIUS, with whiskey bottle in tow.

How could it be? You expect green, slimy, grey, unfamiliar - you don't expect 1970's BDSM porno-sitcom (if such things are possible). Worse, I hadn't been listening to the news - and the news was all about this weird show, and what it meant for humanity, and the experts were saying "don't judge them, what would other beings say if they had only fragments from one of our horror films or news feeds from some war-torn nation". It seemed like this show, "People Time", was forcing everyone to take a pause - to reflect.

Religious experts, ranting about hell, came on every once in a while - but those kooks were mostly ignored by the guy on the radio ... then announcer.

We were on the road for several hours, 3 or 4, I don't remember - I had passed out after the first 45 minutes. It was getting dark, about 8 PM, and the campus was alive with activity. Like some weird new holiday had been declared. People dressing up like characters from the show, drunks, madness. I'd been to New Orleans once in my life during Mardi Gras and this looked similar. The same debauch, the same sense of excited, energetic, furious, crazy.

Brian's lab was across campus and I was sober enough to walk.

I held that whiskey bottle, and the few sips that were left, and followed Brian and Sarah. The lab was far enough away from the bustling crowd that it did get quiet - sort of. There was a dorm nearby, but it seems that dorm was populated by a more sedate crowd of merry-makers.

"This is CRAZY!", Sarah exclaimed, probably because she was

having a flashback to a more innocent time in her life ... before the military ... before she entered the hacker underworld. I had witnessed a transformation of a darkly-jaded emo-chick into something else ... somebody I'd never met.

"Here's my key-card ...", Brian mumbled and into that post-modern looking building we went.

The building itself looked like so many contemporary science, lab, type fucking places - glass, bare steel, polished concrete floors. His office, and lab, were on the second floor - and other than a janitor no one was there.

"I've got a monitor in my lab, we can watch the news coming in ..."

I sat there and stared at the screen, while Sarah and Brian pretended to be geeking-out. My drunken state had returned, as I finished off what was left in the bottle.

"Hey, Randy, you doing ok?", Sarah would do that every 5 minutes, almost as if she was auditioning for "concerned wife" and Brian was the agent now.

"Yep, fine, is there any place I can take a piss?"

Brian pointed towards the stairs behind, "yeah, back the way we came, by the information desk". I vaguely remembered a desk, like that, and I stumbled back that direction.

I was on the toilet when I heard the screams ... I was taken aback by the whole thing, and then "Freddy" started talking to me again ... and then I got scared.

I walked back to Brian's lab, slowly up the stairs, making sure to not make much noise. The good news: there was a low rumble, from the quad, of students yelling, screaming, partying, celebrating "life on other planets". It was an outrageous festival - and the tremors were felt all over.

When I got close to Brian's lab, I could see the outline of the man who had a gun pointed at both Brian and Sarah - it was that weirdo ... the stalker-guy ... Mr. Pauchy-Pastel ... the guy looking for Kurt.

I wasn't sure what to do - I thought about calling 911, but my phone was wrapped in foil. I could re-assemble it, but I was drunk, jaded, not really focused. Next to me was the fire alarm, now that did sort of make sense ... to pull it ...

I was still out of sight of the stalker, I pulled the alarm, immediately all hell broke loose.

I guess labs and other geeky places have a different series of events when it comes to fire. It was nothing but flashing lights and a loud voice ... a voice asking "everyone to exit the building immediately".

Sarah might have been smitten by Brian, but she wasn't just any geek or girl. She saw an opportunity, clocked the guy in the head with a laptop on a nearby stool, and then she and Brian made their way my direction - and we ran for the car.

I wasn't much of a runner, never have been, and I wasn't in good shape.

I was still drunk, but I pressed on.

My legs were stringy and weak when we reached the parking lot ... when we got to Brian's car, I was winded and I simply collapsed in the back seat. It turned out Brian was a better driver than I realized, because he got us out of that place fast - and without cops pulling us over.

The drive back to L.A. was too long for me. Sarah and Brian couldn't stop talking - it was geek talk, so I could pick up bits and pieces ... when flashbacks of high school

physics made this feasible. We listened to excerpts from the President's speech on the radio:

"... TONIGHT THE WORLD CAN STOP HOLDING ITS BREATH,
WAITING FOR PROOF OF THE AMAZING UNIVERSE THAT SURROUNDS
US,

PROOF THAT OUR WORLD IS SMALLER THAN WE THOUGHT AND ...
THAT OUT THERE ...

IN THE DARKNESS ...

ANOTHER WORLD IS TALKING, SPEAKING, AND WE MUST HAVE THE
WISDOM TO UNDERSTAND AND TO LISTEN ..."

The current president, as with most of his predecessors, went on and on about "hope" and the "future" and "meaning" and "brotherhood" and other kinds of inchoate nonsense.

A panglossian narrative, torn from some cheesy Spielberg flick, was spewing out across the air waves - everyone was ecstatic that we finally had proof of life, out there, some place. Sure, "People Time" didn't exactly paint a great picture of that intelligent life, but perhaps we were merely picking up their adult channel.

As one of my college profs once said: "based upon human experience, if we ever did detect a signal from space it would likely show one alien fucking another". I paraphrase my prof a bit, I think he said it in a slightly more profound way.

"I still don't understand the distortion in the signal ... and ... actually ... isn't it kind of weird that they look exactly like us? Humans?", Brian kept jabbering about the show and Sarah kept nodding. They were in shock, but they handled it by babbling. That attack, back at CALPOLY, left us all a bit weirded-out.

"Maybe there's a general principle here - maybe life can only evolve in one way ... you know ... based upon the general constraints of physics and nature?", Sarah continued.

I just tried to sleep.

I think, during that short ride, I had a dream.

It was a memory or a dream.

I was sitting on a boat, somewhere on some beautiful stretch of water. It was a Summer day, August, one of those days where the water, the waves, the wind, all told a familiar tale - "the easy days of ignorance pass quickly". I laid back on my chair, on my boat, with a golden sun shining down and I felt my heart beat a little slower, a little less pressure against my chest. The ride from CALPOLY to L.A. was only a few hours, but just enough time for me to dream, just enough time for the whiskey drunk to leave my system. I awoke at the highway off ramp, not far from Sarah's apartment - I had only one thought: "Sarah, do you have any weed at your place?"

We parked Brian's car and stumbled up towards Sarah's place. The neighbourhood was quiet, it was almost 2 AM. The door to her apartment creaked as she opened it, she turned on the lights and we plopped ourselves down on her one, ratty, sofa.

After a few seconds, my one thought bubbled up again:

"Where's the weed Sarah?"

And then a monotone voice came from the direction of the bathroom.

"Yeah, Sarah, where's the fucking weed?"

"WHO THE CRAP ARE YOU?", Sarah said in a rattled way.

The man, holding what looked to be a pistol, probably a GLOCK (everyone knows what a GLOCK looks like - even douchee anti-gun folks), walked out of the darkness of the bathroom and into the dimly lit view of the the three dishevelled hunks on Sarah's sofa.

"Where's Kurt?", the man asked, still monotone.

"Listen, dude, we don't have any money ...", Brian should have kept his mouth shut.

The man, wearing black sweatshirt, worn jeans, looked to be in his 50's. His hair was grey, uncoloured - which, at the time made me think "cool, this dude doesn't try to be anything other than his age". His hair was short, military style cut, and this gaze was focused, stiff, resolute. He pulled a cylinder out of his pocket, a black tube, and began screwing it on to the tip of his GLOCK - and that's when I thought, "crap, we're toast ... I wish I had some weed."

"So there's no confusion, I'm gonna ask this one more time ... where's Kurt?"

"Man, we don't know shit ...", I wanted to tell Brian to shut the fuck up. But, to be honest, I also remembered something I'd read once - "if you are being chased by a bear, you don't need to run faster than the bear, you just need to run faster than the other guy being chased by the bear." Brian was clueless, a dweeby-nerdy ignoramus - Brian thought he lived in some safe cocoon called "America", and his learning curve was steep.

The strange man, in scrappy clothing, pressed his pistol - with silencer - up to Brian's forehead. He looked at Sarah, then at me, "where's Kurt?".

Sarah was not talking, she was probably paralysed with

fear. I didn't know where Kurt was, but saying so wasn't going to help me or Brian.

The shot was fast, Brian's brains dripped from the back of his skull. It wasn't like the movies, it wasn't loud - but it wasn't quiet. It was more like the noise a glass makes when hitting the floor - sharp, not too loud, but also not a "soft pulse" like the movies - movies are crap.

Sarah was frozen.

Before I knew it (or even noticed it) urine was running down my right leg. In my own defense I'd needed to pee for a few hours - I just held it in. That had been a crazy night, taking a piss wasn't on my radar.

When that strange man saw the puddle at my feet, he walked my direction. Brian's mind was still dripping on the couch, his head tilted over, looking my direction - one eye popped out and the other darkened with blood.

"Buddy ... don't worry buddy ... I just want to know where Kurt is ... tell me where he is?", I still said nothing - but not out of courage or bravery. I simply didn't know the answer. At that moment I wish I had known where Kurt was ... fuck ... I probably would have ratted him out.

The man pressed the gun to Sarah's head, and spoke again:

"Here's what's gonna happen. I have some associates who can spend hours and hours asking questions ... they'll make a mess of your girl friend here and then when they're done and you've watched that, they'll make a mess of you. Now, if you tell me the truth, if you tell me where Kurt is or call him up on the phone, then I can let you guys go ..."

He was lying.

If we delivered Kurt, we were still dead.

He was also talking about torture and that never appealed to me. If you work around the porn industry long enough, you develop a healthy respect for the human mind and its capacity for the depraved.

"Sir ... Sarah doesn't know, but I might know ... or ... I might be able to get him here", I was stalling for time. No one was coming to save us, but I figured a little more time never hurt.

The man handed me Sarah's iPhone that was lying on the coffee table. There were a few drops of Brian's blood drying on the screen. Kurt's number was disconnected, and I felt that this man had already checked Kurt's office. I fumbled about, typing as slowly as I could, I entered 10 random numbers not knowing who was on the other end ... an old lady picked up.

"Hi, can you get me Kurt?"

"There's no Kurt here ..."

The man spoke, "... put it on speaker phone."

I put the phone on speaker, placed it on the coffee table - just on top of Wired Magazine's August 2010 issue - it was torn, stained by coffee mugs and beer cans, and Will Farrell's face looked back at me, taunting me, as if saying, "Pal, you don't have a future ...".

"Listen young man, no one named Kurt lives here, you have a wrong number ..."

The old lady hung up.

The strange man was clearly perturbed. He looked to be seconds from blowing Sarah's head off. And then, I heard a boom that wasn't silenced and this man's chest shattered, gushing, oozing.

Some gang-banger had fired a 12-Gauge at this prick and it must have been a special load of ammunition because the guy had one of those expressions on his face - despite having what appeared to be a 6 inch diameter hole in his chest. He stood there, for a second, and then his legs collapsed under him.

I heard some voice say, "you bitches are really making friends ...", and then I felt a blow to my head and the darkness washed over me, calming me.

For a moment, before I passed out, I thought - "You've been shot in the head Freddy, that's what it feels like". Of course, when you've been shot in the head, there's no "I" to feel shit.

9. The Medium IS the Message - and so is Raul

It was Raul.

I'd never met Raul, I only knew of him. His reputation in L.A., especially the porno/drug arena, was well earned.

Raul was mean, ruthless, without compassion. He dealt in snuff porn, which meant "People Time" was probably one of his favourite YOUTUBE channels. Actually - I tended to dismiss reputation, superficially, as a mask everyone wears. Sometimes, very seldom, the reputation matches the man - in most cases the reputation is just another kind of smoke screen.

"Randy ... how are you my man?", Raul stood there, agitated, holding a 3 foot long chunk of industrial rebar.

"Randy ... are you there? It's time to wake up Randy ..."

Some prick had knocked me out at Sarah's place, I didn't know where I was, what was going on.

We were in some kind of crappy industrial warehouse, could

have been at Long Beach, could have been out in the desert - who the fuck knows. I was tied to a metal chair, they had used about 20 rolls of duct-tape.

Sarah was tied to a metal bed frame, the frame was mounted on the wall. She was mostly naked, other than underwear - and she didn't look so good. The bed frame was hooked up to a DC generator. I had no idea what they had been doing, I guess they'd been shocking her, on that frame. Feces was dripping down her legs and her mouth was gushing saliva. She was shivering and clearly in shock. I had a creepy thought, as I looked at her, tense, body wrenched with pain ... she was beautiful ... even then ... and my dick was hard. "Freddy is a sinner" - that's what Sister Una used to say, before she spanked me ...

"So, Randy, we've been talking to Sarah about this show ... it's a great show Randy ... we want to buy this show ... I think Kurt knows about this show Randy, but I haven't been able to reach Kurt ... be a pal, Randy, and tell your friend Raul about this fucking show ..."

In college I had read Nietzsche - and I was familiar with his notion of "eternal recurrence". Nietzsche believed that given infinite time and finite space, the patterns of existence simply repeated, over and over again, eventually. I dunno ... I'm probably butchering this thought ... but what does that matter ...

At that moment, seeing Sarah near death, in pain, miserable ... remember Brian's brains on the sofa ... recalling that look on Kurt's face as he left my apartment, only days ago ... thinking about my own puddle of urine, all sticky on the floor ... well ... at that moment I wondered, "is this some special story on repeat?" I wondered if this story was going to keep replaying, a

little differently, each time - with some minor variation ... but the ending is all the same: "Freddy, you dirty bird, you're dead."

Dejected, tired, and in dire need of a vaporizer, I spoke:

"Raul, man, I don't know shit. You're the 3rd guy to ask me about Kurt in the last couple of days, and I have no idea where that fucker is ... if I knew where Kurt was I would tell you, but I don't ..."

Raul tilted his head, then looked down at the ground.

Raul was a man in his forties, close to my age. He was Latino but didn't wear the typical clown outfit of a gang-banger. He was well groomed, dressed in nice jeans, a long leather jacket, and a turtle neck sweater - must have been a light weave because L.A., even in Winter, is barely a place for a sweater and jacket like that.

Raul moved closer, kneeling down, only inches in front of me, scraping the machete on the oil soaked concrete floor. After a moment or so he gazed in my eyes - so close to me I could smell dinner on his breath, Italian, a nice wine probably to go with it.

"Randy ... my dear friend Randy ... I believe you Randy."

Raul got up, spoke with the 2 men working over Sarah and they proceeded to take her off of the metal grate and handed her back her clothes. She was still shivering, in shock, but she was aware enough to quickly pull on her jeans and her torn shirt.

While Raul held a gun to Sarah's head, the men dislodged me from my chair. After I was free, they brought us to a small metal container, in the back of a parking lot. The sun was out, a light breeze blew, the temperature was nice - 65 maybe, perhaps cooler. "Winter in L.A. ...", I thought. I

wondered if that was the last time I would see the sun. The container was locked, Sarah and I were left inside. Sarah immediately went to the corner of the container, curled up in the foetal position, and passed out. I sat down, back up against the wall, staring at the few glimmers of light that shown through the rusty holes created by time.

10. Desert Run

I fell asleep again, inside that rusty container - there was nothing else to do, and I was exhausted.

It was easy for me to sleep, just about anywhere.

I've known plenty of people, over the years, with "back problems" and sleeping some place like this, a metal container, would not have been ideal. For me, as tired as I was, as messed up and gob smacked, sleep was simply too easy. I don't think I dreamt, I don't know. I might have slept for several hours or just a few minutes. When I awoke, Sarah's dirty face, covered in snot and blood, was leering at me in the dimly lit coffin - "... fuck, Randy, we need to get out of here ...".

I don't know why Raul and his men didn't tie us up. I figure they must have assumed we were weak and not likely to run or put up any fight and in my case they would have been right. But Sarah ... I don't know. Maybe it was her military training, or maybe it was her youth. I don't know how long they had her on that metal grate, shocking her, but I would have assumed she would still be in the corner of that container, huddled, shivering, in shock. Instead, she was slapping me, pinching me, cajoling me.

"Randy, I don't know how much time we have ... you need to get up, come on ...". Sarah whispered, but with a stern

resolve. Sarah pulled me to my feet, and I could see that she already had a plan in the works.

The container was some old shipping box from Long Beach, low grade steel, bent, rusty. These boxes were designed to move bits of crap from China to the United States and never intended as prison cells. Sarah, with her bare hands, had been pulling on a tear in the lower corner of the container - and she'd done quite well. It was night time again, and who knows how much longer before Raul came back.

"Randy, I really can't do this by myself", I could barely make out Sarah's face. The parking lot lights provided some illumination through all the tiny holes rusting out in the roof of the box - but not much. Sarah's voice was clear enough, strong - I was glad she was so clear headed, but it was off-putting all the same.

I struggled, for a few minutes, trying to pull up more on the corner. It was rusted steel, but it was still steel. Neither one of us was strong enough to do much more to that corner - and it was still too small a gap to escape from.

Side note: it is true that I used a vaporizer, primarily, for weed.

I preferred it ... the vape ... it was simply more pleasurable and seemed "healthier".

But I also tended to go about prepared to smoke, if I had to, and I had a wonderful lighter I had bought in China Town for that purpose - it was like a tiny blow torch, and as luck would have it, it was in my pocket.

I pulled out that tiny little welding torch, and Sarah immediately grabbed it. I could make out a smile, I think, and then she went to work. Under normal circumstances, that little lighter would have been only useful to a dessert

chef but this old container was rusty and worn enough that the lighter did the trick.

It took several minutes, but Sarah was able to weaken that container enough ... with my lighter ... allowing us to pull the tear wider - eventually, wide enough for our escape.

We made our way out of the lot, away from the container and the warehouse and that disgusting metal grate ...

We were in some industrial park, it could have been Los Angeles, it could have been any industrial slum in any part of America.

Sarah broke into an old FORD truck, she fumbled about under the dashboard for a few minutes and then the engine turned over. We drove off.

I fell asleep again. This time, leaning against the passenger side window, I felt almost at peace. My anxiety, my stress, my frantic search for an E-Z path to riches had been burnt away - erased by those crazy days of maddening chaos. The sun was rising, in the distance, and I knew we were heading East - we were somewhere in the California desert, between L.A. and Las Vegas.

I woke up and then fell asleep a few times on that desert road.

I remember Sarah asking me if I wanted something to eat at one point. I hoped she was using cash, maybe cash that she found, but I didn't care. We stayed on that road, and 2-lane highways, for many hours - and I simply drifted in and out of consciousness. I was thinking about that boat, on that gentle sea, somewhere so far away it might as well have been that planet - that strange world sending us messages of sex, violence and decay.

I really didn't know how Sarah kept it together. I felt lucky for that. I was in terrible shape before this all started "happening" - now, I was simply useless. It reminded me of those days I would tag along with my dad, when he went looking at some stretch of forest to buy, to harvest. Those were days when he was happy, and that meant he wasn't angry. I would ride along, on those winding roads in the North Cascades of Washington State, and listen to his AM radio bleat out some top 40 hit - "Touch me in the Morning", by Diana Ross, was a song that resonated for me. As a kid, I didn't know that song was about "breaking up", instead it was the tone, the tempo, the rhythm that made me think of long sunny days, blue skies, and the foothills of the Cascade Mountains like they were the emerald dwellings of some ancient race of giants. Driving through the desert, Sarah at the wheel, my mind drifted as the childhood spirit permitted - and I thought of that song.

I hadn't slept that well in years - without weed of course.

11. Cancellation

I woke, once again, in "chains".

This was getting disconcerting ...

The room was antiseptic, fluorescent lighting, air conditioned.

The walls were painted orange, an institutional hue.

I was hand-cuffed to a large metal table, it was painted some kind of pea green but with the signs of struggle, scratching, all over it ... I made out some pinkish ... reddish colour ... "Freddy is in trouble again ..." ... that's what the nuns would say.

There was an old fashioned closed circuit camera in the top left corner and a mirror to my front - "it's an

interrogation room", I thought.

I don't remember what happened between the truck and here ...

I had a headache, and there was a bottle of water in front of me. Maybe I was dehydrated, I didn't know. Maybe I was hallucinating.

As a kid they showed me those terrible propaganda films, like "Reefer Madness" - our catholic school had original reels of that shit. As a kid I knew it was bogus, but it was funny - to see the over-done version of "madness" and to have it linked to "that dreaded plant" marijuana.

I thought, "shit, maybe I've smoked too much", maybe I've been given some bad shit. Maybe the weed has finally driven me insane?

I drank the water, and sat there, waiting ...

I might have been there hours before I regained consciousness, I had definitely been there hours when the door finally opened.

In walked a beautiful woman, demure, well dressed, professional, black suit, white blouse, the obvious sign of a gun on that small frame, make-up, hair combed back - it was someone I barely recognized, but it was Sarah nonetheless.

"Freddy ... how are you feeling?"

I was in shock, so the words came out sarcastically on auto-pilot.

"Great ..."

"Sure ...", she slid a chair out and sat down facing me, "... this is very confusing ..."

"Fuck you confusing ... I'm having a psychotic break you bitch! What the FUCK is going on! Where's Sarah? Who's this fucking bitch walking around in her skin ..."

"Freddy, Sarah never really existed. I've been undercover for several years. I know you don't believe this, but everything we are trying to do is for your protection."

"Whatever ...", I said, with nihilistic resignation in my voice, "... just tell me when I can go home you cunt."

"You're not going home, and we won't be asking you about Kurt any longer. We found Kurt, just outside of Portland, near the Columbia River ... at a water park ..."

She pushed pictures across the table at me. They were photos of an older gentlemen, slouched over, with blood covering his nicely dressed body. A panama hat on the passenger side seat, some kind of pistol lying next to his hat. It was Kurt, and Kurt was gone.

Sarah, or whomever that bitch was, got up out of the chair across from me and started pacing back and forth as she spoke.

"We really don't know what to do with you Freddy ... Ideally, I would have left you dead in that container ... but your pot addled mind got us out, and that means that I owe you one Freddy."

"What's next ... ?", she could tell from my voice that I'd given up. Of course, I've seen movies, read about people who are near death or at the point of giving up. Some people simply drift away, some people have that last, final, burst of energy. In my case, it was wild cards, dice, and chaos.

"Well, Freddy, you're safe where you're at. We know you are clueless and under control. You can't go home ... you can't

Freddy ... you can never go home ... but ... we can keep you here for a while ... feed you, maybe even get you some weed ... that would make you happy, wouldn't it - Freddy."

In a dejected fashion, I interrogated her ...

"Didn't you know Brian?"

"Freddy ... my name is Sarah ... much of what I told you was true, real ... this show 'People Time' means something different than what most people think ... Brian ... well ... he was one of those people I knew a long time ago ... before the military ... before I peered deep into that ugly hole we call reality ... I've been working undercover, in the porn world, because I knew that world would detect the show first ... 'People Time' ... that kind of show would pique interest ... get people talking ... in the porno world."

"How did you end up in this ... situation ...?"

"Oh ... Freddy ... how did you end up in your situation? How did you end up helping drug dealers clean their dirty money? How did Kurt end up in the role of 'universal connector' for smut kings and thugs and perverts? There's a lot to this story, some of it I can tell you because you are so fucking stupid Freddy ... and I mean that in the nicest way ..."

She leaned back in her chair, took a breath, and continued ...

"About 30 years ago NASA started picking up these signals ... 'People Time' ... it wasn't a show then ... fucking computers weren't strong enough to process the information ... it was just a 'Pulsar Anomaly' ... one of many that were initially considered candidates for an extra-terrestrial message, but then dismissed ... as a

pulsar ... it wasn't until 1995 that they began figuring out what it was ... who had sent it ... so, Freddy, they shut down SETI because of this ... they've been sabotaging similar efforts for years ... they've paid scientists to write papers on the 'waste of money' that SETI was ... and then that douche Henlis came along ... and he threw his money at the problem ... and we knew it was just a matter of time before their observatory decoded the signals."

"So this is real ... this message?", I asked Sarah, and she smiled.

"Yes, Freddy, it is real."

There's a reason people don't call me Freddy - at least not my good friends. Sarah should have known this ... we'd talked about it ... but I could tell that my 'Sarah' and this one weren't exactly the same.

When I was 8, my uncle turned 50 years old - and he had a big birthday party.

I was a kid - kids are stupid, they say things that are stupid, this is to be expected.

I made some comment, to my uncle, like "you look good for your age", and that's all it took for my dad to grab me and drag me up to the cabin.

My Uncle's birthday was being held at our family's beach cabin, on the Puget Sound. I was very sun burned, so the beating I got smarted in ways I can barely describe today without a few tears. I don't know if it was the beating, or the sense that this was the closest thing to a hug I would ever get from my dad - this was intimacy for him, beating me, swollen, skin breaking from sunburn. He would drop f-bombs and scream "god dammit to hell", and invoke my weak-child name, "Freddy". Since that time, the word "Freddy"

has inspired dread, terror, anger, hate, sadness, but never fondness or peace of mind.

"Sarah" leaned over, and whispered in my ear ... "... sorry about this Freddy ...".

I don't know what I was doing - but I simply snapped, and not in a "catatonic" way.

I swung my right leg under hers, knocking her back. As she tripped, her head hit an exposed AC outlet on the wall, and it was clear from the blood pouring out that she was not getting up.

With the same leg, I pulled her body over, slipped my foot out of my shoe and checked her pockets. I found some keys, one of which seemed to be for shackles. I stretched, contorted, and got the keys on the table to unlock my cuffs. Who knows how much time I had - zero time.

Another random thought: don't fuck with desperate, tired, hungry people ... just don't. Sure, many people will simply sink into despair, but every once in a while you come across someone who will simply go berserk. Sarah, or whoever the fuck that was, had seen me regress, hide, pull away. We had gotten drunk and high together - she made assumptions ... she thought I was a lost little boy and perhaps she was right. But every single person has a breaking point, and at that point ... the breaking point ... they either fall apart or stand up and fight.

I was clearly broken ... and very much insane with rage.

I grabbed her gun, I knew how to shoot - Kurt had insisted I learn properly.

I made my way out of that ugly little orange room and down the corridor.

The "fat man", the man Sarah had supposedly knocked out,

was standing there - eating a burger. He looked at me, for a second - because that's all he had ... a second. I fired. I didn't care who heard. I hit him in the head, and he dropped like 300 pounds of shit.

I kept moving forward, until I got to a large room, with monitors, computers, and 1 or 2 douches sitting in front of them - I blew their fucking heads off too ...

I see no reason to glorify it, I can't even really take credit ... "Randy", the man I'd been for many years, was a coward - he froze when shit fell apart. But "Freddy" ... ? Freddy was a pissed off kid from many decades earlier ... a survivor ... boiling ... inward ... terrified and ready to hurt someone.

"Randy" would have simply drifted away to that special fantasy land, somewhere under the golden sun - sailing a boat on the blue waters. "Freddy" - well, like that other "Freddy" from the movies, he had a dark side and was 40 plus years of unmanaged anger, all compressed, like the strands of hair coiled, tight, ready to let loose on a catapult or ballista or some contraption like that ... a time bomb really ...

So, no - Randy was not a hero, and neither was Freddy. But Freddy was no longer a victim, and that's a start ...

I wandered about that dungeon like office space, and found a door. It was the desert, the same desert I had been driving across the day before, and likely there were people, from some other place, heading there - even as the bodies of those ghouls downstairs lost their heat.

I stood out there, in the desert sun, for a few minutes.

It was quiet and I felt the spasm of rage dissipate. I stood there, looking, peering across that infinite distance

that is the desert's horizon - and then it came to me,
"fuck, what next".

I could run - but the last few days had made "running" seem
pointless.

Or ... I could get some more answers ... to understand my
doom.

I needed to know, even if knowing "why" guaranteed my death
- it seemed a sure bet already ... my dying.

I ventured back to that large room, with the computers ...
and the screens ... and the 3 douche pricks lying dead on
their keyboards.

I spent several frantic minutes looking for anything that
would clue me into why this was happening - why I was
caught up in some kind of messed up situation. I was
nobody, so the answer had nothing to do with me.

The "secret" was out ... right? There wasn't a secret ...
the President had given a speech ... everybody knew ... so
why all this black-bag shit?

And then, by accident, I found an email on one of those
computers, it had been sent a few months earlier - just
before Thanksgiving ...

FROM: DIRECTOR NSA, GENERAL HORN

TO: FIELD OFFICE ZEBRA

RE: EPISODE 36

RECONSTRUCTION AND ANALYSIS OF ALL 36 EPISODES IS COMPLETE.
"GANTO-RE-LEMONS", OR "PEOPLE TIME", HAS LEAKED. MAKE SURE
TO TAKE CARE OF THE ISSUES IN LOS ANGELES. TOO LATE TO SHUT
DOWN YOUTUBE CHANNEL, BUT IT MAY SERVE THE PURPOSE OF
DISINFORMATION. RADIO OBSERVATORIES, WORLDWIDE, ARE
DETECTING THE SIGNAL - TOO LATE TO CONTAIN, FOCUS ON

MANAGEMENT. POTUS HAS BEEN NOTIFIED AND IS WORKING WITH HIS TEAM TO DISCLOSE "CONTACT" AS THE CAUSE. SEE ATTACHMENTS FOR LATEST SUMMARY FROM PROJECT SODOM.

COMPARTMENTALIZED: NOFORN, TOP SECRET

DIRECTOR, GENERAL HORN

I spent the little time I had left reading the .pdf files attached to this mysterious email.

They spoke of an archaeological site, in South Africa, discovered in the 1950's. They described a civilization, that existed, 70,000 years ago - that shit did not match what I was taught in school ...

I remember being drunk once, in college, hanging with friends, and pondering "homo sapiens" - a form of life that arrived between 50 and 60 thousand years ago. But, according to this document, there were humans - like us - much earlier, perhaps as early as 200,000 years ago.

Those drunken, stony, conversations always began with "what if" - what if our civilization wasn't the first, the first to use advanced technology, the first to travel into space, the first to build computers and television. Those were always ridiculous conversations, without any academic merit. But here, in front of me, lay the words that made the ridiculous concrete.

The "signal" everyone was looking at, "People Time", had been on a round-trip through space for about 70 millennia (plus or minus) ... passing by a super-massive black hole, muddled by a pulsar along the way. The black hole behaved like a re-transmitter - bending space-time enough to redirect the signal back to Earth ... reducing the quality of the signal in the process, shattering it into pieces ... clumps of jumbled noise.

That show didn't come from another planet - it came from here, Earth.

Sure, it wasn't our civilization ... it was one of the others ... and it might as well have been an alien people, alien enough.

"One previous cycle, perhaps 2", was phrase that popped up twice in my reading. And the word "SODOM" - of course, I knew that word, from Catholic School, from Church.

Sodom was destroyed by God, and Abraham acted as lawyer, attorney, to the accused. Abraham pleaded with God, saying things like "hey God, if I can find just a few good people, in Sodom, will you be merciful and spare that city your destruction". Abraham got God down to a few, 5 or 10 ... I don't really remember. But Abraham couldn't even find that pitiful number and so Sodom was destroyed.

One of the documents I read referred to the "final translation of Episode 36" and a file name - "final_36.mp4". I searched the computer, and found the video file, and clicked on it - dragging the video to one of the larger screens connected to the laptop.

That familiar, grainy, poorly shot footage was familiar - now I knew the "quality" was more a function of the time degradation and travel than the actual original. Who knows - the original was probably high-definition, very well shot.

Unlike the other episodes of "People Time", this one was dubbed, more professionally - but made even more creepy by the process.

The show proceeded like normal, like the others - a drab, dystopian plot. Then, 10 minutes in, a large pyramid was displayed on the screen, with an eye at the center of it -

underneath, in sub-titles "EMERGENCY BROADCAST".

And then ...

An announcer ...

Looking like a news announcer would today ...

Began to speak from behind a desk - the dubbing was chilling, well matched, very good work:

"PEOPLE OF SODOM ... CENTRAL MISSILE COMMAND HAS DETECTED AN ATTACK UPON OUR BRAVE PEOPLE. GOMORRAH, BEING DECEITFUL, HAS VIOLATED THE 50 YEAR TREATY. MAKE YOUR WAY TO YOUR EMERGENCY SHELTER. IF YOU ARE A SOLDIER OR OFFICIAL, FOLLOW PLAN 65 PER EVACUATION ROUTES BLUE, YELLOW AND GREEN. MAY BAAL BLESS THE PEOPLE OF SODOM. ALL POWER AND RUTHLESS STRENGTH TO BAAL. MAY GOMORRAH BE DESTROYED IN A FRENZY OF OUR GLORIOUS WRATH. ALL HAIL SODOM! ALL HAIL BAAL!"

And then the video crapped out ...

At that moment, I could hear footsteps, down the hallway ... the hallway leading to the desert.

I had a few bullets left in my gun and nowhere to run.

I could stand and fight and die ... and perhaps kill a few of them - but what was the fucking point?

I could give up, and hope for the best - and that seemed silly.

I could point the gun at myself, at my brain, and pull the trigger - and that was appealing.

I was performing in the final episode of "People Time".

(the ending needed to be good)

THE END