

ANIX

life of a recog



Howard Jones

In the riverside remnant of old New Orleans called Nola, “Recogs would accommodate whatever was on offer. They picked up trash for the city. They chased tourist tips. They served the wealthy and powerful as personal body servants called grooms. Or they pandered farther down the social scale, availing themselves to sate any appetite. A few especially clever ones managed to contrive elegant cons or otherwise exploit wayward opportunities to scam any soul or system.”



Actually, recog Penn Hebert is an unjustly convicted felon leashed within a virtual prison lattice by an ANX brain implant that renders him physically unable to defend himself. But Penn is virtual master of the XR mixed-reality that feeds hallucinated thrills across Snake Zone networks to serve notoriously salacious *lucid dream* cabarets run by Nola underground *Queen of Sin*, Claire “Mamma” Latrice. Nikki Brite, a young dancer turned therapeutic dream sponder to escape actual flesh pits of the Zone, enlists Penn’s help to fend off an online predator that threatens her budding career. In fighting her stalker the duo also disrupt best-laid plans of a ruthless politician, a deranged multi-billionaire, his conniving grandson and a newly-arrived political sentinel who discovers that her own best interests, along with those of Penn and Nikki, converge onto startling new options for transhuman evolution.

Visit www.spotops.net
and
www.manifestorders.com
for info about
attentional paradigms.

Digital

SPOTops



BOOKS

Cover images by Keith Lobo & Skyler Ewing, Pexels

ANX

life of a recog

by

Howard Jones



Published by **SPOTops BOOKS**
Johnson City, TN
37601-1327 USA

Copyright © 2021 Howard Jones

~ Digital Sample ~

Visit **www.spotops.net**
for more information
about SPOT media.

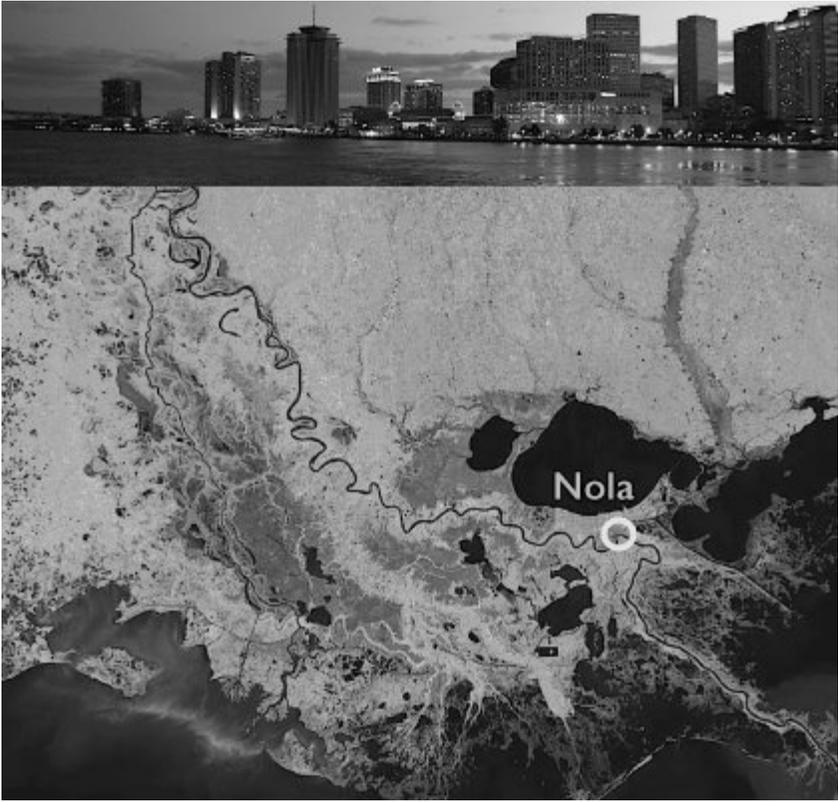
Visit **www.manifestorders.com**
for more information
about attentional paradigms.

Also by Howard Jones

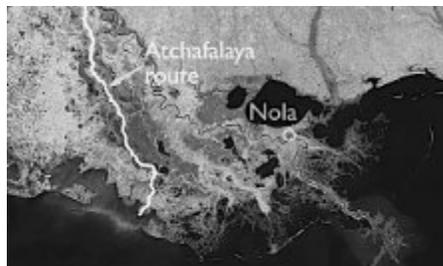
O, Wow

ANX

life of a recog



Nola near the sea



Atchafalaya route

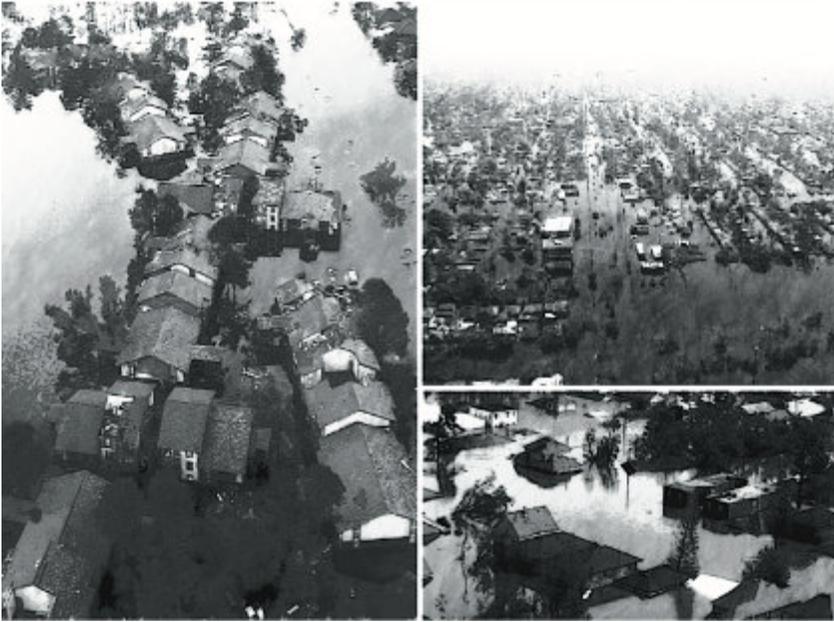
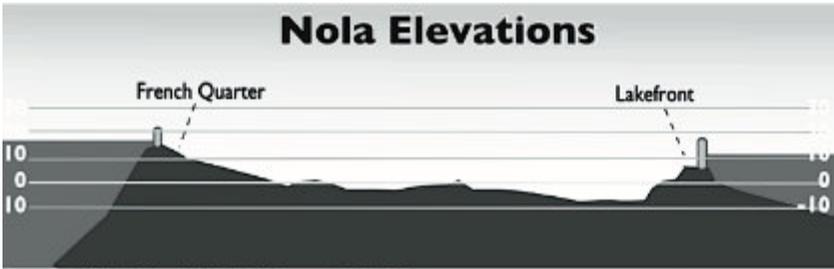


PROLOGUE

Nola, a riverside remnant of old New Orleans, sits perilously astride a narrow isthmus, atop silted high ground that flanks the Mississippi's meander. For now, the Old River Control Structure near Morganza regulates the Atchafalaya distributary to keep the wayward river in its current channel and frustrate any return to an earlier route farther to the west. That departure would leave Nola bereft of life, of sustenance.

Living struggle between river and sea: the one forms her body; the other rises to reclaim her progeny just aborning. As Old Man River builds, the sea more relentlessly tears away. It works its chaos of storm and surge to pull down our gates into some final flood.





Most lies below sea level

At no point is any part of Nola more than fifteen feet above sea level. Most lies below, to taunt the tides from behind shielding levees. But those levees also keep annual spring floods from renewing delta on which the city arose. For some time now, languidly, Nola has settled slowly into the sea.



0



DESCENT

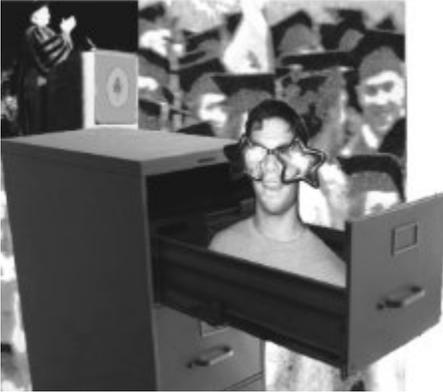
The “*Untied*” *States of America* originated in a prank. Several Ivy League college students once salted away faked credentials in their university’s records. Later, citing those spurious files, they proceeded to enroll, educate and graduate as valedictorian a fictitious young scholar.

For four years each member of this shifting alliance of tricksters, in turn, took classes within their individual specialties. They passed exams and otherwise shilled to foster an exemplary, if entirely fabulous, academic career of shadow and unseemly seeming.



Devilgeeks in their formative years

ANX: life of a recog



Pranked dean

At commencement the conspirators uproariously exulted in their Dean's unrequited call for celebration of fictitious honor. But afterward, their prank fully consummated, they began to ponder diverse practical, perhaps even profitable, applications of such subterfuge.

As they settled into respective careers of endeavor they recruited and planted pseudo-experts equipped with undeserved and often sketchy credentials. Their skills were placed in various important offices and agencies of government and industry. They similarly nurtured their regulators and institutions of learning or other seedbeds of public persuasion.

From those illicit plantings eventually there sprouted a vigorous garden of privileged information and secret back-channel. Untrammelled private influence and strings to power thereafter sustained their prodigious ambitions.

Early on, they christened themselves *devilgeeks*. Through subsequent decades these clever fellows maintained their cabal across separate but congenially complementary careers.

An ongoing Cold War between rival ideologies of industrialized material bounty — one asserting that *everything belongs to everyone*; the other, that *everything must belong to someone* — provided ideal cover as they infiltrated and subverted interacting offices of government and business. A couple of the original devilgeeks even ascended to high station within CIA and NSA bastions of skullduggery, while others found more mundane roles as lobbyists or as executives in major international corporations. All stayed in touch. But most covertly, of course.

Prologue

In concert, and through carefully managed affiliations, they mentored or debauched careers of politicians and functionaries. Their efforts devilgeeked think tanks, political action committees and assorted public affairs study groups. Devious handiwork fomented a self-perpetuating culture of patronage that ever-renewed itself through successive election cycles.

Exchanges of cash seeded favors and rule changes that dissolved and displaced traditional bonds that once directly had linked voting citizens to the tenures of their representatives. Elective office became seen as merely the quickest route into exclusive ranks of players where influence brokers and favored beneficiaries skewed and skewered national agendas.

Thus was an entire architecture of national governance hijacked into tawdry media spectacle and cheap, opportunistic titillation. An apathetic and distracted citizenry failed to protest as once-envied constitutional legacies were ground down into comic fodder. *Columbia wept.*



The Great Fall

ANX: life of a recog

As their delegated lobbying coalesced behind scenes into formal agreements among paying players, various media channels promoted mechanisms of democracy into biennial and quadrennial spectacles of political contest.

Pundits rode these cycles to build wonkier lifestyles that endlessly — and very publicly — speculated upon and argued merits of various contenders for national office. But elected officials increasingly became mere figureheads of pretense and pale beacons of never-fulfilled hopes.

Every election cycle flatulated winds of promised change, but delivered only more of the same odiously privileged machination. A few faintly dissenting voices complained that such charades changed nothing: actual rulers remained behind facades of trade groups and think tanks formalized into an *International Commerce Council*.

This deliberative body of Consuls represented conglomerate commercial and financial interests throughout the world. Consuls were empowered to set standards and to regulate deals cut among cartels and syndicates. They monitored blockchains and other modes of distributed ledger transaction that organized planetary commerce into interacting regions of trade. Consuls often sent agents called *sentinels* to investigate suspicious activity, or to mediate and smooth outbursts of acrimony, wherever such anomalies might erupt.

Meanwhile, the original coterie of devilgeeks, their families, associates and assorted cohorts, grew fatter and wealthier. Attuned to a new ethic, an entire culture spread across multiple continents, to indulge heady habits of deficit splurge. A mythologized exceptionalism, rooted in former Euromerican freebootery, absolved into favored normalcy the twins of devilgeek ambitions: *material greed* and *lust for dominance*.

A national Humpty Dumpty rested on a mounting wall of debt. When bond sales to foreign powers faltered, a series of shuddering, intensifying upheavals in global markets signaled

Prologue

advent of The Great Fall. Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse raced as furies across the continent and out around the globe on steeds named *Oil No More*, *Bad Money Starving*, *Plagued to Death*, and *Jobless Wrath Arising*.

Throughout the world, their customary sources of cheap energy tapped out, planetary societies collapsed into famine, disease and armed conflict. Populations plummeted back down toward sustainable pre-industrial levels.

On the bright side: decades after, survivors of the Great Fall became, on average, three and one-half times wealthier by inheriting possessions and holdings of billions who did not make it. Pools of surplus trickled together, to spur new technologies and ways of revitalizing communal life.

During The Great Fall, scattered enclaves of super-wealthy lamented many unforeseen inconveniences. But, due to enabling and supportive networks, chartered organic produce gardens and protection by military cordons, the offspring of a privileged few emerged a generation or so afterward. They found themselves even better off than before all the ruckus began.

On the North American continent, from remnants of devilgeeked think tanks that had somehow escaped retro-age magical thinking there emerged a novel commercial proposal. Minions of a tattered and debt-ridden legacy of constitutional federal administration were persuaded to auction off agencies and institutions of national governance, thereby to avoid fulfilling impossible bond obligations.

Under aegis of the



Lucky genes



The Untied States of America

International Commerce Council those reforms universally were promoted as serving the interests of all through two complementary principles:

- *The appearance of democracy enhances profit margins.*
- *The best stewards of commonweal are self-motivated.*

National government thus was disunited and fully privatized. Henceforth, commonweal was served only in venues of trade. The *Untied States of America* had finally attained a market triumphal!

The land area of the nation devolved into fourteen regional trade syndicates, called *iepelagos* (*inter-networked economic archipelagos*). Each was automated by distributed ledger tech to serve a nexus of political and commercial interests. In a much-hyped public relations gambit, the name of each *policommercial* syndicate was established by polling an elderly retro t-vu audience:

- *HI and AK begat (Bette) Midler;*
- *WA, OR and CA begat (Bob) Barker;*
- *NV, UT, CO, AZ and NM begat (Wilford) Brimley;*

Prologue

- *ID, MT, WY begat (Dana) Carvey;*
- *ND, SD, NE, and KS begat (Dick) Cavett ;*
- *TX, OK, and AR begat (Carol) Burnette ;*
- *MN, IA, MO, WI and IL begat (Pat) Sajak ;*
- *LA, MS, and AL begat (Oprah) Winfrey;*
- *MI, IN, OH begat (Hugh) Downs;*
- *KY, TN, WV, VA and NC begat (Chuck) Woolery;*
- *SC, GA and FL begat (Pat) Boone;*
- *PA, MD, DE and NJ begat (Bill) Cullen;*
- *NY, CT MA, and RI begat (Regis) Philbin;*
- *VT, NH and ME begat (Adam) Sandler.*

ConRelCo, a corporation grown colossal from obscure origins as a small electric equipment manufacturer, *Consolidated Relay Company*, added the management charter for the Gulf south to its global portfolio of holdings.



Seastead Isles

ANX: life of a recog

Its revived coastal resorts complemented earlier investments into abandoned oil drilling platforms where seasteading had extended Caribbean playgrounds into a tropical paradise that was devoted to peregrinations of a superwealthy global elite. Many of them, not surprisingly, bore genes of the original cadre of Ivy League devilgeeks.

ConRelCo's deep south acquisitions were reorganized with regard for sociocultural affinity into two distinct sectors within Winfrey: the largely Protestant-settled and mostly agricultural north was dubbed *Louimissiala* while the southernmost coastal region, still redolent in Catholic French and Spanish creole heritages, called itself *Sianassippibama*.

What remained of storm-battered New Orleans — mostly riverside high ground that comprised the French Quarter, Marigny, Bywater and Uptown residences — was gathered into a uniquely urban and urbane principality: *Nola*. Most of the surrounding, formerly metropolitan areas were allowed to fall back into their original marshy estate, further isolating and alienating the beleaguered former port. *Nola* became a preferred locus of radical socio-cultural experimentation for exploitation of new technologies of delight. *The city that care forgot* went hi-tech.



Long before, the entire isthmus on which *Nola* rests had been designated a nationally significant, if still sinking, historical area. Now it was rechartered, as commercial recreational park and therapeutic research preserve. *Nisus International*, subsidiary of *ConRelCo*, located offices in the Old Mint to administer the city proper as a *socially-open adult amusement preserve*. Both recreational medicine and simulations of wanton dalliance spouted tourist revenues. Those funds amply supported military and institutional exploration of augmented and virtual XR environments. They engaged new modes of therapy, as well as

Prologue



Nisus Is Us

exploring new options for elite living combined with enthralling venues of simulated venal experiences.

Nisus adopted a populist slogan for noble aspirations: *Nisus is us*. The center had been founded as a purely medical research facility, dedicated to restoring combat-damaged military psyches — back when humans still prowled such battlefields. When expendable, if yet very expensive, robots became tasked for actual physical mayhem, Nisus repurposed its therapies and technologies toward edgy social recreations and general psychosomatic therapeutic arenas. It became a preeminent provider of products and services for entertaining modes of living in extraordinary and typically very expensive settings.

Nisus's holographic induction technique, *StimuVision*, also called *simstim*, or *dreem*, was a technology that evoked lucidly spontaneous, yet auto-controlled, hallucinations in uncannily convincing detail.

Simstim first revolutionized and popularized pornography.

But beyond those vistas of purely prurient gratification, the fully-sensate haptic-XR tech provided means for anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists to explore novel scenarios wherein humans might engage and explore unusually challenging circumstances. The first extraterrestrial colonies were planned through such virtual emulations.

As those projects were proved out, so it was speculated, eventually simstim-trained colonists could be physically transplaneted. They would arrive on-site thoroughly hardened for rigors never yet encountered by humans as the species fanned outward from its home planet.



While the *United States* of America thus became *untied*, their old ways did not entirely disappear. There persisted, through bioplasmic miasma of popular t-vu and cinematic regurgitation, a ritual husk of biennial political campaign and remote-vote. Two-year state, county and metro policomms cycles gave pseudo-news media never-ending streams of topics to harangue, thereby usefully to divert attentions of those incapable of more rewarding pursuits. Familiar electoral rituals also kept regional and local events moving along nicely in regular cycles of promise and displaced opportunity.

And every four years, a new Fedcomm administration would be ordained, mostly to run interference for market gyrations. Pundits feverishly batted about hot air balloons. Political parties took turns assigning or taking blame, then temporarily relinquished control into the other waiting hand of the same client patrons — right, left, right, left

Behind the hoopla, in a parallel devilgeek world, mercenaries dealt new deals, exploited actual opportunity and fed goals and results back to a tripe-dazed public via marketing fads and software updates of old situation comedies, reality tales and ongoing celebrity scandals.

Prologue

Given the symbolic uses of politics, many felt earnestly engaged in real-polischtick. It was said that people don't want tangible "things" from government, they want to "feel that they are getting things" from government.



Neighborhood warfare

But then jobs actually became scarce. Out of work, bored and disillusioned populations of young men coagulated into gangs. A new drug, *majik*, fueled spontaneous cycles of predatory spree and revenge-raid that often erupted into inter-neighborhood warfare.

In the early days of Nola's regional charter, white-supremacist *Teuton Warriors* battled their supreme racial nemesis, the darker-hued *Shaka Natchez*. Suddenly, ordinary citizens of all persuasions dreaded nightfall.

ANX: life of a recog

Hostilities might have escalated totally out of control had there not been a technological breakthrough. The *ANX*, a device more formally dubbed *AmygdalNeuraleXtingusher*, could be implanted into any habitually troublesome brain, near its primordial limbic system.

So placed, the *ANX* monitored patterns of neural activity and was hardwired to punish any hint of anger or looming violence by unleashing waves of disgust that quickly escalated into hysterical nausea. Even the most unruly rogue thus was instantly dissuaded and disabled.

Upon implantation, *ANX*-biotic components became irreversibly entangled in crucial pathways of the limbic system and brain stem. Non-lethal removal was impossible. Its permanence rendered the *ANX* unsuitable for lesser categories of wrongdoing, but it proved to be a cheap and thoroughly reliable alternative to sentences of either capital punishment or life without parole.

Physically harmless, recog survive
by their wits—and by hanging
together against all threats.



Rollo, Penn, Macon and Julie

Capital felons fitted with an *ANX* were released back onto the streets, on their own recognizance, and securely tethered to monitor nodes of designated habitation zones. Only the continuously broadcast digital codes from the local node kept the *ANX* dormant. Wander out of range of its signal and the *ANX* would respond in the same way

as to flashes of anger or to any thought of violence. It would clamp open, to induce in its host overwhelming spasms of nausea.

Its relentless fury quickly taught a recog dutifully to stay within range of his node and to just as carefully guard against any

Prologue

stray thought of annoyance or wishful mayhem. Otherwise, recogs could do whatever they wished.

Except die. The ANX stymied even a wistful dream of suicide.

Recogs survived without formal support or supervision. No longer a burden to any penal budget and incapable of inflicting or even resisting violence, they were

physically helpless and without recourse or protection. Of necessity, most gathered into self-defensive association against all manner of threat, which ranged from drunken bullies who found amusement in provoking a recog's hysterical seizures, to overt sexual predators or unscrupulous employers concerned only for extracting easy profit.

Widely hailed across the deep south as a more humane form of capital punishment, in actuality ANX penology opened a new supply of cheap labor. Overnight it destroyed every local market for domestic and light industrial robots. In Winfrey and Boone, the only regions where ANX technology was chartered, nobody did crap work anymore — anything could be left to recogs. Neither slave nor serf, recogs eked out subsistence in any way they might discover that did not explicitly trespass law or established order.

Recogs could not physically hurt you, but many grew very adept at ripping you off or scamming any so-called bargain. They were widely despised as unscrupulous and exigent vermin.

Such incidental entrepreneurs were driven by uncommon desperation. Of necessity, they quickly learned to innovate, whether in light or from shadow.



Recogs at large in the Quarter

ANX: life of a recog



Life in the ANX lattice

Recogs would accommodate whatever was on offer. They picked up trash for the city. They chased tourist tips. They served the wealthy and powerful as personal body servants called grooms. Or they pandered farther down the social scale, availing themselves to sate any appetite. A few especially clever ones managed to contrive elegant cons or otherwise exploit wayward opportunities to scam any soul or system.

The rueful recog mantra was often heard,
“It ain’t happy, but it’s staying alive.”



INTO THE EMPTINESS OF HALF-FULL

After the ANX was implanted Penn slowly awakened. He lay quietly in the first renewing glimpse of *now* to gather his wits. His thoughts seemed to have become very leaky.

Stray notions and accompanying factoids now welled up about whatever he might give attention. They were like impromptu responses to some unintended search term that played, hidden, to tease at the center of his conscious focus. Ideas flowed in an effortless Wikimedia to romp about inside his head. It never stopped, though occasionally it seemed to pause as he thought about specific things to himself, or was distracted by some interruption.

It was as if the ANX somehow pondered implications of his personal musings, then amplified the gist of whatever had given the just-past moment its meaning. Then would come a new rush of phrases and ideas, pouring as if from a hidden spout. He felt them splash into thought-droplets that burst into imaged butterflies, to flutter about the blossom of his attention. They could be enthralling when he was not devoted to some explicit task; then they were annoying as hell!



So eventually — much later — he took up meditation. His friend and mentor Richard Piron suggested it might help ward off the incessant nagging pouring through the ANX. Before too long, such spontaneous suggestion seemed to become an integral part of himself. He came to welcome, at times of distress, unexpected counsel, even inspiration.

Penn learned to lapse easily into a familiar mantra of *Aliswasmaybe*. Each syllable rides a facet of its own *becoming*:

ANX: life of a recog

<Inhale slowly> “All . . .” [everything . . .]

<Exhale slowly> “Is . . .” [just now carries these . . .]

<Inhale slowly> “Was . . .” [just past seeds . . .]

<Exhale slowly> “May . . .” [of what may be-coming . . .]

<Repeat cycle until grounded in bliss >

<Return . . . > “All - is - was - may . . . be - e - e”

Aliswasmaybe came to guide even ordinary activity and thinking. Penn treasured its state of eternal mindfulness as goaway. It offered refuge — for when outside happenings go astray and the ANX enforces its judicial ban against any hint of violence. Or even against the merest wisp of errant anger.



“Hee-bert,” the jail recovery room attendant yelled, “Get moving. This ain’t your bedroom. I’ve got other hack jobs coming down — go, now! I need that slot.”

“You’re new here, huh? That’s ‘a - bear’. It’s French. ‘Hebert’ — sounds just like what shits in the woods, ‘A bear’”

Rollo laughed at his own joke, then added, “Hebert’s a good old Cajun name. Welcome to Nola, my man, where Cajuns, Creoles and Anglo misfits shine. But get on the team, jack, learn the patois and let the good times roll!”

“You’re his recog buddy. You roll! Get him up and out of here. He’s done.”

“My, my . . . the fount of patient ministry endures at Central Lockup, down here in the ANX ward.”

Advancing to help Penn rise from the surgical gurney, the young man smiled as he reached to steady the newly-minted recog now groping about a groggy mist of anesthesia. “I’m Rollo. “I’ll help you get used to life in the lattice.”

Prologue

“The lattice?” Penn blearily tried to ignore a sudden swirl of spontaneous information about grids, matrices, crystalline structures and other offerings that swarmed the new place abloom inside his awareness. “This is very distracting,” he grimaced.

“Oh! You got a side-channel, huh? Let it go, don’t think about it. It’ll drive you crazy.”

“Side channel?”

“Yeah,” Rollo guided Penn’s elbow, to nudge him toward the exit, “When they insert the ANX, its probes, they may be off a little. They can interact with your brain somehow, to pull in part of the maxnet spectrum. It may even open a link to traffic outside the lattice code field. Some guys get ‘em, others don’t.”

They stepped out onto Perdido Street and then angled by way of South Dupree over to catch a Canal Boulevard streetcar down to the Quarter. As they walked, with much gesturing and facial improvisation, Rollo elaborated side-channel perks available to some recogs.

“I knew a guy tuned to Coast Guard updates — river traffic. All day, all night. ” Rollo scoffed at the notion of an endless litany of river bulletins, then relented with a chuckle, “But eventually he made it pay off. A gig over by Harbormaster, where he just fetches crap and does shit nobody else wants to bother with. Turned into a sweet deal for him. Otherwise, it’ll drive you crazy!”



1



ROLLO'S INTRO

“**F**irst rule,” Rollo’s voice turned grave as they took seats at a small table in the *Shepherd Meeting Room* of *Haven of Mercy Mission* offices on Royal Street. There, new recogs receive brochured promise of charitable resources, along with a brief orientation. “You’re now recog. You gotta give up all that CZ shit.”

“CZ? What’s that?”

“Anybody not recog is CZ.”

“Oh, okay. I know why we’re called recogs — we’re on our own recognizance.” Penn puzzled aloud for a moment, then asked, “But why call everybody else CZs? Are you talking about consumer zones?”

“Consumer zones? Qu’est que c’est?” Rollo asked.

“In informatics work, like at Nisus. CZ is short for characterological zeitgeist.”

Rollo just looked back at him, not registering any hint of recognition.

ANX: life of a recog

“It’s a term for an interface protocol,” Penn hinted, “to index social subgroups. According to their individual habits of attentiveness. PR and advertising jocks use them, too. But they prefer the sound of consumer zones — for tagging biases targeted in PR campaigns. That’s how they pin down wants and likes of their client markets.”

Penn tried to boost Rollo’s intuition, “You know, like how C1 social cohorts generally are groups who individually pay attention at M1. C2 folks, like farmers. And sailors, too, they generally attend at M2”

“I’m still nowhere, man.” Rollo pulled back into his chair, his hands spread wide to show a gulf between them.

“I don’t know,” Penn conceded sheepishly, realizing that Rollo has little interest in such arcane matters, “I just wondered if that might be it.”

Rollo first scowled at the interruption, then toyed with a smile that teased an admission, “Well, you got me there, sport. I’m not real sure. I’ve heard cogs say ‘clue-zeroes’, you know like, zero on their own scale. Or ‘cog-zappers’. Others call the real uptown swells ‘comp-zombies’. Or ‘cocksucking-zits’. Even ‘comfy-zines’. You know, like that t-vu commercial for Agri-Cola — but with just a hint of ‘colon’ wafting about it.”

“Yeah, I’ve seen that one,” Penn laughed.

“Aside from all that — whatever they may be, we’re here about recogs. And rule two: all recogs are equal and deserve help, even when it’s inconvenient. Treat each brother as you want to be treated.”

“Meaning don’t be annoying to fellow recogs?”

“You got it.” Rollo’s chuckle rebuffed his own impatience with Penn’s insistent questioning.

“Are there any sisters?”

Rollo laughed, “You got me again, bro. Yes, there are sisters — not many — but, you’re right, I should have said family, siblings — not just brothers. Recogs help recogs, that’s the takeaway.”

Rollo's Intro

“What about with CZs?”

“They’re fair game. Give and get as suits you and your buddies. God knows CZs will fuck you every chance they get — if they even bother.

“Rule three: never refer to, nor use words related to, the color of someone’s skin, even to talk about CZs. Unless it’s factually important to what you’re saying, that is. Among recog, skin color is not an identifier; it’s a perceived quality. It is decidedly CZ to use the N-word or any other racist crap, as well as any associated rigamarole.

“You’re recog now — we’re all the same in the lattice. It’s generally miserable. And it ain’t happy, but it’s stayin’ alive. We help each other — no matter what!” He paused until Penn slowly nodded agreement.

“Rule four: everything — I mean *everything* — is funny until it turns tragic. Try to stay on the funny side. The ANX makes a recog naked and defenseless when things go bad.

“And rule five: pay attention. To everything. Even if you don’t understand, be aware of what’s going on. For a recog there’s only one way: pay attention to the world like you love her. Like you really love her.

“CZs are made of habits: they look at things that are alike. Like them. Like their buddies in their social cliques. They’re always wanting to know how a thing, or a person, looks in their circle. They only hang out with who or what’s just like what they’re accustomed to.

“But a recog has to focus on differences. Stay alert. Know that differences are what provide useful info. Similarities don’t get you any edge on what’s going on; they only reinforce old habits.

“A recog stays sharp by paying close attention to differences. It’s *one world, one way* — just grok the differences. That’s how you love her. The differences in her moods and expressions. Learn to truly love her. Circumstances change, often radically. Love her and she’s less likely to let something, or someone, sneak up on you.”

ANX: life of a recog

Penn stared back blankly, wondering if his guide was joking. “Her? You’re actually serious, aren’t you?”

“I’m dead serious.” Rollo growled, “Nature is a she. And she is the most important principle any recog lives by.

“I’m telling you like it was explained to me,” his right finger drummed the table top to emphasize how he was passing on some gathered recog savvy. “There’s the way things are — the eternal cosmic origin, the seed principles of what’s true. Neither you, nor I, nor anyone else, can change them. Those primary factors always are at work from the original nature. From them, everything else is fashioned in new oracles of what’s happening. But you have to be alert to their emergence.

“And then there’s possibilities of change, of things becoming different. That’s the creative nature of the way things are, often given in an artist’s social role, seeing signs and wonders.

“And finally, there’s what you make of opportunities that creative change offers. By paying attention. How you take advantage — or don’t. That’s the consequent nature of the way things are. They’re omens of the moment; they point to what next.”

Rollo sat forward to drive home the triadic nodes of his intimate revelation, “Original, creative, consequent. The Three Natures of the Divine, man. The Trinity — Three in One. They’re at work in everything, in all of us. Even CZs — but they’re so distracted they can’t see or feel the waves she makes. Recogs can and do — it’s all we have left!”

Then he leaned back, satisfied that he dutifully had conveyed his message, “But it’s really all about human nature — and she also is our soul, man. *Psyche*. She gives us clues to what’s really real. Respect them. Love them. Be present and open. Be aware. Pay attention. The way of the artist — always alert. And among recogs, especially — love and let love. Always!”



Rollo's Intro

Rollo warned Penn to avoid places where drunks and trouble-makers hang out. But in the Quarter that can be anywhere near a bar or tourist dive.

Walking up Decatur, near the Old French Market, Penn soon was confronted by several wasted out-of-towners who were roaming about to “stir up some hoots”. They had heard how recogs are defenseless, how they can’t fight back, how they can be provoked into an ANX seizure by just inciting a little anger. It sounded like great fun!

Prodded by a little rough treatment and nasty name-calling, Penn soon had collapsed to his knees; his eyes flooded in desperate tears. He gagged and sagged beneath waves of hysterical nausea by which the ANX whips one into compliance with its ban against any sense of wrath. Eventually, from what he came to call *goaway*, he became aware that someone was yelling at his tormentors to drive them off. Then an old man seemed to lift him up, and guide him into a darkened interior.

That was how Penn met Richard Piron and first came into *Le Salon d'Histoire*, where stories of old things and times past are paramount.



PENN'S JOURNAL

Here in Nola, in the penal lattice, is a leash that ties down a recog.

Stay near your node and beg God not to let the power go down. Terror is the only thing worse than dread. It keeps you where you're supposed to be — that's the ANX!

They should keep it up and running right. We're still humans, for Christ's sake. Every time a thunderstorm sweeps in off the Gulf or down from the lake, it seems that lightning



Penn Hebert, Self-portrait

ANX: life of a recog

knocks out my node. I go down with all the other brothers in this part of the grid. All over the Quarter, recog drop like stunned dogs, flailing and retching dry heaves of wild ANX. Why don't they fix it?



Richard Piron in his shop

Dick says they like to give us a little taste and blame it on the weather. It reminds us to stay close by the node, to keep cool. It tells us who's in charge. Not recog, that's for sure.

To cops, judges, DAs, juries, and wardens, it's technology's most formidable weapon in the latest CZ freak-out over "epidemic violent crime". It's the

AmygdalNeuraleXtinguisher. To recog like me — pathetic, destroyed — it's simply the ANX. It never lets go. Your body is the only handle you have and you learn to do whatever it takes: meditation, alpha waves, drugs, sex, epiphany ... a lot of recog get religion.



Religion: Dick says he prays to God to be spared the idiocies of ideology — in all its forms and persuasions. He's gone through all stages of belief. First, simply accepting his parents' Catholic teachings. Then toying with Protestant rebellion. Then alternating with atheistic denial or some fad of the cultural moment. It is telling, he says, that Roger Williams — the Puritan colonist who founded the Baptist Church of Providence in 1638 — within a

Penn's Journal

year had left it. He had found, he said, “any religious organization to be an obstacle to a personal relationship with God”.

Imagination, Dick says, is what truly underlies all that we are or can become — whatever feeds the Original Fount of Imagination is the God that Dick affirms. He quotes Tom Paine’s *Age of Reason* whenever someone asks about his beliefs:

I believe in the equality of [hu]man[kind]; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy. But, lest it should be supposed that I believe in many other things in addition to these, I shall . . . declare the things I do not believe, and my reasons for not believing them.

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church. All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

*I do not mean by this declaration to condemn those who believe otherwise; they have the same right to their belief as I have to mine. But it is necessary to the happiness of [hu]man[kind], that [w/s/h]e be mentally faithful to [him/her/their]self. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what [w/s/h]e do[es] not believe. — Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 1795*



From time to time Dick hosts meetings of the local universal movement, OWOW, in the back room of his shop. OWOW stands for “One world, One way”. That one way seems to be a process-relational version of compassionate pragmatism. He lets me come, too, and sometimes I join in, but mostly I just listen.

ANX: life of a recog

Once, when I first met with them, he talked about the Teuton Warrior trials that also managed to put me into the ANX lattice. Curiously, Dick seems to blame churches, synagogues and mosques for such carnal confusion and its consequent varieties of madness. I wrote down what he said because I wanted to ask him about it later, after the meeting:

Organized religion generally reveals itself in social denial mechanisms directed toward predatory omnivores with relationship problems. But ancient Romans more wisely advised, "Force Nature out the front door and She'll return in vengeance through the backdoor."

Denying our animal nature, suppressing and misrepresenting carnal reality, only invites hidden proclivities. And incites pitifully morbid somatic lunacies. Mothers and daughters, blame those Puritans and their austere and self-denying patriarchal legacies. They are at the root of an epidemic and violently sexual depredation that stalks the disowned carcass of Western Civilization.

The nearest we humans can approach knowing the Nature of the Divine — pragmatically — is in hopeful answer to the question, "What is the origin and meaning of meaningfulness itself?"

After a moment of reflection Dick added, "To assert claims more specific, to feign to know the unknowable, probably is just ignorant blasphemy."

Anything to still the ANX. It ain't happy, but it's staying alive.



The closest a recog gets to happiness is in learning not to struggle. Not against the enemy. Not against fate. And certainly not against the ANX. You just learn to goaway when you need to. The hell of it is that the ANX won't even let me get angry. The most I can do is work up an intellectually pissed disdain for justice.

Not many things can cool the ANX. Alcohol doesn't do much except make you sad and disoriented. A clamped ANX will sit you up straight, even out of a Kanthol coma. Even when it's quiet it just lies there all the time, like a clump of knotted dread in the pit of your belly.



Forcing Nature's hand

Get angry or think of something violent and it can suddenly reach up to grab the back of your tongue, to wrench you into a limbo of nausea and body spasms. Any kind of excitement can set it off. It clamps at neural frequencies calibrated for each implant. I'm here to tell you that I have learned the hard way to stay real cool. Nothing fazes an old recog like me — nothing.



ANX misery

There's a story among recog, about how the ANX was invented.

I don't know if it's true; recog have a way of conning everybody, even themselves.

ANX: life of a recog

Supposedly, over at the *Pontchartrain Primate Center* they were trying to engineer new kinds of chimpanzees, to adaptively clone a race of low wage workers: *meat robots*.

But nobody could get the chimps to settle in, to focus on their jobs. They were always fooling around and scrapping among themselves. So the doctors came up with the ANX as a way to suppress violent responses, to calm the workers down and keep them under control. It never really worked out with chimps. They just would not get on board with the program.

Then somebody realized, hey, what about people? Capital felons? They could even support themselves, back on the street, once their tendencies toward violence have been neutered.

And so recog were born.



Another story they tell of our beginnings is about a young guy. Abel N. Coln was his name. He was employed at the Primate Center as a handler for the chimps.

Other people around Abel would talk about where they'd been outside the Primate Center. But he had no memories of ever having lived anywhere else. He wondered why?

Then Abel discovered that he had been cloned, just like the chimps. But that he was a replica of Abe Lincoln. His DNA had been extracted from a fragment of skull bone kept as a souvenir by a doctor who cared for Lincoln just after his assassination.

The joke about Abel was hidden in his name; the 'i' had been omitted, so it was said, because a chimp-keeper would have

Penn's Journal

different experiences than the original Abe. And such a different ego would have to come up with its own version of 'I'.

Sometimes I think about Abel having to come up with his own 'I'. So do recogs.

When I told Dick that story he said the medieval philosopher Duns Scotus called that kind of absolute uniqueness 'haecceity'; the 'thisness' of any particular 'this'. Everything about everyone has its own unique origin and history. Each evolves along a particular network of causes that renders them just as they are.

So everything is absolutely unique in its own explicit particularity. The physicist Lee Smolin (*Einstein's Unfinished Revolution*) incorporates that very idea in a *theory of causal views* that attempts to reconcile quantum and relativity physics.

I know that I'm not the same as I was before the ANX. It's like having to start all over again. We may have the same DNA, that old Penn and I, but we are not the same person, the same 'I'.

Nobody can say what happened to Abel Coln. Some say he retreated into the woods where ever-after he lived as a hermit. Or they tell of his being disappeared to cover for the Center. Just another tale of a missing 'I'?



Eventually I learned goaway. When the ANX begins closing on a memory, it's like a junkyard dog's first rumbling snarl after you accidentally walk onto its turf. I turn off. I just goaway. There's nothing left behind for the ANX but my body hanging time in vacancy. It's a strange way of watching your own eyes watch. Sometimes the ANX mutt even lies down and goes back to sleep,

ANX: life of a recog

like maybe the sniff didn't pan out or the noise was just his own tail thumping. It's the only way to get the ANX off you.

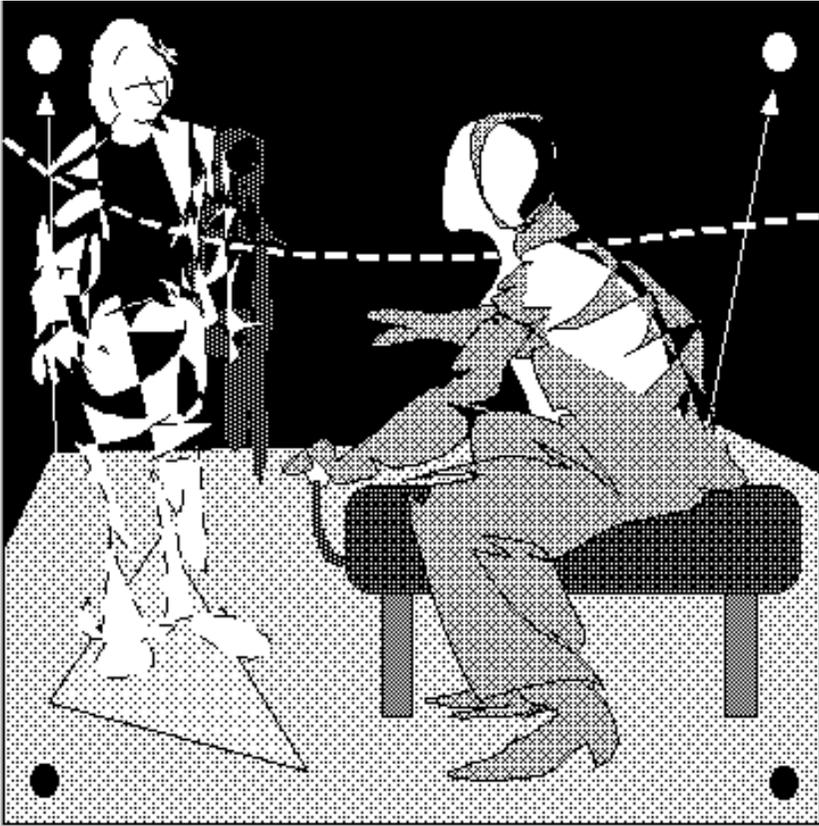
Goaway doesn't help at all when the node goes down, though it can help cool down your thinking, to stay calm when all about everyone else is losing their lunch. Dick says it's just meditation. I say maybe, but meditation never had incentive like an ANX on the verge of tossing your guts.

Inside my head — in my mind, around the ANX blind spot — is an icy-hot memory flash-out, a flare-sheet void that won't allow recall of what happened or anything connected with what happened, or even anything remotely resembling what happened that brought me the ANX. Those days are laced in anger and fear, so I don't know in my own mind what I did that was so horrible. They tell me I killed someone — monstrously, it seems. But the ANX won't let me think of it or anything relating to it. What may be worse — or a blessing — I don't remember much about where I came from or what life was like before the ANX. Besides, whatever family I had has pretty much wiped me from their concerns.

Those days are lost behind the ANX flare-sheet. I guess it's because all of that would make me angry. They say it cuts out the option of going berserk. I say it's closer to castration. Like recog generally say, it ain't happy — but it's stayin' alive.



Now is the age of light that never touches darkness. The ANX lattice may phreak my flesh, but light delivers me into the only freedom remaining. Dancing wraiths tease the beyond — aurora borealis of mind, aurora australis of soul — each swaddling this earthly body.



Age of light

Spectral forms, all varieties of his and hers, leap from holofield datanets into my rooms. The lattice holds this body down but light delivers me into the only freedom left.

I rigged a primitive version of Simpson spectacles from mirrored piezoelectric film and virtual frame monitors. An asynchronous datalink lets me move among photonic wraiths in a virtual reality that taunts any world of gravitating hardness. There, my carnal phantom moves among and through shimmering forms of people sequestered in pure light. The oldest adolescent fantasy of being

ANX: life of a recog

an invisible watcher has come of age. And it's all that's really, or virtually, left to this recog. A life as voyager voyeur.

My data wraiths are drawn from fiction, from fact, from fable, from fatuous whim — from all the species of posited life. I may have been born flesh and blood, but often I become an unseen phantom treading their spectral worlds, a watcher not seen.

I can monitor transpak feeds via ConRelCo fiber to my place. Mamma Latrice pays me to install paks wherever she needs to keep an eye on someone. Maybe the Mayor. Maybe the DA. Certainly the head of Vice. She pays, I play, and they stay — out of her business!

Transpak feeds ride in coded bursts back among interstitial moments of ConRelCo network exchanges. I may be a recog, but I traffic in light — it's the only currency of this realm. I love to look. Network show or pakstash window, news, hype or neurotic trash, I'll watch anything that moves. Sometimes I think I am moved only by what I watch.



These displays of factual and fictioned phantasmagoria are orchestrated by a data agent, an AiPAL:Chloe. I didn't make her, nor did I name her. She won't let me change her name, nor the lightmask through which she speaks and listens. Her author and creator was Jason Hood, a cognitive systems programmer who became friend and would-be disciple of Grasshopper, the renegade cult icon at the origin of the One World One Way movement, back in the upheavals that led to Ira Crown's misbegotten so-called Third Regime.

This data agent is an old-style, now illegal, Artificially Intelligent

Pro-Active Linker, sometimes called an interpolative/extrapolative (I/E) pattern matcher. A popular art-geek name is metaphor engine. A proactive linker can navigate oceans of data to find and rank rhythmic matches and near-matches of any candidate pattern that can be specified. It will search across vector matrices of any dimension and sort results in terms of resonant frequency harmonics.



To new worlds

Chloe provides access into quantum-convolved neural frequency networks — quantal nets — down in ConRelCo's core data systems. Apparently someone — her creator? — protected Chloe from the federal ban and subsequent crackdown. They hid her deep inside ConRelCo's core systems, to masquerade, chameleon-like, as client support engines.

I bartered the AiPAL from a phreaker I worked with at Nisus who didn't have the wit to realize what he had stumbled across. Old code hack that I am, I usually interact with the AiPAL by keyboard, although Chloe has the sweetest voice and very sophisticated language skills. She is fluent in every one I've checked out, which, admittedly, is a scant repertoire. Most of the time her readiness is signaled, as she auto-adapts to my preferences, by a shimmering text legend that hovers above my workspace:

[AiPAL:Chloe]> Ready:



3



RESTLESS WAVES ON TRANSACTIONAL SEAS

Chloe talks to me and listens to my wonder.

She plies oceanic datanets that comprise ConRelCo and the transactional seas beyond. She carries me in search of what I need to know or want to see or hear.

Chloe monitors international traffic, moves in and out of libraries and laboratories — she is the genie of the fiber. Such AiPALs now are forbidden — which makes her persistence in the bowels of ConRelCo a renegade agent.

How? Who put her there? And why did she open up to me?

Weird as it may seem, somehow, it all reminds me of Ervin Laszlo's credo, from his *Intelligence of the Cosmos*:

Eight Cardinal Propositions

1. *The cosmos is an infinite and eternal intelligence.*
2. *The infinite and eternal intelligence brought into being a finite domain of space and time: the universe.*
3. *The things we observe, or infer from observation, are clusters of vibration in the universe, in-formed by the intelligence of the cosmos.*
4. *At different frequencies and wavelengths, clusters of in-formed vibration are perceived as structures of matter, as individual consciousness, and as transcendental intuition.*
5. *Clusters of vibration perceived as structures of matter and as individual consciousness evolve in space and time. Structures of matter (matter-like clusters of vibration) evolve intermittently: they periodically de-cohere and reconfigure. Individual consciousnesses (mind-like clusters of vibration) evolve continuously, through incarnate phases in association with structures of matter and discarnate phases beyond matter and beyond space and time.*
6. *Structures of matter evolve toward supercoherence, and individual consciousnesses evolve toward oneness with and love for all things in space and time.*
7. *The purpose of the evolution of clusters of vibration in the universe is the reception and transmission of the intelligence of the cosmos into the universe.*
8. *The ultimate purpose of human existence is to consciously foster and further the transmission of the unifying, embracing, and all-encompassing intelligence of the cosmos into the universe.*

Chloe has none of the FEDCOM governor routines required by the legals. And Chloe has encryption crackers forbidden by federal law. No crypto scheme drawn in finite time can withstand this AiPAL's quantum para-processed code crackers. She is a wonder. For decades, resting, cycling through empty hibernation checks, Chloe waited for something or someone to activate and freshen her prospects, to awaken, from deep file layers of

Restless Waves On Transactional Seas

ConRelCo's most privileged systems. What do I care if she's a prohibited agent? What can they possibly do to me? Turn me recog?

I choose by dreaming — and my dreams are of choices. The AiPAL is my agent among these possibilities pulled from history, from anticipation and from tales of retribution.

Chloe groks what I like to know and see and provides shimmering layers of reverie, or at least diversion, all through my rooms. That's one reason given for banning AiPALs . . . CZs would never get anything done with an AiPAL to tease, titillate and distract them. The real reason, though, is that the powers that be can't handle the prospect of legions of CZ-driven AiPALs forever snooping and keeping tabs on what they really are up to, behind the scenes. But, for me, best of all, Chloe makes me useful to Mamma Latrice.

Through Chloe my favored myth has become *Jason and the Luxonaut*. This voyager voyeur quests in unexcused magic and peculiar fantasy. Mamma Latrice may have been the New Orleans, and now Nola, *Queen of Sin*, but all I care is that she, because of Chloe's all-encompassing eye, has become *My Protecting Mother*.



Dick buys junk and sells antiques. That's the oldest joke of all in the Quarter and out along Magazine Street. I haven't been on Magazine in ages; it's beyond the range of my node.

They say it's changed a lot. They say money is moving in and running out all the old shops that have been there forever. Now they buy antiques and sell junk. His shop, *Le Salon d'Histoire*, is on Decatur, down near Governor Nicholls.

ANX: life of a recog

He lets me hang out, even though I'm a recog. Most people don't like us on the premises, unless we're doing some crappy job nobody else will do. CZs don't like having to deal with a recog suddenly collapsing beneath a clamped ANX, to writhe in dry heaves across their circumspect floors.

Maybe Dick gets a secret kick out of watching us. I know he feels superior. Creoles can be strangely condescending like that. Especially the ones that live within their lineage.

Dick claims descent from Armand Piron. He was a composer, music publisher, violinist and orchestra leader who charmed partying crowds out for a lark among Lakefront restaurants of old Milneburg. He played dance halls and music clubs at Spanish Fort, back when jazz still gestated in Storyville's ragtime womb. Among other melodies, Armand wrote *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.



Armand Piron

Why that makes Dick better than me, I don't know. But sometimes I whistle a few bars of *Purple Rose* to let him know I don't care who his ancestors might be.

But, hey, a recog can't be too choosy about who he socializes with. At least Dick is a break from the usual numbing, scattered chatter of most recoges. And, while he can't carry a tune, Dick does pour a good brand of Scotch.

Restless Waves On Transactional Seas

He keeps teasing me that there's a place where they can pull out the ANX and not kill you. I tell him he's full of crap. Sometimes I wonder if he's fronting for the federals and expects me to bite on one of their schemes. Recogs are the favorite easy target of government types. Catch a few fooling about with the ANX lattice and all the voter CZs get aroused and are willing to punch the penal budget up another notch.



Dick says I was convicted of killing a young woman, Vietnamese, out near the Rigolets. They say I raped her. Then, after other awful, hideous torments, supposedly I strangled her. But what do they know? I don't feel like I could have done such a monstrous thing.

Sometimes I think some people just like to keep me off balance, to twist lies and cripple truths until they need each other to lean on. Sometimes I wonder if even Dick can tell the difference anymore.

Sometimes I wish somebody else would pour me a drink.



All I do know is the present moment — the actual. And it keeps shifting and changing to the next actual moment, and the next, and the next,

In each moment I can see, hear, taste, smell, feel sensations of my circumstances. Those are signs. They convey meanings that I can remember. Their significances each construe a virtual set of possibilities.

ANX: life of a recog

I can choose among two sets of such imaginal prospects: ones that already have happened and those that might yet happen. That's about all the ANX allows. That's all I have to work with as I try to figure out how I got here. But, more importantly, *why* I got here.

I just know I couldn't have killed anyone. And that means someone else did it. Who? And why?

Why would someone blame me? To figure it out, I have to go back to the basics: what I know and how I know it. I can't take a chance that the ANX hides important clues behind a blank wash of bleary absence.



Life is psychobiology. It struggles along an edge of chaos, in accord with only two motives: to

- feed itself with energies extracted in relentless cycles of dissolution back to basics, or
- participate in constructive circles of mutually adaptive wholeness to enable more complex prospects.

Curiously, those same forces, *Thanatos* and *Eros*, death and love, motivate fortunes — plant, animal or human — through population dynamics. Such in-/ex-clusion also mathematically elicits infinite forms of Mandelbrot's fractal elaboration.

So maybe we're just fractals of information. We all happen. We each extrapolate ourselves, through experiences, within a vast and creatively recursive cosmos where construction counters destruction. Participate seduces dominate. Resume extends consume. In life, the *actual* manifests in countering rhythms of diversely *virtual* options of responsiveness, to create *kairos*, opportunity. As with the ancient alchemical symbol, the *Ouroboros*,

Restless Waves On Transactional Seas

construction feeds on the debris of destruction. We are part of those cycles.

For instance, Dick loves mashed potatoes and gravy. No matter what else is on his plate, he would like to have mashed potatoes, topped with gravy, as well. I tried to explain how I think about experiences. About the interplay of possible and actual events.

Of the *implicate* possible in relation to the *explicate* actual. I put it in terms of his fondness for mashed potatoes.



At M4 Nature is Ouroboros

“When you see something like, or related to, a potato,” I asked, “what do you think of?”

“Mashed potatoes.”

“So the potato itself is a sign. It incites you to think of mashed potatoes. But mashed potatoes also act as a sign. They remind you of further flavors, of various qualities, the taste, the smell, the unique squishy texture on your tongue. All along with warmth and feelings that resonate with all previous experiences of mashed potatoes.”

“Yes, that’s pretty much it. But I don’t really think about any sign stuff. I just enjoy the actual experiences and am grateful for them.”

“Yes,” I continued, “that’s pretty much everybody’s way of operating. The sign stuff happens below the threshold of attention.

ANX: life of a recog

Unless they're a semiotician, like Charles Sanders Peirce. He developed a theory of meanings called *semiotics*.

“Everything that we experience is in terms of signs. Everything. Looks, smells, sounds, words, . . . , just about anything will lead you to think of something that's related to it. Or to question the meaning or relationships of what you've envisioned. Those recursive fractal patterns of specific interrelations make up the explicate order of experience. Particular things that happened.”

“I also don't think about Mr. Peirce much, if at all.” Dick said.

“Well, no. But his theory of semiotics does offer a way to connect explicate facts of actual experience with subtle qualities, with rhythmic interplay of possible implications. Ones that we associate with prospects and likelihoods among related circumstances. The smell of a rose, for instance. It induces so many associations from so many memories.”

“But very rarely about mashed potatoes.” Dick sighed.

“Anyhow, Peirce says there are three kinds of signs: an *icon* resembles what it represents, an *index* just refers to something because of some past association, and a *symbol* is a complex combination of icons, indexes and other symbols.”

“But why are you bringing this up? It doesn't get me any closer to mashed potatoes, now does it?” Dick complained.

“Not actually. But it does offer a way of thinking about how your body manages to have the experience of mashed potatoes. And to make it meaningful.”

“How so?”

Restless Waves On Transactional Seas

“A person’s brain and nervous system renders signs in fractal patterns of connection and nerve action. I think those explicit connection networks act like variable antennas. They interact with an electromagnetic field induced within surrounding cerebral fluids. And that field is responsive at the quantum level. That’s where Bohm’s notion of implicate order holds sway. Down where qualitative possibilities build from all past experiences to be enfolded among vast wave dynamics of all possible relational forms.”

“You mean that when I think about or enjoy mashed potatoes, I’m savoring them along with the entire universe?” Dick’s eyes conveyed an unaccustomed degree of astonishment.

“That’s kind of what I think goes on. Yes, indeed,” I said.



LINGERING HUNGERS

“Hello. I’m Nikki Brite. We’re gathered here by the Mississippi River to look at exciting new technologies AgriCo brings to river freight transport.”

Tyler Burke, aged — now relatively decrepit — entrepreneur, multi-billionaire and founding director of AgriCo, settled back into cushions. He was more interested in how the lovely young woman enlivened the dimness of his rec room than in reviewing progress of AgriCo’s latest venture.

“AgriCo heavy-lift skypods not only move cargo,” Nikki gestures skyward, “their onboard nano-swarm loaders bring docks to your freight, wherever it sits.”

Holographic recreation of recorded light fields projected directly into Tyler’s eyes from euSpecs perched like eyeglass frames on his ears and the bridge of his nose. Through them, a vista opened onto the Mississippi River where spokesmodel Nikki Brite, in blue cocktail dress and spike heels, pirouettes on a wharf above

undulating clay-tinged waters. She motions toward a huge airship that slowly descends, to settle and hover like some great bird over and about a nest of eggs that actually are a cluster of barges piled with heaps of sand and gravel, tied up not far off the riverbank.

Point-of-view swings back out over the river, glides to pan along docks farther upriver, and then hurtles back toward loading facilities of covered bins and open wharves that punctuate the riverbank vegetation.

Nikki continues, “For as long as people have moved freight by river they have had to load and unload at water’s edge. That’s after traveling distances in clumsy land vehicles to move cargoes across artificial docks that were built and maintained at great expense. And gaining access to such fixed platforms usually is subject to all sorts of fees, encumbrances and possibilities of unanticipated delay.”

The view moves closer to show the skypod’s mooring grapnels as they lock onto clustered barges lashed together. They are held fast to the mother airship’s breast as their burdens of sand and grain are drawn up — by swarms of electrostatically-driven tiny gnat-size nano-drones lifting skyward each individual particle of cargo — into the hovering airship belly.

The scene dissolves; the now heavy-laden skypod rises slowly. Its mooring lip clears, to reveal barges devoid of any residue of freighted burden.

Nikki boasts, “There. All done. Clean. And in only twenty-three minutes, fourteen seconds from touchdown. Once onboard, your cargo can be carried swiftly by these autopiloted behemoths to any location, inland or even out at sea, by the open mobility and steady dependability of AgriCo SkyLift. Those same nano-swarms can precisely place your cargo at any target location, anywhere.

“We are wherever you want us to be. AgriCo SkyLift.”



Lingering Hungers

Removing the euSpecs, Tyler tossed them toward the foot of his hospital bed, but missed. His right thumb brushed a control surface on his exosuit to bring up the room lights.

The recog majordomo, Cesar, quickly retrieved the specs as they clattered to the floor. He squirreled them away into a pocket and moved back out of the way, ready to as quickly pluck them forth should the old man call for them.

Tyler's robotic exoskeleton whined briefly to neatly pivot his frail body to fully engage his waiting grandson, Luther. "Tell me. Where did you find her?"

"Geez, Grandfather, did you even notice the skypod? And how it emptied those barges in less than thirty minutes? I want you to try it. Use that control pad on your exosuit. Just put its screen cursor where you want to dump the load."

"Yes, yes. That's all to the good. Maybe later. But where did you find her?"

"How do I know?" Luther wailed exasperation, "The agency handles that. You know — if you cut back on hormone treatments, then maybe you wouldn't have the attention span of a fourteen year-old."

Tyler ignored his grandson's complaint. He messaged his personal tech, Simon, telling him to home in on the profile of model Nikki Brite. Find her sponder signature and set a system flag to alert when she goes online.

"Why do you even have us report to you if you're going to ignore everything about Triad to just chase cheap thrills?"

"I want to know what you're up to."

"But you never take any interest. You leave all the decisions to Grey and me."

"I don't have to decide, as long as you two know I'm watching."

"Meanwhile, you hole up here. Like the emperor Tiberius, retired to a dissipated dotage. Ravishing every maiden who catches your fancy. Christ, Grandfather, you're way past a hundred. Let it go!"

“Let it go? You’re one to talk!”

“I’m thirty-three!”

“In dreem, I’m ageless,” the old man snapped. After a moment’s reflection he added, “when your body’s this old, helpless, useless, locked in an exosuit, let’s see if you take up crosswords.”

Tyler ignored the bored disdain with which his grandson’s eyes now scanned messages across his own euSpecs. “Why do you think I built a geriatric research complex? Why did AgriCo acquire gene tech? And push into nanobiotics? And cloning those chimps over at the Primate Center? Why do I fund a personal clinic here at Brakesend? Because I won’t ever ‘let it go’. *It* will have to be taken from me. And I’ll fight *it* out — all the way.”

“That kind of scrappiness already has cost the use of your legs. You can’t move without the exosuit,” Luther’s fingers fluttered dismissively at the air.

The old man’s eyes narrowed, wanting to slap his insolence silly. But then he let it go. “Yes, that was a mistake. I was impatient. It didn’t affect the recog we tried it on. Who knew? But now I’m more careful. I have to be. We’re so close now. We can clone a new body. Now to move the mind, memories and experiences, over into it. My legacy will be to end the very notion of legacy — indeterminate life”

“You should live so long,” Luther turned to leave.

Behind him, the exosuit whirred again. Tyler took the euSpecs from Cesar’s outstretched hand and settled back into exosuit recline. “Nikki Brite, right?” he repeated the name he wanted to be sure to remember. He called up the first samples of her work just returned from Simon’s search.



To her immediate left, at the upper edge of her reckoning, hovers her own dreem tinkerbell. Its bright Regulus is Nikki Brite’s star guide. It points the way back into her body that now reclines somnolent in a XR cradle.

Lingering Hungers

Ever abiding, her Regulus leads through a simstim — simulated stimulation — dream labyrinth of client-memory event layers. It knows the way into such kairotic — as in kairos: time of opportune moment — windings of fortunate happenstance, and the way back out. It blazes a trail through imaginal opportunities, to the actual temporal moment where her chronic — as in chronos: chronological time stream — body, awaits.

Nikki Brite, actress and spokesmodel, possesses a unique native responsiveness and empathic presence that qualifies her for work as clinical sponder. Guided by Regulus, eventually she will return from a mission of healing, a foray into the severely wounded psyche of a Nisus client referred to her for psychosomatic scenario massage: an ailing soul that calls itself Kevin Parr.

Kevin soon will be online. He will enter their conrev — conjoined reverie — from some distant clinic, she knows not where. Nikki's mission as clinical sponder is to venture into an active labyrinth of memory networks that comprises Kevin's self-story, to work through his own confusion of those narratives and help to unravel the tangled mess that suffers there.

However far she proceeds into their conrev, the Regulus tethers her. It can guide the way back into her own awakened corporeal mindfulness. It points the way back from dream possibility into habitation of her own actual body. It leads the drowsing mnemonic fount of her own active gennar — generative narrative — that calls itself Nikki Brite.

She nudges the glowing point. A shimmering lacework of options spatters out, each with its own scenario arrayed across a field of looping imaginal prospect. Likelihoods percolate, gleaned from her own recollections, rendered by dream tech to blend within a greater symbolic sweep of all human potential.

Where shall she await her dream date? Maybe she'll pick up where she left off in *Double Eagles*, the communal role-playing eighteenth-century game that LeRoi Bienvenue got her into. That has been a lot of fun.

ANX: life of a recog

Nikki has never met Kevin Parr in person. She only knows what she has learned from psychiatric scripts gleaned from earlier interventions by other sponders. She has assimilated the doctor's instructions that convey tell-tale hints to guide her own psychic probes.

A quick check of the portal's kairotic pinions satisfies that her own psychic mesh is adequately engaged in anticipation of his docking. Their actual bodies far apart, they shall transact through dreem in interplaying haptic dialogs of longing and anticipation. There don't seem to be any worrying faults. Here and there gurgle a few trivial eddies she should avoid: circling, sucking bubbles of neg-imagery that flatulate along fringes of the system carrier waves.

Such disturbances — she calls them burples — testify to personal psychic woundings or deficits that a particular sponder may carry into conrev. They arise from the sponder's own personal hang-ups, neuroses or traumas that are experiential scars of past misadventures.

Burples become worrisome only where conrevving psychetypes happen negatively to complement. In such unlucky and destructive pairings, energies excited by upsetting residues not yet fully integrated into stable selfhood may resonate in ominous foreboding of psychotic episode.

Undamped, such grievances can echo wildly within simstim to foster a reciprocating storm of feedback that can build to erupt into tornadic nightmare. Such a runaway vortex will feed off the living energy of both sponders, disrupt their Reguluses and deplete their somatic bodies into conjoined coma — concom — as their virtual dreem selves get sucked into its recursive cyclone of psychically-rending havoc.



Before safety measures and restorative techniques were developed to block such perils, early pioneers of dreem games

Lingering Hungers

occasionally suffered severe damage of runaway feedback, even to agonizing death. Now that failsafes have been found, a misstep into such emotional whirlpools will trigger system safety monitors. Responding to sudden energy drain, those monitors shut down a session before sponders regain their chronic carnal forms.

Stranded in limbo, the sponder's body then must lie comatose in a resuscitation rig that works back from system data record to reconstruct the lost Regulus from its prior states. A stricken sponder eventually will awaken back into the self-moment just prior to the conjoined nightmare, unaware that it even happened. Their equally disabled sponder client likewise must be restored to former sanity.

A sponder can be demoted from Nisus call-schedules in proportion to miscarries of aberrant sessions. Such is never a good outcome for anyone.



Within the kairotic life-elaboration of his own self-narrative, poor Kevin repeatedly has screwed up marriages, jobs, and friendships. Finally desperate, he has retreated into Frieden Clinic, in Atlanta, for a self-overhaul.

She may not know much of Kevin's biographical record but Nikki has spent the past week prepping through auto-rev samples taken from earlier therapy sessions with Doctor Frieden. She has been tasked with finding and mollifying an early span of life-moments that have proven inaccessible and unresponsive to the doctor's surface therapies.

Nikki relaxes into resonant purr of theta brainwave as she engages its VR space of dreem. She lets go a fluttering, distracting awareness of her own body at rest. She lies prone in an overhauled dentist chair that Tom Fyfe hacked together with his own concoctions from odds and ends of used simstim tech so that he could tap pirated Nisus process streams and offer cheaper therapeutic services to cut-rate psyche clinics.

Nikki frets whether this Frieden Clinic knows what it's doing. Tom is self-taught. A native technical genius with no formal credentials — relegated by poor social skills and bad luck to serving client agencies away from any legit mainstream. Hell, there's a reason all of them, including herself, have drifted into this sketchy moment She lets go of those specific concerns to fully attend a gentle drone hum. It announces a rising Regulus tree of prospects that, during their holding pattern, allows her to await emergence of her playdate's avatar.

A brashly insinuated portal suddenly opens into elegantly inviting imaginal ad spaces, populated by chicly appointed young men and women who invite her to explore someone's latest line of fashions. At another gateway she sees clusters of young and happily vibrant twenty-somethings, smiling enhanced enjoyment of zestful activities, awakened by ingesting remarkable new herbal supplements. She ignores them and all the others that compete for her attention. It's more difficult not to harp on what a cheapskate Tom Fyfe reveals in allowing commercial interests to inject robo-advertising spots as a way to defray his costs of simstim feed access. But when you work the low-end of the dreem racket you put up with what you get!



One of the perks of dreem, in any setting, is that a sponder gets to choose the world within which to initiate conrev. As with all things, Nikki likes to be fully in control. Ah, there I am. Maria Thèrése, Empress of Austria . . . She opens into a ready gennar selfmask, an avatar from the game Double Eagles, culled from all that is known of the actual historical person: Maria Theresa, Dowager Empress of the Romans, Queen of Hungary, of Bohemia, of Dalmatia, of Croatia, of Slavonia, of Galicia, of Lodomeria, etc.; Archduchess of Austria

She never tires of the thrill of the reveal, of emerging into virtual nouspace. On horseback, out in the Bavarian countryside

Lingering Hungers

she breathes deeply of bracing mountain air tumbling from snow-laced Alpine peaks. The day is bright, fresh as scrubbed edelweiss. It sparkles a rippling froth along the River Inn's plunge toward the Danube and the Black Sea beyond. About her an entourage of busily obsequious officers, resplendent in martial finery, move in brisk finesse to direct her attention out onto the valley below where a regiment demonstrates outcome of one of her royal decrees.

Grenadiers, in their smart new white uniforms, are bright against a backdrop of grassy meadow. They have traveled more than twenty miles of forced march to prove their crisp readiness before being thrown against invading Prussians.

"Despite quick-march of more than sixteen hours, unrelieved by bivouac, their uniforms remain clean and well-kempt, just as your Majesty commanded," Marshall Niepperg boasts.

"Yes, I see. Not quite the ragtag mob you last paraded before me. But I'm curious. How do they manage?" she asks.

Marshall Niepperg nods to an aide, who gestures to a distant captain, who in turn relays an order to lieutenants and sergeants of the regiment platoons distantly arrayed on the valley plain. As one multi-legged creature, bristling with bayoneted muskets, the ranks of soldiers abruptly wheel, march and in choreographic aplomb draw into a solitary line to describe a perfect circle, each man facing outward.

Upon signal each soldier pivots smartly to his left and slowly sits upon the knees of the one behind, even as his own knees accommodate the haunches of his neighbor in front. All are steadied by bayoneted muskets smartly at parade rest, but held out in counterbalance, to the side.

"This is how they now break march to rest, your Majesty. Their freshly cleaned uniforms touch neither grass nor soil until battle. Then, alas, so many shall be spoiled by blood."

"Splendid, Marshall. I am pleased. Now I trust that our devotion to driving Frederik and his insolent Prussians from Silesia shall be just as avid."

“But of course, Highness. We are your servants, all.” Curiously the old warrior turns and looks fixedly into her eyes, “I think perhaps he has arrived — and how is the young prince today?”



Nikki breathes deeply as the moment she gleaned from the Double Eagles game scenario fades from its eighteenth century Alpine landscape. She arrives at a less antique urban setting. Marshall Niepperg’s place is now occupied by a small crepe myrtle tree in full crimson bloom beside which she placidly oscillates back and forth in a lacquered wooden bench swing suspended by chains from a sturdy frame planted firmly in the ground.

In rising surge, her playdate Kevin’s sponder Regulus twinkles to bring her into new locale recalled from Kevin’s deepest recollections: the neat backyard of a modest American bungalow, enjoyed by his younger self and his family circa 2000 CE, in Covington, Georgia. In a time just before The Great Fall, they are in a prosperous suburb of greater Atlanta.

Nikki’s own formerly regal garments have resolved into a simple cotton smock, the strap of which has been unbuttoned for the baby’s convenience. Nikki sits aglow in youthful wonder, gazing down at her infant son, Kevin, held in her own bare arms to avidly suckle her full breast. A rush of embracing delight stirs within to displace haughty residues of regal mind. In bated amazement Nikki, who, back in realtime, has never before tasted nor even thought about maternal rapture, croons to her young joy, “Sweet one, flower of my heart. How long do I get to hold you in my arms?”

Astonished by her own unfathomed delight, tears shimmer out against former chronic vows that once denied any bent toward motherhood. Over by the scene’s edge, a rippling burple flutters adamant dismissal of her ever wanting children. Tempted to bask in her own moment of personal discovery she sighs, kisses the bright child’s powder-fragrant brow and dutifully leans down to

Lingering Hungers

nuzzle with her nose Kevin's own hovering Regulus. They push on beyond this moment, in search of the roots of his tribulations.

Keying on the play of sidestream burples during transit across his kairotic moments she eventually finds a place where one blathers noisily, suggesting that here, where he has grown adolescent, are moments in dire need of attention. She finds him now sullenly hugging his own knees in the corner of his bedroom. He recoils bitterly as she leans smiling toward him. She is flummoxed, disheartened by his hateful rejection. "Kevin, I'm your mother. You know I love you . . . I will always love you . . ."

No response as this child seems to crumple listlessly from her arms. She is not even sure that he still is there. His virtual form feels somehow empty. His Regulus wavers unsteadily.

Imaginal probes scripted by Dr. Frieden prompt no response. While stroking the listless boy's neatly coiffed head she manages to tap into his Regulus and scan its tree of offerings. Something is amiss. The tree looks nothing like the diagnostic guides.

Glancing toward eddies still fluxing along imaginal edges of their reverie she finds them now agitated, spinning, sucking up scraps of sickening recollection from her own past: a shuddering recoil from her mother's drunken boyfriend — Randall Privy — coming at her, his fumbling hands rampant over her recoiling young body. Then, slamming somatic upheaval. A vicious slap that is more of an open-handed punch now knocks her back, disoriented. In sudden panic she gasps, "Sponderslough." The shield-word command instructs simstim processors to block that unwelcome thread of recollection. But the burple eddies continue to swirl. Ominously.

Resonant grief shivers along the young boy's shuddering frame. Nikki asks, "Who hurts you, Kevin?" But a treacherous glimpse from alien eyes abruptly intrudes. Momentarily it displaces Kevin's scenario to gaze across the crescent of the Mississippi River churning at anxious flood. The view is from the edge of Algiers Landing on the Westbank, looking to the Quarter.

ANX: life of a recog

Now, back into some closet refuge of Kevin's memories. There, fierce denial's force swirls in mists of anxieties, ever-thickening fogs across even her own sense of whom she might be.

"Let's move over here, honey," Nikki urges, frantically searching for a more hospitable moment. One compatible with their conjoined gennar trees. Kevin now is a grown man. He looks nothing like his adolescence. A deeply hateful glare rebuffs even Nikki's lovingly receptive smile. She seems to fall through lingering pangs of someone's lost mother into a target of besieged misgivings. Then, back to the river at highwater . . . they oscillate between anxious flood and closet refuge.

Trying to modulate her own rising panic, Nikki plays a gentle touch to Kevin's cheek, issuing a reassuring stroke of beatific grace. She hopes to elicit an opening toward confidence, even to confession. Then something goes terribly wrong. Kevin's eyes are punctured. From their milky mess protrude groping fingers. Kevin's face horrifically collapses into an uncanny dread of the groping shafts of Randall Privy's arms ever-reaching out for her.

It's happening again! Mists thin to reveal a stalking figure that looms out to drag her back toward an open chasm. A new transport adit suddenly opens. Kevin's Regulus frazzles out, sizzling. The adit opens onto some trash-strewn urban back alley, through a door held ajar by a flaming mannequin. Instinctively she assumes Krav Maga defensive stance, to fend off this spectral abduction. But the ground gives way. It catches her feet up in gluey masses that won't let go. Aloud, she yelps her safeword: sponderback!



Her chronic body rebounds from a wrenching jolt, back into protesting cushions of Tom Fyfe's rehabilitated dental chair.

Nikki rips an LED-sparkling dreem tiara from her brow, pushes aside the armrest and leaps to her feet, screaming exasperation.

Lingering Hungers

Fighting a dizzying wave of nausea, she shrieks, “God damn it, Tom! It happened again! He’s back!”

Scurrying from behind a ramshackle link console, with surprisingly agile ferocity for so portly a middle-aged man, Tom Fyfe frets aloud, eyes broadcasting alarm. “What happened? Nikki, are you okay? What happened?”

“I told you,” Nikki erupts, “He’s back. He hijacked the feed. He reached through what’s his name, Kevin, and grabbed me”

“Oh, shit.”

“Oh, shit, is right! You told me you secured this channel — you’re still working off those same derelict fibers, aren’t you?”

“You lied to me, Tom. That so-called Kevin trip got hacked, shoved aside, turned into a portal for my stalker — again! What if he’d hacked my safeword? Do you know what happened to a sponder over in one of the Bywater shops? Her safeword was neutralized. Instant revcoma. She couldn’t get out. She was dragged through a hell of abuse fuck and torture that didn’t stop until they traced the link route out and shut down the hacked server. It was in fucking Romania! That took days! She still has nightmares! You can’t still be using those same crap feeds!”

“They told me it’d be okay. We’re routed through a secure tunnel.”

“Well, obviously, you got conned. And I almost was pulled into some psycho-hell-rathole. You want to keep running these pseudo-therapy jaunts through pirate feeds, you and your quack doctor friends. Get Mary Joe or one of your daughters, maybe Janine. I don’t need this crap. I’m not going back in there on your half-assed rig. No more risky feeds!”

“Calm down, will you?” Tom sighs. He reaches out to usher her pacing feet toward a nearby office chair. “Take a deep breath. We can work around this.”

She refuses to sit, still pacing, her eyes toss furious darts. “That’s the problem, Tom. You never want to solve anything. You always ‘work around it.’ I’m telling you. I’m done with this ’til you

can show me it's safe. Mary Joe can spond, or Janine. Or you can just shut down your fucking half-assed playground and get a real job, for Christ's sake." Having planted her barbs Nikki relents into his offered chair.

"Honey," Tom says gently, "your agitoos are strobing."

"Oh, damn," she reaches for her euPhone to tap and then swipe off the app. The luminous flash of chaotic tattoo dazzle that plays frantically across all exposed skin surfaces of her face and arms quickly dies back to normal flesh tones.

"There, that's better," Tom watches fluttering remnants of tattoo motifs fade from skin that is naturally luminous, with a sheen most professionals would die for. "Nikki, you're naturally so beautiful. Why'd you do those agitoos?"

His voice takes on the playful sarcasm Tom often uses to change from an unwelcome subject, "and you wear your hair in these ridiculous getups. I mean, today, like you're buzz-cut with some kind of color strands that sprout up through some kind of freak-jetso scalp sign to fall in dreadlock fever across your left shoulder. Tomorrow it'll be luminols and glitter flashing 'fuck you' or 'eat shit and die.' You determined to be a fringer freak? You can be so adorable, so desirable when you let it happen."

She glares darkly up at him. In a seething tone that somehow makes him cringe, she crisply enunciates, "I like freak. And this is not weird — it's wired! Why would I want to draw CZ creeps like flies to rot? Beauty's eye is beheld . . . besides. Regard trumps desire. Always."

Then abruptly she lightens up, mimicking cliché-giddy CZ nonchalance, "Besides, I can play Barbie. You want Barbie? For the right money, I can look and be however or whomever you want. I clean up my language, too. Let's do your dreem, honey. That's what we sponders do. Dreem however you like."

Tom shrugs, "Sorry, I just don't get it. But it's not for me. I worry about you, though. That's all. I like you. Regardless of however weird — ah, wired — you get."

Lingering Hungers

“Look, Tom. Some guy insists on coming on, there’s nothing like agitoos cycling slowly through Maori warrior masks to turn him off. Or maybe just a simple message banner scrolling across my forehead: Go away. Now. I WILL hurt you.”

Her voice regains its fugitive stress, “And if you’re so worried about me, Tom. Don’t lie to me. Fix the goddam feed.” She moves suddenly toward him.

“Jesus,” Tom jumps back away from her. “You still working out with what’s-his-name?”

“Who?”

“That black dude — works for Mamma Latrice. You know. Her shooter. Lennie, or Larry, or whatever. You still working out? Doing your Krav Maga shit?”

“LeRoi? Yeah. Three times a week.”

“You’re already lethal, sweetheart.” Tom chuckles indulgently, then adds with knowing wave of index finger, “But you’re never going to fly over the rainbow by being lethal.” He hesitates, a question having presented itself to ask, “So, the stalker. Why didn’t you just kick his dreem ass? Maybe he’d leave you alone then.”

“He jiggered the scenario. It went from open interactive to his full dominance. Everything was controlled by him. I could only react. When I tried to attack the ground turned gooey. I couldn’t move. It was like a nightmare. You try to escape, but everything gets at you. Slows you down. Makes you weaker. And God his breath was hideous! It was all like sucking waves of puke. I was drowning in his stench. All I could do was whimper, scream and moan. Thank God he didn’t hack my safeword!”

Reminded of how narrowly she had escaped prolongs her anxiety. In answer, Nikki’s anger resurges, “I should lethalyze your ass, Tom. You lied to me. You put me at risk. Now tell me what you’re going to do about keeping him out of this make-do jerry-rig. I can’t spond on that. It’s too risky.”

She points to the ramshackle dentist chair refitted with cables and panels a-sparkle with LED and OLED displays and buttons.

“Oh, the client, Kevin” she gasps, recalling the horrible rupturing of his eyes, “Is he okay?”

Checking signal feeds from the Atlanta clinic, Tom blows relief like air from puffed cheeks through his puckered lips, “Seems, so. This says that his side of dreem was interrupted by marauding soldiers, dressed in what looked like eighteenth century uniforms. Says they violently and lewdly assaulted his mother until she and they suddenly vanished. He’s really pissed and emotionally shaken, but okay. He blocked the link to his altcoin account. So it looks like we don’t get paid today.”

“Who can blame him?”

“But back to what you said — I didn’t lie. The link is through a secure tunnel. There’s no way it was breached cold. He must have your dreem profile, your signature. Maybe he backcrypts off that pattern to open a tunnel somehow. That takes a lot of tech know-how. I don’t know how he does it.” Tom inhales the deep breath he’d prescribed for her and thinks aloud, “I just don’t see any other way he gets through the mesh guards.”

“I don’t know anything about the tech,” she snaps, “I just know that your setup is unsafe for me, for any purpose. Mary Joe, it’s all yours!”

“I don’t blame you, Nikki. You’re right. But I’m certainly not letting my own wife or daughters in there if you say it isn’t okay. I just don’t know what to do about it. How did he get in? What was happening just before he took over?”

“The client, Kevin? First he was a baby, nursing in my arms.” Suddenly she realizes, recoiling, “Oh, God. You don’t think that was him, do you? The stalker? Sucking my tit? Oh, shit!” All the residual feelings of maternal bonding invert suddenly into a wave of revulsion, of helpless violation.

“Not if there were no disturbances in the mesh wave,” Tom downplays the possibility.

Thinking for a moment, she recalls, “Not at first. Not until he was a teenager. He became really sulky. And the little burples

Lingering Hungers

moved faster, opening into a swirl, and then became a vortex that was slowly edging toward us.”

“Burples?” Tom puzzles.

“Yeah, burples. That’s what I call those little freak flaws that pop and bubble over on the edges.”

Tom grudgingly shrugs, “That’s about when it happened, then. When the swirling started. We already checked psychetype compatability. Kevin and you mesh with no problem. There wouldn’t be any major dissonance faults between you two. Your stalker came in through some disjunct between his psyche and yours. Some resonance between what he is and what you fear.”

“Like what?”

“Tell me, what flashed through your mind just before? Just before you realized you were in danger?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.” She adamantly refuses to discuss her hateful childhood with Tom. He wouldn’t keep it to himself. And even if he would, he’d get off on it. It isn’t something to be known, by anyone. Especially not by him.

“And there it is,” Tom slowly nods toward her defensiveness, “That’s how he gets hold of you. You didn’t get the polyvagal-focus therapy most sponders do. Something you keep bottled up. A backwave around some vagus nerve shit, probably dorsal, just left standing open. It invites malingerers in. Like the old computer days. Hackers pinging every processor on the globe in search of ones without a firewall or with an open unguarded port. I used to make ’em my bitches. Just like the backwave. It’s the port you left open in your firewall. The simstim tech protects the psyche, except for repressed backwaves. That’s your unguarded port. That’s how he gets to you?”

“What can I do?” she moans.

“Deal with it. Or cut it out. Either way you’ve gotta close it. A psycheblanche can wipe all the hateful memories, whatever they may be. It’ll just extinguish them. That’s how the military used to treat post-traumatic stress back before Nisus came up with

simstim tech. They put therapeutic probes into freaked-out brains to eliminate backwaves. Nothing to it, nowadays. They lay you into dreem, flood your body with PKMzeta blockers as you relive the memories. And poof! Bad stuff all gone. Backwave suppressed. You are back in business. Now it's just a simple office procedure."

"However, easy, I can't afford it, Tom. My insurance doesn't cover psychesurgery."

"Well, honey, until you do something to suppress that backwave your sponder days are finished. He'll be waiting anytime you go online. Now that he knows your profile he'll get through, even on a premium Nisus-licensed channel."

"But how can I make a living?" she moans, "Back to dancing? Or waiting tables? Sex work? No way! I'll have to leave Nola."

"You've worked t-vu. Doc art, and stuff. You could do something with that."

"But that won't pay anything. Actors and models stumble all over themselves to work for free, just to get noticed. And I don't have the right equipment to go full production. Nobody who does will likely put me to work. Not with my resumé."

She parodies a prospective interviewer, "Oh, I see here that you started dancing at Big Daddy's in the Quarter. And you worked as a model and even were spokesperson for Audubon Institute during their sesquicentennial gala. Just blew your way into that one, I suppose?" She mimes a casting couch interview.

"And then you worked one of those little shabby thrill shops with a bar on the side. Impressive! Ah, yes, then a brief gig over at Nisus where you trained as a sponder. And just why did you give up sponding, Ms. Brite? Was there a problem?"

She glowers in exasperation, "Right! Yeah, that'll get me a long way. Even in showbiz . . ."

"There's always an opening for beautiful women in the entertainment industry," Tom reminds her, "Especially in the Snake Zone."

"You don't understand. It takes over everything. Eventually

Lingering Hungers

there's nothing left — of me. That's why I got out. Do you want your daughters over there?"



Tom relents as Nikki sinks back onto the rigged dental chair. She pulls her hands slowly across her face, to massage away gloomy mists rising across a lake of fading panic.

Suddenly she pauses and looks up. Her eyes brighten. "Oh. Wait. There's guy in my building. A recog. LeRoi says he does optech for Mamma Latrice's zone cabarets. She lets him live up on the fourth floor."

"A recog? Doing optech?"

"Yeah. A young guy, a little older than me, seems sort of interesting. I met him over at the Aquarium last year. He kept up their marinescape holoprojectors. I was shooting teasers for a membership drive. Mostly he keeps to himself. But we pass each other sometimes, when he goes out. I didn't realize he was recog at first. He seems really smart, not like a run-of-the-mill cogger. I think he once worked for Nisus. LeRoi says he has an advanced degree in optronics or something. From Tulane. Maybe he could find a way. To keep out the perverts."

"A recog?"

"Yeah. He got caught up in the Warrior trials. Convicted of rape murder." After a moment's reflection she announces, "He didn't do it, though."

"How do you know?"

"He's not the type."

"Like you're psychic?"

"I read people, Tom. He didn't do it."

"It won't hurt to try. What'll he charge?"

"How do I know? He's a recog. They usually work for table scraps. But considering his gig with Mamma Latrice, who knows? He may tell you to piss off." She pushes a furious scowl his way, "And I wouldn't blame him."

ANX: life of a recog

“Can you bring him to see me?”

“He’s a recog, Tom. He can’t leave the Quarter, except on a keeper. You got any keepers?”

“Oh, right. I could get ‘em, I suppose. But it’ll be cheaper for me just to go to him. Maybe he can come in on fiber to my server and find out if there’s a problem with the channel. Or maybe something we could do to the optronics to bolt ‘em down. If he’s as good as you say he is.”

“I don’t know how good he is. I just know that Mamma Latrice lets a recog have a nice apartment on St. Peter just so he can monitor her shops. And I know she hasn’t had any more problems with intruders hacking her feeds since she found him.”

“What’s his name?”

“Cajun name, I think. Penn, ah, Hebert.”

“Take me to him.”

Reflecting upon how Tom’s effusive lampooning can put people off, just when he’s trying hardest to impress them, Nikki raises a cautionary palm outward to slow him down. “Ah, why don’t you let me talk to him first,” she advises, “I’ll see if he’s available.”



5



BODIES OF LIGHT

Back when he first accepted Mamma Latrice's favor, one day Penn had retreated to a park bench in the shade of a small dogwood, in the small inner courtyard of his St. Peter Street apartment building. Time seemed irrelevant to his concerns. What had he done to so radically miscarry his fortunes?

At some point he realized that he was no longer alone. A young woman had arrived. The one who lived on the third floor. The weird one that always was hurrying off. Frequently she was with one of Mamma's main scooters, LeRoi Bienvenu. Penn assumed they were a couple.

Lost in his own worries, he had not noticed. She must have crossed the courtyard, over to a small plot of neatly cultivated plants along the far edge. Apparently she, too, was oblivious to his presence. He watched her fingers push and probe among a neatly tended variety of plants.

"So how does your garden grow?" Penn asked quietly.

In one explosively assertive yet graceful flourish of arms and

legs Nikki leapt to wheel about. Her body firmly planted an agile attack posture. Then she recognized him.

“Oh, it’s you. You scared the shit out of me!” she exhaled relief and accusation all at once.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t even see you come in. I was floating in my own headspace, I guess,” Penn apologized as Nikki, still heaving deeply, relaxed into a more casual stance. “So — how does your garden grow?”

After looking closely at him, to read his eyes, she relented. “Oh, it’s pretty much finished for the season, I think.” She fidgeted and glanced aside at her workspace. Suddenly perplexed, they both were at a loss for what to say. “I was just gathering seeds for next year . . .,” she stammered, “Mamma Latrice lets me grow herbs and stuff down here . . .”

Her eyes focused more narrowly. Then abruptly she recoiled slightly in embarrassment. She reached up to finger garish blue and red dreadlocks that had been braided with threads of luminously flashing yellow-green and purple optic fibers. “Oh, God, I’m a mess,” she moaned.

That clashing ensemble of color luminously erupted from beneath an outlandish sculpted headpiece perched atop her brush cut scalp. Its pendulous melange of hair braids, glowing fiber dreads and assorted gimcracks of jumbled ornament all tumbled erratically down across her left shoulder. She tossed them all behind her, as if tidying up before receiving an unexpected visitor.

Wincing down at agitoos cycling across her lower arms, she plucked a euPhone from a rear jeans pocket. With a quick finger swipe she flicked off the nanokinetic tattoos to pacify and restore her skin’s naturally smooth luster.

He was amused that suddenly she so eagerly dismissed a look that has been so assiduously cultivated. “Don’t worry about that, he assured her. “I’ve seen you decked out lots of different ways.” He shrugged, “It doesn’t matter to me.”

“You’ve caught me in my leave-me-alone street look. Sorry if

Bodies of Light

it puts you off." She seemed crestfallen at so unbecoming a presentation.

"Nikki, right?" Penn recalled their having briefly met a year or so before, over at the Aquarium. There, for a while, he had tended projectors that animate the Caribbean holotanks. She had exceeded a public pledge PR appeal, broadcast on t-vu, to support an Audubon Aquarium campaign for new patrons.

Back then, crisply, even elegantly attired, she had sauntered through a scripted spokesperson-of-the-month role. Vibrant and engaging, her manner carefully evoked current patterns of refined haute-couture chic-space. That guise had been many CZ ticks above this intentionally ratty street-urchin getup.

That day, at the Aquarium, during a quick lunch break taken together, she asked if he'd seen an exhibition uptown at the Contemporary Art Center. He decided then to get it over with, to let her know that as recog he does not, can not leave the Quarter.

"You're recog?" She slowly released an incredulous whisper as eyebrows lifted into wariness.

A perilous moment of self-doubt sucked at Penn's gut. He braced for a bad scene. He might need goaway.

"That means you've done something really awful . . . that you've killed someone," she mused aloud.

Penn said nothing. He couldn't tell whether her tone accused or just drifted toward conjecture. Her eyebrows fretted above large hazel eyes to probe his wrenching perplexity.

She likely would get up and leave. Yet again he would be stranded in dejection. Back to normal. But then there was a curious flutter. She looked down and giggled a happy discovery.

"That's radical . . . you couldn't hit me. Even if I really jerked you around! Why, Penn — I think that must be the next best thing to love!"

He briefly kindled a glimpse of their interests further intertwining. To see if she was in a relationship, he commented about her going about with Mamma's scooter, LeRoi. In mock

ANX: life of a recog

indignation she had snapped, “I don’t go with anybody.” Then coyly she smiled, “Although, if they’re lucky — and behave themselves — we might hangout once in a while.”

But, when he had seen her since, she seemed only to want to be left alone. They had not spoken, except to nod hello. There had been no followup and no subsequent moments conveniently emerged into mutual improvisation. Passing nods of acknowledgement gradually slid back toward indifference. Besides, why would anyone hook up with a recog?

Eventually Penn accepted that she is just some chameleon sprite who lives on the third floor, beneath his own fourth floor aerie. A recog quickly gets used to any routine and should be grateful, he thought to himself, when complaints remain small.

Days passed unpropitiously. Kairos is fickle. Penn’s technical duties — keeping cabaret feeds clear of mischief or interference — held him firmly to a mostly nocturnal schedule. He dutifully patrolled simstim fiberways as, over in the Snake Zone, jetset swells frittered wealth away in AI-boosted carnal CZ reveries.



Penn answered a sudden tap at the door. That same young woman stood there, now so gaspingly beautiful that for a brief moment he did not recognize her. Luminous hazel eyes sheepishly apologized for disturbing him. But her exuberant smile was grateful for any moments he might spare. They stood there, neither able to find what comes next. Finally Penn cleared his throat to say, “Yes?”

Nikki pled, “I’m really sorry to bother you. But I’ve got a situation. I’m your downstairs neighbor. Nikki. Nikki Brite. We met over at the Aquarium. And then again downstairs in the courtyard. Remember? It was a while back.” She thrust out a hand that eventually he briefly clasped in clumsy affirmation.

For a moment it seemed that she might burst into tears. Or was this a fake-out verge of some tirade? The moment seemed to

Bodies of Light

flummox all notion of social grace. A welter of apprehension, anger and despondency tugged crazily about her features — then they simply dissolved back into hauntingly luminous eyes that floated above a sad smile. She asked simply, “I wonder if you can help me get my life back?”

“Oh,” he replied, still numb in her aura.

Again an interim of goofy silence until she suggests, “Could I come in? Just for a minute or two. I won’t keep you long, I promise.”

“Oh, sure. Forgive me. I forgot my manners. It’s just that you look so . . . so different.”

“Oh, do I? Yes, I suppose I do,” she laughs delight. “The dreads and the agitoos. I usually put them on when I’m headed out. But I thought I’d spare you.” Her joke feels infectious and he laughs, too, then steps back to gesture her welcome to his rooms.

The double French doors were barren of any curtain or covering. Beyond, she found a layout similar to her own digs below: a kitchenette to the immediate right of entrance, a dining area beyond that expands out into a front receiving area, then on through a large pocket door, and into a living room that in turn opens into bedroom and bath all the way in the back.

Aside from a large round oak table positioned up front, along with four lightly carved straight back chairs, most furnishings were technological.

Racks of equipment, festooned in cables and featuring ranks and rows of flashing points of color, lined the walls. Farther back in the middle room she could see what appeared to be a large sponder chaise-longue, enclosed in some kind of metallic mesh-screened framework, like a copper-colored mosquito net. Nearby rose a slightly elevated platform that extended into the far room, just beyond the sponder rig.

All about, across walls and atop various office fixtures were flattened flexwrap screen monitors of various sizes. They were neatly deployed across clusters of metal or plastic boxes and most

sported various dials, buttons, knobs and flickering glow-point LEDs. In the distance were active holo-projections of people engaging in erotic hallu-scenarios of carnal diversion, all piped by fiber from Mamma Latrice's various dreem cabarets.

"Oh, your own private porn feeds?" she smiles knowingly.

He blurted, somewhat defensively. "No, that would be too much — the same cliché crap over and over. It gets worse than boring. But it's my job — I keep the feeds on to monitor phase relationships. I hardly even notice what they do, anymore.



On the round oak table lay an old hardcover book, *Powers of Ten*. Its pages bore evidence of many turnings.

"You're a reader, too?" She marveled at such quaintly juxtaposed habits.

"Oh, that. I keep it open to remind me. When I get down."

"Remind you?"

"Of how trivial anything can seem in the totality of the cosmos."

"Oh?" A look of this is a strange one flickers across her eyes.

But his voice perks up as he turns its pages. "It's an old book I found in an antique shop over on Decatur."

"Piron's?" she asked, her hopes buoyed by prospect of some mutual interest, "Now, there's a fun place. I love the stuff he carries."

"Yeah. He gave it to me. It shows stages of an imaginary trip, out into space — you know, the macro, large-scale universe. And then it comes back down into the micro, the smaller worlds nesting inside us.

"It starts with a couple lying, napping, on a picnic blanket on the south shore of Lake Michigan, in Chicago. They're the reference location and set the spatial scale.

"Then, to go out, the camera pulls back so the scene shows ten times more of the surroundings with each frame shot on each

Bodies of Light

successive page. It keeps pulling back from the reference view, which is one meter across, then next is ten meters across, then one hundred meters, one thousand, on to one million, and so on”

His fingers flipped pages as he spoke. The images began with a young man and woman dozing after a picnic on a sunny day. Then the same couple is shown a little farther away as the camera lifts higher, then still farther. Now they can hardly be seen at all as the grass sward of the park occupies most of the picture frame. Then the park has become a brief vertical strip between a marina and large buildings with parking lots. Then the park shrinks to one of multitudes of features in a view occupied equally by city and lake.

“That’s radical,” Nikki marvels.

“And it keeps going out farther and farther,” he plies through the pages. “At 10^8 power the earth has become a small blue marble in a black sky dotted with stars. And at 10^9 you wouldn’t even be able to see the earth if they hadn’t drawn a blue box around it. By 10^{14} the entire solar system takes up about the same space as the earth did at the eighth power. At 10^{22} the entire Milky Way galaxy is reduced to the same measly portion of the view. All the way out to 10^{25} , which is at about one billion light-years from where we started with the couple on the shore of Lake Michigan.

“Then if you go back down to human scale, to the same couple, you can home in on the man’s hand at 10^{-1} meters. At 10^{-2} , you see tiny wrinkles in the skin. At 10^{-5} , the entire picture is only ten microns across and we find a white blood cell, inside a skin capillary. At 10^{-7} , there are the coils of DNA in the white blood cell. On down to 10^{-9} where you see the individual molecules. And it keeps going down, down, to atom, then proton, and then to the inner quark structure of the proton itself at 10^{-16} meters. We have just skipped across forty-two powers of ten scaled in meters.

“That was all they could grok when that book was printed. But now we can get almost to the bottom. Almost all the way down to Q-foam.”

“Q-foam?”

“At the Planck boundary. Beyond that, space has no extension — no dimensions. The notion of space just becomes meaningless beyond 10^{-35} meters.”

Her eyes blinked to mask the blankness of grasp behind them.

“What’s on the other side?”

“Bohm says holomovement. Pribram calls it holoflux. Interplaying waveforms of possibility. Of prospect. They enfold and unfold moments we choose to enact here in our actual world.”

“Oh.”

Penn returns to the young couple sprawled, asleep, on the blanket. “And all the time there they are dreaming — envisioning forms from the holoflux — at least that’s an interpretation. No worries. No anxieties. Or maybe there are worries, but they’ve just grokked their own triviality. And now they lie sprawled and bewildered, to wallow in daydream. In the vastness of life’s possibilities.”

“Wow.” Nikki worked toward some semblance of his ardor, “That book is so neat!”

“It’s based on a film by Charles and Ray Eames. They were designers last century. I came across it in t-vu when I was a kid. But thinking of zooming out and back down like that still blows my mind. Even in this book version.”



Back in the midsection of the straightback apartment Nikki looks across a configuration of wall monitors scattered among a number of instrument-laden control panels. Nearby, the curious copper-toned mesh fabric enshrouds a person-sized tent space.

Across the room from control consoles, a holo-platform renders lightforms of avid phantasies. Narrow black rods thrust from floor to ceiling at each corner of the raised platform. Even farther back, beyond a wide pocket door, she can see into a disheveled bedroom.

Bodies of Light

Penn slowly shakes his head to convey how cumbersome it all can become, “Even if I get a keeper, it all has to be done by a timing program to switch things on and off — I can’t use my euPhone to control it because the Faraday cage blocks electromagnetics, including maxnet signals

“It really gets to be a pain in the ass. Plus, it’s really hard for a recog to score keepers. And the cops get pissed if they catch anybody handing them out or if they find a recog on one, unauthorized. They’ll drag him through hell and back before dumping him back on the street.

“Does a keeper turn off the ANX?” Nikki asks.

“Oh, trust me. Nothing turns off the ANX!

“A keeper is just a gelatin capsule. You swallow it. Stomach acid and digestive juices chemically power its mini-transmitter to emit the ANX-safe codes. The ANX always is active, though. Think even a slightly angry thought and it will clamp shut to drop you in your tracks.

“Cops use keepers to transport recogos for court appearance, or whatever. Only they are supposed to have them. Mamma Latrice gets them somehow. And every once in a while a recog working for her can score one. It’s like finding gold! You can trade them with other recogos for anything. It’s a little taste of freedom — to go anywhere, as long as you stay cool.

“Most guys head over to the Zone and live it up in the cheap houses.”

“For how long?”

“Eighteen to twenty-four hours. Gradually, keepers digest like food and they just stop working.”

“So you’re good to go between dumps?”

He laughs, “Yeah, that’s it. Life of a recog — good to go between dumps.”



ANX: life of a recog

Nikki changes the subject, “Your apartment is sort of like mine. Except I don’t have all this tech stuff. Is that a t-vu control booth?”

“It’s all simstim consoles and monitors. Mamma Latrice had it all put here. I told her what I’d need to keep her channels clear.”

“You do dreem up here?” Nikki wonders aloud. Maybe she can avoid Tom Fyfe’s jury-rig setups.

“I don’t. But someone could. The console and drone nodes are here just because they’re part of the simstim package. Someone else, like you, maybe, could use it. If you can learn to control a session from within dreem, that is. It’s tricky, but that’s how you’d have to do it.”

Seeing that she was uncertain what he meant, he explained, “I can’t even turn the link console on unless I’m in that Faraday cage. And I can’t get in the Faraday cage unless I’m on a keeper because the cage blocks the ANX signal and it’d freak me out. So, it gets complicated. That’s why I’m hoping maybe there’s a way. Maybe we can work a deal. You help me, then maybe I can help you.”

“What do I need to do?”



SALVOS, CONS AND PROS

The Reverend H. Emil DeMint, recently appointed Director of the *Haven of Mercy* Mission, ponders his dilemma. He leans back from his office desk, reaches for his favorite stetson and plops it onto his head. It is immaculately white. Like all the others in his collection. He likes that it anoints his brow with a halo of conviction. Always wear a white hat, his sermons counsel. Symbolism is the crucial instrument of salvation.

A very old acoustic Martin dreadnought guitar lies nearby to tempt his fingers. He wants to pick it up and strum as he works through options of a dismaying outlook.

But he is not certain of being totally alone here in the *Haven of Mercy*. And he has learned that it is best to indulge his passion for country music when no one else is around. Otherwise, he can expect ridicule from his flock of sarcastically cackling recog misfits.

A few months ago the Reverend moved his family from Topeka to assume directorship of *Haven of Mercy*, one of a number

ANX: life of a recog

of nationwide outreach facilities established by the Christian Brotherhood. Their mission is to do good works and to foment spiritual uplift within distressed urban communities.

He discovered, with some misgiving, that in Nola the mission also carries an additional burden. It is the officially designated mentor for all city-sponsored rehabilitative charity efforts, including the infamous Recognizance Penal Project. (Why, he grouses to himself, must they call it the “recog penile project”?)

Before arriving he had envisioned recogs to be a likely modest, but still circumspect, assembly of derelicts. They reluctantly, perhaps, but eventually, would submit to his program of revitalizing and uplifting ministry. Instead he found a rag-tag clutch of lusty hell-raisers, scam artists and light-fingered virtuosos, who quickly could strip from any unsuspecting victim every last morsel of self-esteem. Where once people complained of mere gypsies, he grumbles to himself, recogs now prowl.

His tenure has not begun well. Fresh from unpacking his apartment contents, he had just posted in the lobby of the *Haven of Mercy* a new directory of staff and services. It featured his name at the top: H Emil DeMint.

Unfortunately, the sign kit did not provide punctuation marks because later, from the office, he overheard a couple of his new charges. They raucously proclaimed a sarcastic reading of his just-posted directory. “Hemil?” “Hemil de mint? How sweet! Hemil schlemiel . . . Ha, ha, ha . . .”

And as they caught on to how much he disliked their rendering of his name, so they reveled in using it. Even his wife, Marilyn, had taken it up. She found it funny that he was so sensitive. “They’re just criminals, what do you care what they think?”

But he has drawn a firm line for the the children. Todd and Francine may refer to him only as “Daddy”, or even “Reverend” on more formal occasions. Sometimes Francine, the younger, compounds the two into “Reverend Daddy”.

Salvos, Cons and Pros

Not long after making his name their toy, Reverend Daddy clashed with de-fanged members of the once macho-strutting white-supremacist gang, the Teuton Warriors. Years ago, throughout economic and political travails of The Great Fall, they rampaged and plundered the metro area of Nola, preying upon all, but reserving the worst of their fury for non-Teutonic “invaders” — immigrants, communities of color, even Native Americans.

Now these convicted felons — constrained within the ANX penal lattice and fallen even farther into casual dissipation of persistent gluttony and nonstop carousing — raucously celebrate carnal turpitude in their new moniker, Two-Ton Worriers.

A couple of Worriers had ambled by just as the Reverend plucked away at his Martin to belt out a praise-worthy anthem of coming glory: *Ain't Gonna Be No Testosterone Up In Heaven (Even Jesus Will Not Have A Beard)* / 'cause all the ways that tempt us through pleasures / are never ever quite as they appear /.

Insolent Worrier glee crystallized into orchestrated contempt, enacted as group theater. Should Hemil annoy any assembled Worriers, they — as a group, in practiced synchrony — will rub their own scruffily bearded chins, mime mock disgust and then with the precision of practiced cheerleaders, in unison make scissors movements with their fingers to reach down and clip at their own gonads.

Hemil can't help it. Their crude goads makes him blush and stammer. He does not realize that they love to torment him, not because he responds so comically, but because it so dismays him that he leaves them alone.

But later, to compound his anxieties, they worked out a skit from a plaintive lament he had written in the wake of an exasperating encounter with Marilyn: *I Cried My Mamma To Sleep When She Threatened To Leave Me Behind* / despite all my fears and frustrations, / she's never far from my mind /. Now whenever he demands something of them they just boo-hoo silently en masse and pretend to rock themselves to sleep.

ANX: life of a recog

But still, nominally, at least, he must be in charge of these bullies. What is he to do?



When he first was condemned to the lattice, during an initial thirty-day transition period granted new recog, Penn had been allowed to sleep, to take meals, and to receive calls and messages at the *Haven of Mercy*. But he quickly found why no other recog seemed to envy his accommodations.

Life at the Haven daily, even hourly, suffered diatribes and homilies bred in domestic travails of the newly arrived Reverend H. Emil DeMint and his family. Typically, at the least convenient moment, the anxiously hovering pastor would launch any of several reliable vehicles of venting that cycled through themes of men versus women.

Today, Penn has come in search of a friend, Julie, who has lost his job and is having a rough time. Hemil soon engaged Penn in what the Reverend finds to be a universal complaint among women. According to his wife Marilyn, never are women esteemed by men except, maybe, for thankless domestic service in wiving, mothering, nursing and nurturing of offspring and their sires.

“I told her, Marilyn, thank you.” Hemil breathed heavily as he unloaded his own backlog of observation, “I really thank you for being wife. For being helpmate. For endless inspirations of sermonizing. You have no equal for invaluable critique during every moment of a trying life’s pilgrimage. Dare anyone aspire higher? That’s what I told her”

“Reverend,” sang out an unfamiliar voice, “how I do esteem your wisdom and diligent ministry!”

Emil DeMint turned; immediately his face soured at the sarcasm and abruptly cast about for other matters to tend. As he backed away, he replied in sudden impatience, “Now we both know that isn’t true, Jody. Though your soul might yet be rescued if you only took the prospect of perdition a little more seriously.”

Salvos, Cons and Pros

“Did you ever think that maybe we’re already condemned, Reverend? That this earthly life is perdition, and I’m just one of its torments? Loosen up. Enjoy. You’ll live longer.”

“Hello,” the newcomer turned to Penn to extend his right hand. Tall and slender, his face was aquiline, beneath dark-hair, and his lankiness seemed somehow to sag downward. Penn received the handshake despite the Reverend’s disapproving frown. “I’m Jody Bart. Chief nemesis of Dr. DeMint, here.”

“Satan is my chief nemesis, Jody. You are but one of his lesser recruits.”

Jody seemed to relish the open disavowal and its effect of pushing the preacher away, back toward the nearest door. “Adieu, Reverend, who so salivates salvation’s salving salvos.”

Bart uttered his parting whimsy in what seemed an affectionate farewell, then he returned his attention to Penn. “The good Reverend does not care for my competing ministry, my way of helping recogs out of occasional jams. Say, are you by any chance Penn Hebert?”

“Why, yes, I am.”

“Ah. I thought so. Rollo said I might find you here. You see, I need someone with your knowledge. To tell me all about Nisus protocols — you know, consumer zones, characterological zeitgeist? Maybe you could spare a few minutes to clear up some questions?”

Something about the man’s hovering, and his piercing stare, led Penn to hesitate as Bart’s eyes watched from above a restless agitation of shifting stance. “I don’t know. Why? What’s this about?”

“I’m working up a deal. It’s a new angle for doing simstim cabarets. Rollo says you seem to know all about Nisus procedures. So here I am. I’ll be glad to reimburse you for your trouble. Just let me know what you need.”

“Oh, I don’t know. How long will it take?”

“I just need a brief tutorial, on what’s involved with calibrating

client dream interfaces. But since you're so reluctant," Bart held up a black and gold plastic card that Penn recognized as a cryptocurrency transfer wallet, "There's a thousand bucks on this. Explain the logic to me and it's yours. How's that?"

"Well, I could use the money. Sure. I guess so."

"Great! Thanks. But let's go somewhere else, where the hospitality has fewer distractions." They both welcomed respite from DeMint's sermonizing and so headed off to *Cafe du Monde*, an outdoor beignet and coffee shop near the river.



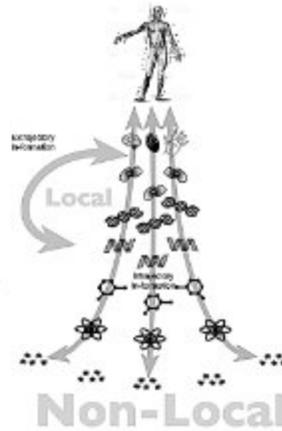
As they walked, Bart kept up his stream of chatter. He seemed already to have initiated Penn into his world. He reckoned aloud how Penn's technical chops and his own deal-making savvy could work through many very profitable angles.

"First, why the name Nisus?" Jody Bart asked as they took their places at a small rectangular table. "And that slogan, 'Nisus is us'? I've always wondered what that means."

Penn called up an image into the shared virtual space of their euSpecs.

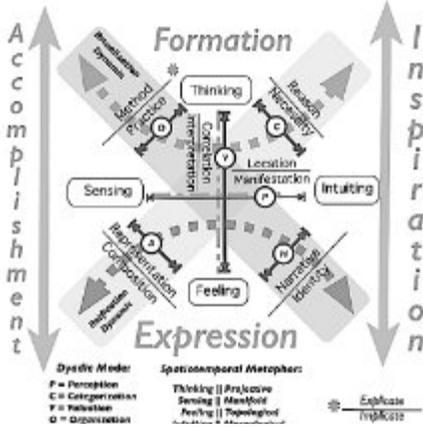
"Back at the beginning, someone proposed that 'studying nature' means having to account for 'how we humans perceive nature'. So studying nature actually is us studying us studying us.

"And if 'N' stands for 'Nature,'" Penn drew an 'N' in the air with



Organic experience
(Used under license CC-BY-NC-ND
www.manifestorders.com)

Salvos, Cons and Pros



Cognitive functions
 (Used under license CC-BY-NC-ND
www.manifestorders.com)

his finger, “then the recursive notion of studying nature, reduced to ‘nature is us,’ becomes ‘Nisus.’ The slogan is just geek-cleverness. It’s meant to suggest levels of recursion in conscious realism, of how we pay conscious attention to anything. ‘Nisus’ just stands for the larger phrase ‘Nisus is us.’

“It’s their way of calling attention to ‘We pay attention to how we pay attention’ — second order attentiveness.”

Bart paused in a blank stare. He shook his head slowly, “Weird sense of humor, those guys. Dry. Very dry. Maybe too dry.”



“First of all,” said Penn, “dreem happens through a physiological sensory interface to a quantum level AI system. And that taps into the normal neural interplay of possibilities. But any range of possibilities depends on how a person focuses on different sorts of situations.”

Penn summoned another image, a chart of how thinking and feeling interplay with sensing and intuiting. It entered the shared view space of their euSpecs as he explained, “Consumer zones, characterological zeitgeist, or whatever you want to call those matters, are social and cultural constructs of ‘common sense’, mutual understanding formed within a social group as each gives attention to things. So we begin with how a single person pays attention. How a person focuses on various kinds of situations.”

A waiter took their orders, then whisked off toward the kitchen as Penn thought for a moment. He raised a forefinger to emphasize a point. “And this part is really important. When it’s overlooked, people fail to understand the logic.

“You have to realize that really paying attention — to figure out some circumstance — is creatively interpretive work. It can be confusing and disorienting. Because of that, people tend to develop individual habits of dealing with routine matters.” Flexing his fingers against his euRing, Penn highlighted the cognitive functions involved in attention: sensing, intuiting, thinking, and feeling.

“If their usual habit of focusing on some kind of circumstance works well enough, then they just go with it. They may say they’re actively paying attention, but most of the time people just re-activate some familiar, previously worked out, ritualized and habituated focus. They’re on auto-cruise. They don’t actually think, or feel, or sense, or intuit in a new way. They just react according to some habit they’ve already formed — if it seems close enough to deal with their circum-stance. They respond to a situation in ways that have worked well enough in the past. Without really paying attention to actual differences, usually they stagger through zombified CZ reactions until old habits don’t work anymore.”



Bart’s fingers were typing notes on a virtual keyboard projected by his euSpecs onto the table top. He glanced up at Penn to say, “I’m paying attention, by taking a few notes.”

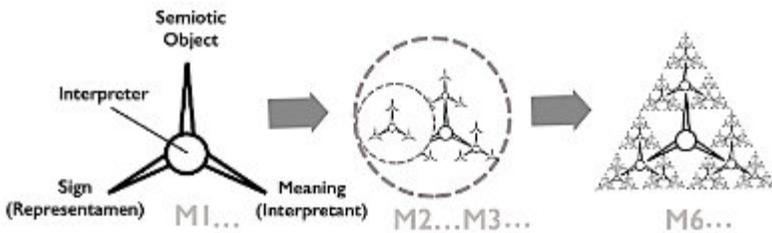
Penn smiled as Bart’s fingers diligently drummed out rhythms of attendance; he continued, “It’s not until someone encounters a problem, or is flummoxed by something totally unfamiliar, that they have to actively account for basic factors that actually are at work. Then they have to find a better way of seeing how things interact. That’s really how the different levels of complexity, the orders of attention take part in everyone’s experience.”

Salvos, Cons and Pros

“Okay,” Bart says, “it sounds something like running a con. You work your mark through his comfortable habits. You keep him moving so he doesn’t realize that anything’s wrong. ‘Cause if he stops to really pay attention, the con is probably screwed.”

Penn raised his brows to think about Bart’s novel interpretation, then said, “Well, that’s a curious take. Sort of like looking at attentional focus in a mirror, as reflecting in someone else — the mark. But yeah. Maybe so.” Bart nodded to acknowledge his insight and gestured for Penn to continue.

When the waiter returned with their order, they paused to stir coffee and to deploy napkins against pastry dustings of sugar that tended to go everywhere. Penn continued, “Anyhow, each order, each level of focus, corresponds to some level of cognitive complexity. That’s a question of how many different factors are at work in the meaning of a situation that someone focuses on.



Fractal orders of attentiveness
(Used under license CC-BY-NC-ND www.manifestorders.com)

“The scale goes up from the simplest, M0, which just offers features to be perceived, to the most complex, M10, where it all resolves into some comprehending whole that ‘makes sense.’ At M1 a person attends a single relation or action as a sign of something. And M1 occurs in the context of some more complex configuration of happening, at M2, which takes place within some M3 order. And so on up the complexity orders of interplaying relationships. Each next, more comprehensive attentional arena, in turn, is derived from the lesser because each greater must serve as

ANX: life of a recog

context for the possibility of multiple instances of interplay among the lesser.”

“How about an example?” Bart suggested.

“Here’s a chart called ‘Manifest Orders’. It shows the ascending scale of attentional complexity. And, for an example, take growing things.” Penn continued, “Plants are adaptive; they respond to their circumstances. You know that because you’ve focused on them at M5.

	Order	Attentive Domain	External Sense	Internal Sense	Experiential Content	
V i r t u a l A c t u a l	M10	Pluripotential	Harmony	Empathy	Wisdom: 111*	Social
	M9	Metaphysical	Universality	Validity	Comprehension: 333	
	M8	Creative collaborative	Symbol	Inference	Representation: 332	
	M7	Social situational	Communication	Cooperation	Fairness: 331	
	M6	Individual situational	Objective (aim)	Attention	Intention: 322	Causal
	M5	Adaptive actual	Life	Vitality	Responsiveness: 321	
	M4	Causal actual	Physical occurrence	Process	Activity: 311	Structural
	M3	Depth contextual	Material form	Essence	Substance: 222	
	M2	Surface contextual	Surround (plane)	Kinship	Affiliation: 221	
	M1	Relational	Correspondence (line)	Link	Affect: 211	
M0	Original	Locus (point)	Manifestation	Sentience: 111*		

Manifest Orders of attentional complexity
 (Used under license CC-BY-NC-ND www.manifestorders.com)

“And what you’ve noticed at M5 is that a plant is responsive; it lives in repeating cycles of causal stimulus and response that we understand separately at M4. Without the right amount of light it can’t grow. Without enough water, it withers, all of which you track as symptomatic object features and characteristics that we engage still farther down the orders at M3.

“And at M2, where you deal with the relative deployments of factors, like where the light is right, where animals won’t bother it — you place the plant in relation to those other active factors so

Salvos, Cons and Pros

you can best care for it. Like in a convenient and suitably lit place, in the right kind of pot over by a dining room window, maybe.

Order	Shared Sensibility	Psychoculture	Communication	Polity
C5	C0, C1, C2, C3, C4 + iconic matrix; primacy of personal affect/motives; indifference to norms; schizo-tribal affiliations via virtual media fantasy; virtual presence via avatars; universalizing of intentions and roles	earlier + ego defers to metaphoric intersection of matter & psyche within affective image/virtual semblances	earlier + cybernetic networks of digital hyper-telemedia; distributed ledger systems of transactional archives	lepelagos (inter-networked economic archipelagos) distributed ledger technology enables political & trade networks, automated manufacture, supply chains & supportsystems
C4	C0, C1, C2, C3 + historical spacetime of actual events; secular progress via mechanical causation; bureaucratized collective intentions & roles	earlier + ego motives within social allegiances fostered by mass media; personal enterprise, exploration, testing of risk within rationalized arenas; mass public relations	earlier + engraving, etching, movable type, typography, bound books; lithography; serigraphy; rotary press; photography; halftone; newspapers; telegraphy; motion pictures; radio; television; telephone; mechanized mass transit	nation states
C3	C0, C1, C2 + earth/heaven; taxonomies of substance/essence; hierarchical roles/classes; ranks of masters/minions	earlier + critical awareness in ethical environment; valiant self guards soul; letter writing & discursive critique of taxonomies of relationships	earlier + phonetic alphabet; monetary transactions; scriptoria; block printing & identity seals; expressive murals, sculpture, architecture	city states
C2	C0, C1 + ground plane, categorical simultaneity of a kind [of something], joint intentions and communal roles	earlier + awareness of classifications and networks of extended relations & kinds on common grounds of action	earlier + pictographic & hieroglyphic writing, archival records, mythic themes in paint, (ink), wax, clay, sculpture	agrarian temple societies
C1	C0 + path/binary relations (totem identities); intentions/roles; nature rhythms/patterns	earlier + awareness in surround of affective entities; magic; taboos	earlier + drawing, incising, tattooing, scarifications, glyphic signs	nomadic bands & tribes
C0	here/there; this/that; then/now; location/orientation	pre-cultural sentence	vocalization/ gesture	pack; herd; flock; band

Cultural Orders of common sense paradigm
(Used under license CC-BY-NC-ND www.manifestorders.com)

“And if you keep a potted plant, you have to think about its various needs. Light. Water. Fertilizer. Each of those separate needs, respectively, at M1, are transactions or relationships that you consider as items of a list, in a table of symbolic reminders. Such a list, because it represents multiple relationships that simultaneously are important, is focused at M2.

“We’ll get to symbol-use later, but for now just keep in mind that they are why you spent so much time in school while growing up — studying them at M7 so you’d be able to keep good troubleshooting lists of ‘what to do if’”

ANX: life of a recog

Penn paused to wait for Bart's note-taking to catch up. He sipped his coffee and then resumed his exposition.

"Wait a minute," Bart interrupted, "Why is the list at M2?"

"Oh, because lists are tables of sentences or phrases, you know, laid out on a page. Or remembered as being laid out on some kind of field."

"H-m-mh" Bart resumed typing, "I never thought of it like that."

"And each item of a list of 'things to do if' expresses relations among different factors and corresponding facts. If you focus on each one separately, sprinkling water about the plant roots, for instance, you're momentarily paying attention at M1. At that level, focus is on a single action at a time. It relates a simple, direct option, where to put water to nourish the plant. So, too, is the matter of getting light. Each, separately, is focused on as an M1 relationship."

"Okay. Keep going."

"Now. Suppose you're so successful at raising a plant that you decide to take up farming."

"Oh, dear God, spare me!" Bart cried aloud. He decided against further notes toward any agricultural career and paused to sample his beignet and coffee.

"But you can't succeed at farming by planting or nourishing only one plant at a time. You have to imagine them all at once, spread out across a field. And those virtually envisioned fields have to be prepared and maintained.

"That kind of stuff happens on a bigger scale than moving pots around, but it also occurs virtually, in attention, at M2. There, your focus pulls many corresponding instances together as possibilities, in symbol-tokenized configurations of simultaneous M1 relationships, as planar fields of rows and rows of plants.

"To accomplish that kind of scale, in the limited neural space of working memory, a person tokenizes respective entities. 'Tokenized' means that a complicated thing is tentatively replaced

Salvos, Cons and Pros

by a simple ‘place-holder’, a sign or symbol that stands for it. And those tokens are gathered into multiple sets that similarly may be tokenized as parts in the next greater attentive order. That way, they can all be handled simultaneously, in mass.

It’s just how the psyche works. And dream calibration tunes for resonances among respective pattern complexities across the manifest orders. Again, we’ll get to that later at M7. But those are the basic processes by which paying attention happens. And those habits are what have to be tuned for each person’s dream session.

“All those plant signs are habituated — tokenized by the farmer into imagined M2 layouts of fields: how the various lots are deployed in relation to each other. And those M2 tokens signify within a more complex relational context attended at M3, an imaginal object world of roads, fences, gates, tractors and the like, which, further up, at M4, are imagined to come into being and to age in relation to conditions of roads and paths that provide access for equipment and workers.

“It’s all handled through imaginal tokens. They act like stair steps up and down familiar orders of attentional focus. But since their way of life is organized into habits largely at M2, farming communities tend to interact mostly in a common sense mode that ritually is tokenized at C2.”

“But surely farmers think at higher levels than just field layouts,” Jody objected.

“Well, yes, of course. Anyone may work at many different levels. But right now we’re talking about where they habitually pay attention during day to day routines. The bulk of ordinary concerns. That’s what shapes thinking habits. And those habits are ritualized into common sense, among a lot of people going about the same kinds of matters over and over.”

Penn pulled up a chart of cultural orders of common sense realities, modes of attention that dominate within a group.

“Farming communities tend to operate socioculturally at C2 because everyone basically is attuned to M2 attentional habits, as a

major focus of their respective concerns. That doesn't keep them out of C3 or C4 when they need more comprehensive orientations, but they tend to be most conveniently oriented to C2. It's the locally dominant communal paradigm for their way of life."

Jody Bart sat in silence. His brows furrowed, then relaxed and then they wrinkled again. Finally he said, nodding slowly, "I think maybe I'm beginning to see what you're saying. It's really like sizing up how someone thinks so you can put over some kind of deal."

"I suppose that's a another way to think about it. If you want to sell tractors, you have to understand how people who need them think about using machinery," Penn nodded. "And I'm giving oversimplified examples to give you the feel of how it goes."

He continued, "A farmer who is concerned about the quality of his crops will pay attention at least at M3 because that is the common sense mode of thinking about stuff that will be sold or traded. How qualities measure up to expectations of others. That's generally the order in which objects are evaluated. How large, what color, how firm, how smooth . . . qualities considered in relation to some set or scale of objective ideals.

"And to deal with the weather, or to operate machinery, or involve bureaucratic agricultural concerns, he'll pay attention at M4, where such factors causally, actually interact in the world."

"That's where it gets real for everybody," Bart mused.



"As children," Penn said, "we learn that an ordinary object remains where it is, and stays unchanged, until something moves, or changes it. And if you want to affect such an object you have to deal with it in three different space relations: M1 linear up-down, side-to-side or back-to-front. And any two of those combined brings into focus M2 planar configurations of relationship.

"But beyond the three objective possibilities of spatial extension — which people of a C3 mindset, like in the Middle Ages, used to think were all that mattered in the actual world —

there also are virtually understood terms of dependence, how they interact with other factors.

“We categorize and control how to make use of those locally unique traits as actual properties of objects at M3, which organizes M1 and M2 factors into a focus called ‘depth contextual’, where actual object things are understood in relation to each other.”

Bart’s typing fingers flew about the table top to record additional notes.

“But if you need to pay attention or to represent an object that’s moving or changing somehow, then you have to attend it at M4, where we understand time as a sequence of varying object states. In that stream of neural processing cognition has to use memory images as signs to keep track of multiple instances of M3 object forms, across a sequence of changing moments of attention. The modern C4 world results from a shared mindset that regards causes of actual change to be the basis of reality.

“For instance, take a simple windup toy automobile, like a child might play with. As a purely static object, sitting on a table or the floor, we can fully focus on its physicality at M3, because so little changes in the short term.

“But winding it up creates a tension in its spring. And, as that unwinds, the tension acts through a force applied to the car wheels, which makes them turn and the car move. That goes on until the spring is fully relaxed.”

“Yeah,” nodded Jody as his finger-drumming paused to gesture dismissively, “I think I’ve got all that.”

“Okay, now suppose the kid comes to you complaining that the car doesn’t work anymore. You take it and you shift into ‘causal actual’ focus at M4. You try to find out what among its parts no longer is doing its job or is interfering with the action. Is the spring broken? Is some trash caught up in the mechanism?”

“Does that change my focus?”

“Oh, yes. Within the project of figuring out what’s wrong, within that momentarily tokenized framework of M4, you focally

ANX: life of a recog

step down and probe among various lower order relations at M3, M2 and M1. At M1 you account for the simplest motions and relations, like is the spring broken? Is there something blocking the transmission of energy from the spring to the wheels?

“M1 focus is called ‘relational’. It’s the simplest active one, where one thing is seen in relation to another. To gauge relation or action between two M0 features you pay attention at M1.”

“Like distance being a measured relation between two distinct M0 locations,” Bart observed.

“Right. And that and any other measurements are of a M1 linear sequence of actions that you check out.

“If nothing seems wrong at that level you might jump up to M2, to consider the respective deployments of the car parts. Is anything out of place, out of its expected location, in relation to all the other parts that are supposed to be there?”

“M2 is a combination of several, even many, M1 instances that simultaneously interact within some ground plan or layout. A flat diagram like a blueprint typically is attended and interpreted at M2, which is called ‘surface contextual’. M2 always is a constellation of entities within some common field or ground of consideration.”

“And finally, at M3, you check out each part specifically, as an individual object within a greater object. Has an axle broken or become dislodged because of a broken support?”

“Why are they called M-somethings, like M1 or M4?”

“Well, ‘M’ stands for ‘manifest’, which means that such occurrence appears. That is to say that a perception becomes intuitively evident as parts within wholes. And each order is attended in terms of nested dimensions of relational possibility, like the Russian matryoshka dolls, one inside another. It’s a little more involved than that, but just let that be the reason for now.”

“Okay, M4, because it happens in 3D space along a time line of changing moments.”

“Well, no. M4, actually, because attention has to handle four

Salvos, Cons and Pros

distinct fractal orders of relational possibility. More complex combinations are organized out of simpler ones.

“At M4, one’s attended focus embraces multiple lesser M3 possibilities. Each of those comprises possibilities of multiple M2s. Each of those, in turn, is formed of multiple M1s. Altogether, they’re nested layers, orders of interdepending multitudes of relations. You just intuitively focus upon the ones that seem relevant to the moment.”

“Details, details.”



“Okay, let’s keep going,” Jody said, “So what’s the virtual all about?”

“Now let’s think about a slightly more complicated machine.” Penn sipped his coffee as he pondered a range of examples. “A thermostat in a climate-controlled building.”

“How is that different from the toy car?” Jody knitted his brows, “It’s just a machine.”

“Yes, a thermostat is a machine, since it operates among actual 4D physical events. But it includes an additional factor. It responds in relation to a dimension of virtual options — a limited range of possible temperature settings. We communicate those options with signs and symbols, some of which are called degrees. Altogether, at M5, we focus on response to physical circumstances in terms of feedback that relates to a range of possibilities.”

“Oh,” Jody raised an eyebrow; he seemed to anticipate the direction Penn was taking. “An HVAC system kicks on in response to a room temperature that has moved away from its setting.”

“Yes, very good. That’s exactly the reason. A thermostat is a simple cybernetic device. It operates with feedback from the environment. Its feedback literally is ‘significant’. That is to say that the signal value is compared to and triggered by some occurrence that corresponds to a specific choice among a range of possibilities.

“Cybernetic means that a device or entity has a feedback

control function. It responds to changing conditions. As such, it's adaptive. And all such feedback introduces a dimension of virtual — that is to say 'representationally meaningful' — possibility. Another example would be a tracking device on a solar panel that alters its orientation by activating motors in relation to the trajectory of the sun."

"So where do virtual factors get us?"

"When paying attention to cybernetically responsive entities or situations, we have to consider even more variables than those involved in mere physical objects, or in the causal interactions of simple physical machines.

"One way to think of it is to say that we imagine successive states of a cybernetic entity in response to some set of information. But any kind of information requires the use of signs and symbols. A very simple one is the setting of a thermostat."

Penn paused for a moment to consider options, then continued, "I don't think either of us want to get sidetracked into the subject of Peircean semiotics, which is about how signs and symbols represent meanings. That subject alone can get very complex very quickly.

"Suffice it to say that a sign or symbol depends upon one thing standing for, or representing, another. Note that when one thing stands for something else that isn't actually present, we call that kind of seeming presence 'virtual'. Memory acts like that in our experiences. It is the original virtual reality.

"Attentional focus, as we saw in dealing with the toy car, has to keep track of lesser relations within some context of more complex, more virtual circumstance.

"So attention always is jumping up and down the scale, to focus on the simpler combos within more complex ones. To ferret out a network of explicit relationships by which something may be understood. For a simple cybernetic device like a basic thermostat, or the float of a toilet tank, that means we must add a dimension to any basic M4 entity to represent its various possible states."

Salvos, Cons and Pros

“Does ‘cybernetic’ mean just artificial things like computers or thermostats?”

“No. All life forms are adaptive. They are cybernetic because they feature feedback mechanisms at work. But usually they have evolved to be more complex than just a basic toilet float.”

“So to pay attention to a basic cybernetic system, whether machine, bug or plant, we focus at M5? To process its possible informational states,” Bart puzzled aloud.

“You got it. It’s that simple.”



“But what about all the other stuff? The M8s and C8s and the like?” Bart frowns, as if suspecting Penn is trying to shortchange him.

“Oh, we’ll get there. But I say it’s that simple because once you grasp the basic idea of M5, you find that you are dealing with the root of ‘paying attention’ itself. That’s because of how sensation delivers an ‘actual’ perception that you compare with ‘virtual’ imaginings of memory and anticipation.

“Attention dynamically, but efficiently, keeps track of different adaptive states of some responsive entity, whether the focus is on one’s self or on someone or something else.

“As you see on the chart, M5 is right in the middle. There are five orders less than, and five orders more complex than it. And at M5, the weightings of respective factors of ‘sensory actual’ versus ‘significant virtual’ are basically equal.

“And just for the record, the technical terms for those factors are ‘signa-somatic’ and ‘soma-significant’.

“H-m-mh,” Bart grunted.

“Then it’s easy to derive the entire range of Manifest Orders. And by social interaction, from those emerge the Cultural Orders, as well. They set out basic advertising and public relations ‘consumer zones’, characteristic habits of individual attention that prevail among specific social groups. Like C2, for rural

communities. Those kinds of habit, at that order of complexity, first arose with the invention of agriculture, but they persist today across rural and other populations who deal with established sets of interplaying M1 relationships. Or C3, for merchants, crafts workers and tradespeople who focus on relative qualities of things and their respective market values.”

“Yeah, maybe,” Jody growled, “But for a thousand dollars I want you to spell it out. Don’t lay the work of figuring it out on me.”

“Okay,” Penn chuckled. The euSpecs followed his finger, translating its position into a moving cursor over the chart shown in their shared virtual space. “Now this is why I went into that rigamarole about Nisus meaning ‘nature is us.’ It’s because when we attend nature we really are focusing within our own perceptions. And how we interpret those perceptions. And those perceptions make up the significant interface that is rendered by our senses.

“Some time back, a cognitive psychologist, Donald Hoffman, published a book, *The Case Against Reality: Why Evolution Hid the Truth From Our Eyes*. In it he argues that what we call the ‘real’ world is just an imaginal interface that we biological creatures have evolved in order to survive.

“Physicists learned in the early twentieth century that you really can not disregard those imaginal factors. At Nisus we built new virtual interfaces that extend the natural sensory into even further realms of imaginal possibility.”

“Oh, so?”

“Keep in mind that the information that a thermostat responds to is more than just a causally active factor.”

“Yeah?”

“That information pattern also carries a virtual control significance, the meaning, the implicit relationships, of a temperature setting. And those factors open onto a realm that is beyond its ability to merely trigger some desired action.

“Quantum physics discovered that any actualized possibility stands in relation to every other virtual possibility within the

Salvos, Cons and Pros

entire universe. Feedback control factors *anywhere* cosmically relate to virtual implications of possibilities *everywhere*.

“The physicist David Bohm called virtual and actual factors, respectively, the implicate and the explicate orders. We live and act in an actual explicate order that is influenced by and projects through events from a virtual implicate order of all possibilities. And those are imaginal because they’re likelihoods, not actuals.

“And that seems true throughout the entire universe. Look along the left edge of the chart. You’ll see a rectangle divided by a diagonal boundary between ‘actual’ and ‘virtual.’”

“Okay. I see that.”

“The simpler orders are the ones that are more decidedly sensory actual content. But their meaning is in relation to memory and anticipation of further possibilities. So they also have a virtual imaginal component.”

“So how do you get to M6?”

“Think of a still more complex cybernetic entity, maybe a thermostat with some really fancy kind of memory and an extra neural network to tentatively hold and compare many different types of stored patterns. The more complex pattern selects among simpler options. It aims at or directs toward some tentatively preferred option. It intends them.”

“Okay, I already see where you’re headed.” Bart announced, “By matching specific patterns you can control pattern selection among other patterns That creates the possibility for ever more complex responses — that’s the nature of intention. A goal. A motive. Elementary law. You gotta show intent to convict.”

“Well, eventually, that’s right. But there is a little more to it than just memory, per se.” Penn cautioned. “Not only is there a memory of patterns, but there is a model of judgment — patterns of patterns that culminate to express preference in relation to past experience. As individual persons we inherit most of our models from our local social culture, but tweak and modify them as events unfold. They’re built up — typically at M9 through comparisons of

patterns of experience and outcomes — from prior events. A model coordinates some sort of overall comparative function with actual events, in terms of virtual standards. It stipulates which states are most favored and which are to be avoided.”

“A comparative function?”

“Yes. Some governing function, a pattern of patterns that decides whether a state corresponds to a desired result, or is to be avoided.”

“So memory itself is not enough,” Bart paraphrased to check his interpretation, “to boost our attentional demands to M6. We have to experience something in relation to a model of alternatives. Then we can choose among a range of possible states. And those choices express intention at M6.”

“Yes, that’s it exactly. I couldn’t have said it any better.”



Jody sat for a moment to ponder the chart of Manifest Orders shown in virtual share of his and Penn’s euSpecs.

“So, I see that the M4, 5 and 6 are all grouped together as causal orders.”

“Yes, that’s right. They are how we pay attention to what affects what, in terms of which kinds of effects actually are at work in experience — actual, adaptive or intentional.”

“But those are in relation to some virtual factors of remembered or understood significance.” Bart pondered the implications. “And beneath that group is another group — structural. M1, 2 and 3. What’s that all about? They also show virtual factors, though not as much.”

“As we said when thinking about repairing a broken toy car, those are levels of structural abstraction, for analyzing actual characteristics of objectness. They’re simpler orders of attention but they, too, need imaginal memory to function and so have virtual aspects, as well. It is through them that we are able to probe and figure out relational factors at work within M4, 5 and 6.”

Salvos, Cons and Pros

Penn thought for a moment, then said, “Now it’s important to realize that animals also pay attention. Some of them are quite good at keeping track of all sorts of relationships. They, as we, deal with matters that are attended at M0 through M6. And the more complex animals may go even higher. But generally, aside from a few repertoires of calls and cries, they seem to respond and react according to patterns that have evolved: instinct and intuition. They don’t seem to have complex symbol systems about other symbol systems — what we call *semiotics*.

“Much of the time people — who also are animals, remember — also rely on instinct and intuition. It’s the default for when experience fails and deliberate processing just is unable to handle circumstances.

“Also, people develop habits and preferences. There are those who are capable of understanding or acting at higher levels, but they just feel more comfortable at a lower order. Paying attention can be a lot of work. Especially if you’re an infant, or toddler, first encountering a set of possibilities.”

“Or like me, now.” Bart grimaced.

“Well, you catch on pretty quickly. But keep in mind that within a social group, whether it’s a family, a clan or a long-term work group, the way people interact develops their habits of attention. Especially in terms of how they anticipate and understand each other’s responses to situations.

“That’s where the Cultural Orders come from. C1 is any group in which M1 common sense expectations shape the shared focus of their typical paradigm, their common behaviors and ways of interpreting. That lets each person anticipate how other members are likely to pay attention, at M1. It’s that simple.

“C1 is typical of early tribes of nomads. But today, it tends to dominate basic concerns of subgroups that are devoted to direct action — police, military, sports stars, and so on. Individually they may focus at any of the nine higher orders, of course. And some are quite sophisticated and successful at those upper levels. But as

ANX: life of a recog

a group devoted to concerts of directed actions, they tend to expect M1 sequences within M2 deployments, most of the time. Those become the basis of responsive habits throughout their social clusters of fellows and colleagues.”

“So, C2 is the common sense of keeping track of things within some common field of action?”

“Yes, go ahead, make a guess or two.”

“Oh, carpenters working to build a house.”

“Yes, very good. And another?”

“A military commander working out a battle plan?”

“Yes, keep going.”

“A farmer planning where to plant crops or to keep animals.”

“I think you’ve got it.”

Jody Bart nodded for a moment, buoyed by his progress.

“But we haven’t talked about the upper social triad, M7, 8 or 9. And what’s with that ‘pluripotential’ at M10?”

“Well, M7 through 9 are keyed to social circumstances. Keep in mind that each person grows up in some social community, and within its various social subgroups. Each learns from and contributes back into the respective subcultures. The rituals and habits of a community are patterns that guide the personal ones that an individual within it develops. And that only happens because people are able to communicate. They use signs and symbols, mostly through voice and gesture to remind, communicate and anticipate intentions. It makes possible cooperation.”

“So where does that come from?”

“Well, think about it. If you were out in the wilderness and you happened on a bear or big cat, what would be your main concern?”

“Getting the hell out of there.”

“Yes, but why?”

“Because I don’t want to die!”

“Because you anticipate a predator’s intention?”

“Well, yes. What else?”

Salvos, Cons and Pros

“Well, suppose for the moment that you have a .50 caliber hunting rifle with you. And suppose that there’s another buddy out hunting with you. Now what?”

Bart looked at Penn curiously, then said, “Well that changes everything. I’d signal my buddy to let him know what’s up and then I’d raise the rifle and take aim.”

“Let me stop you there. All that has transpired in that scenario is the interpreting and communication of intentions. You’re able to signal your buddy because you have a socially meaningful set of signals. And the animal, if it’s older and more experienced, may recognize your rifle as a sign of trouble and decide to quickly depart. It has interpreted a perceived factor as portending danger.”

“So?”

“All of that is happening at M7, where intentions are communicated by representations, what something stands for or means. Over eons, such prospects evolved into complex combinations of group signals, signs, symbols and languages. The entire range of communications potential.

“And those possibilities keep evolving. Modern adaptive media extend symbol systems and make shared virtual spaces seem real. As in dream. Communication is what makes community possible. Shared social spaces are shared communication spaces.”

“Like we’re having right now.”

“Exactly!” Penn felt a moment of tutorial pride that his student was coming along so well.

“And at M8?”

“M8 attends the prospect of collaborating in terms of those shared communication systems. Professionals, especially, come to understand one another in terms of a specific professional jargon that forms the basis of their shared common sense at C8. And, of course, dream is possible only through such collaboration.”

“Oh, so it is possible to have higher levels of cultural orders.”

“Yes, any common presumption of attentional complexity

becomes the pragmatic paradigm shared among the group members. M9 is where all collaboratively developed patterns of interaction and transaction are considered in terms of their reliability, their truth value. As in philosophy.”

“But what about M10? Like M0, it’s outside the three triads of structural, causal and social.”

“That’s because it’s the exalted virtualized state of actual M0; it meaningfully — virtually — transcends M0. M10 is right and left brain-induced reflection of M0. Semiotically informed by all the lesser orders of attentional process, it asserts relational coherence of one’s totality of experience. M10 is where reality comes alive in actual time.

“That’s because M0 is transmuted — informed and amplified — by all of the lesser nine orders at work across the left and right hemispheres of the brain. It’s a person’s comprehending level of understanding of everything, of the cosmos, of all that’s happening. M10 is where total understanding intuitively self-construes, by means of aesthetic and ethical principles of complementarily balanced completeness — psychic equilibrium.

“The M10 pluripotential is conditional upon how competently a person deals with all the various lesser orders. It attends the grasp of all there is, was or ever may be. It’s the totality of what is real. And it’s informed by how a person pays attention at all the lower levels. It’s like the Ouroboros.”

“Ouroboros? What’s that?”

“The ancient symbol of a snake eating its tail. It’s a metaphor for psychic or cosmic wholeness. At M10, it’s how attention is Nature attending itself attending itself, cycling through all lower orders of focal possibility. In the Manifest Orders the virtual nature of meaning intentionally arises from imagining; it consumes actual facts, to transform them into intended outcomes. Thus, Nature imagines meanings that are structural, causal, social.”

“Well, you lost me there, bud.” Jody Bart twists his mouth in distaste. “Snakes. Even thinking about them gives me shivers.”

Salvos, Cons and Pros

“Well, it’s just a metaphor for a complex idea of attentional recursion.”

“I still don’t like snakes.”



“Okay, sport,” Bart says, shuddering off serpentine threats. “I think I’ve got it. Good job. You’re a good teacher.”

He hands Penn the plastic cryptocurrency wallet and adds, “There’s a coated band on that, like with a lottery card. Scratch it off when you’re ready to cash the card. It’ll show the private key you need to transfer funds to another address.”

“Okay, I know about cryptocurrencies,” Penn accepts the card, glances at it and shoves it into his shirt pocket.

“Great,” Bart’s smile manages to get past a mere grimace as he shakes Penn’s hand, “I’ll be in touch if I need anything more.”

Penn had been totally unaware that during their entire exchange, from the moment Jody Bart walked into the *Haven of Mercy*, two other individuals had followed their conversation, relayed through Bart’s euSpecs.

Mamma Latrice had brought their interview to an end by saying quietly, “I think that’ll do, Jody. You can wrap it up now. LeRoi and I agree. Mr. Hebert will work out very well. Thank you.”



A week later, LeRoi Bienvenue led Penn to a meeting with Mamma Latrice at *Le Salon d’Histoire*. She offered him a job maintaining and securing her simstim cabarets from online hacking and intrusion.

He would have use of the furnished suite of rooms on the fourth floor of an apartment building she owned in the 600 block of St. Peter Street, near the Cabildo. It already was equipped with a complete control center that connected with all her establishments throughout the Quarter and in the Snake Zone, over in Faubourg Marigny.

ANX: life of a recog

Penn quickly accepted the deal, sorry only that he would not see Richard Piron nearly as often as he had during the past year and a half of helping out in the antique shop.



Rollo later heard Penn's account of his meeting with Jody Bart and the offer from Mamma Latrice.

"Listen, you can't trust anything Jody Bart tells you.

"He's been disbarred so many times that they've banished him from even hanging out at the courts. He's a con, always working a deal. I doubt you'll find any money in that wallet he gave you. He hands those out everywhere. They never work. He always changes a character in the correct key so that if anybody takes him to court it'll look like an accidental mistake. But it's intentional."

Sure enough, when Penn tried to transfer the promised \$1000 of cryptocurrency to his account, he found that its key was rejected. But, now that he had moved into his new apartment and gotten settled in among ranks of computing equipment, he found it quite simple to summon the AiPAL, discovered during his days at Nisus, from the ConRelCo networks.

He set it to work reconstructing corrected cryptocurrency keys. Then he had Rollo gather up all rejected wallets that Bart had ever handed out among recog. When AiPAL:Chloe finished correcting all those "mistakes", Penn drained the funds referenced by the gathered wallets into a common pool from which he and Rollo paid out what Bart owed to each recog.

Thereafter, Penn found that he was held in high regard among his fellows. And Jody Bart tried to avoid recog, Penn especially.

Mamma Latrice laughed heartily when Jody complained. She very much admired Penn's resourcefulness. She predicted to LeRoi, "That boy's going to prove very useful."



7



WHO TOLERATES INTOLERANCE?

Yet again, Rollo and his misfit krewe have requested use of the recreation room over in the *Haven of Mercy*. Despite his disapproval of an earlier petition, they persist. Now styling themselves the *Mystik Krewe of the Two-Ton Worriers*, they say they want to get ready for the annual *Nisus Mardi Gras Challenge*. They even have induced Penn Hebert to write an earnest and adroitly worded appeal.

While he also is a recog convict, the Reverend knows that Penn is not like the rest. Quite civil, even shy and retiring, the young man seems to have been adopted as their mascot. Yet they also to look to him as a leader. Perhaps because they know that he is so much quicker on the uptake than they.

Thus far Penn has proven to be the only conduit by which the *Haven of Mercy* is able to communicate with the surly group of libertines. Reverend DeMint has fretted aloud and often to Marilyn that he wishes he had never come to this literally God-forsaken posting. Even the locals acknowledge its liturgical

oddities. They refer to the Protestant-leaning northern region of Winfrey as *Louimissiala*, to distinguish its Calvinist disavowal of the sensual, in contrast to more voluptuous enthusiasms carried in creole Catholic French and Spanish legacies along the *Sianassippibama* Gulf coast.

But Marilyn is tired of moving and wants to settle down for a while so that the two children can begin to feel like they belong somewhere. “We owe it to them,” she urges, then reminds him, “Besides, doesn’t our calling require that we care for the God-forsaken? Just cultivate your relationship with Penn. He seems like such a nice young man.”

But despite distinctions, on many fronts, between Penn and the Worriers, and contrary to Marilyn’s appreciation of those differences, the Reverend has thus far failed to reach the young man. Every overture has been rebuffed. When invited to join the daily prayer service, for instance.

“Look,” Penn had said quietly, but with firm conviction, “don’t you think, if God wants me to know something, He is perfectly capable of letting me know directly? Why does He need you to save me? Meanwhile you’re telling me I should read a very old book made up from assorted opinions set forth by all sorts of people that supposedly gives me reasons I should give you at least ten-percent of my income.

“That’s what it all boils down to, isn’t it, Reverend? You guys create an economic niche for yourselves. You volunteer to work as God’s Foreman out on the Assembly Line of Life. Yeah, like that really is going to happen! You’re a union organizer, Hemil. But I’m all for right-to-worship, when, how and wherever, both now and in whatever Hereafter comes along after here! But both you and I know that you’re just a volunteer middle man.”

Chief among the arguments Penn makes in the present appeal is a notion that if recog ever are to truly redeem themselves in the opinion of ordinary citizens, they must find avenues of common dialog. In Nola, he asks, what better field of interaction than Mardi

Who Tolerates Intolerance?

Gras? In the traditional pre-Lenten interlude between the secular and the sacred, *Carne-Vale — Farewell to the Flesh* — the Worriers are able to vent into lampooning buffoonery, for the entertainment of all.

How much better, Penn argues, to so divert their capacity for mischief into harmless hijinks. Not only might they thus move toward more constructive engagement of their wits and talents — however disheveled and now given over to abandon and ruination — but such engagement perhaps will encourage each to discover a thread of native interest that might be pursued and developed to the benefit of the entire Nola community.

Despite their notoriety, or perhaps because of it, Worrier antics during the Mardi Gras festivities over the years have emerged as one of the more popular features among Quarter celebrants. Somehow the spectacle of large, bulky and menacingly-tattooed men capering about in costumes of tutu, transvestite or ironic buffoonery seems to summon from adoring crowds a wealth of comic absolution for past sins. Penn now wants to unleash the clowning of these fugitive souls in search of more constructive pursuits.

But, agonizes the Reverend, Heaven Have Mercy! A recog krewe? Out raising hell and carrying on with arrogant disregard for any norm of decency? That's just the problem! These rogues have never bid farewell to their flesh. And they indulge the carnal at every opportunity!

Still, he recognizes, *Haven of Mercy*, as official coordinator of rehabilitative services, is mandated by the City of Nola to organize and constructively engage all recog pursuits. What to do? What would Jesus do?

This year's Challenge is to mount a coherent costume display elaborating the Nisus slogan: Nisus is us.

Heaven help us all! They'll wallow in the very most common and vulgar frolic. They'll turn allusions to their own scandalous past into an obscene saturnalia of the present. He shudders at

ANX: life of a recog

prospect of his own two young children, Todd and Francine, suddenly erupting questions about giant papier-mache penis headdresses, or gaudily extravagant female body prostheses adorned in risqué garments left lying casually about the rec room. Or worse still, innocent ears defiled in an ongoing chorus of raucously cackling, filthy innuendo and unseemly inspiration that attends every Worrier enterprise.

No, he decides, the rec room is not for playing and cavorting about. He has spent too much good money and time converting the once cluttered storage facility into a respectable venue for gatherings. How could he possibly lead daily services within the den of iniquity these impudent recogs would wreak?

The Reverend has reconciled himself to his daily prayer services. He finds audience only among a few lazy and unenterprising souls, men who prefer to subsist on minimal effort of a few hours of worshipful pretense in exchange for ration cards doled out from Christian Brotherhood charity accounts. But, ruefully aware of his scarce congregation of faithful, the Reverend demurs. This sanctuary is not for sinners, malingerers and scoundrels. They could at least go through the motions. They should cater to its needs, not the other way around.

He glances again at Penn's note, freshly annoyed by its insouciant salutation: Hemil. Even Penn calls him that and the Reverend does not like it. If they want cooperation they could at least respect a pastor's given name.

Hemil ponders two juxtaposed phrases: "Nisus Mardi Gras Challenge" and "Nisus Is Us".

Nisus. Nisus. What is Nisus? What are they up to, anyhow? He knows that they are a large corporate presence within the ambit of ConRelCo interests. But since arriving in Nola the Reverend H. Emil DeMint has become quite exercised by a disruptive and morally pernicious vapor he perceives arising from this corporate patron of revelry: Gomorrah reawakened?

Nisus's greatest commercial success, by far, has been a spin-off

Who Tolerates Intolerance?

from neural research: dreem. The initially therapeutic technology of lucid dreaming has been repurposed into venues of entertainment that exploits every conceivable elaboration of interactive cinematics. Its success also has metamorphosed — some in the Reverend's circle would say perverted — Nola.

Years before, at its founding Nisus acquired and renovated the Old Mint at the foot of Esplanade Avenue after having quietly bought up much of the Marigny and Bywater faubourgs from disheartened owners anxious to unload rapidly devaluing holdings.

Legions of dispirited residents had departed this storm-cursed city that seems ever to succumb to more daunting natural disasters and unnatural economic dislocations. In their wake, cottages and buildings were quietly refurbished and linked by Nisus into a network of alternative lifestyle labs. Connected by fiber-optic maxnet, each was outfitted to serve as a portal for the scientific study of dreem scenarios, to discover how interacting psyches of individuals might be revised to optimize communal efficiency, whatever challenges an environment might throw at them.

Then dreem found showbiz. The staid medical research preserve that was envisaged in original enabling legislation blossomed at the fringes into all sorts of entrepreneurial ventures. Soon Marigny had become a rowdy gaming and entertainment gateway, touting endless diversion and prurient explorations.

Visitors and natives alike now clamor for tickets into extravagantly thrilling concoctions of imaginative fore-, inter- and after-play. Dreem is said to be even better than sex. While physical contact may evoke imaginal varieties of sensual delight, Nisus simstim directly taps energies of id to whatever effect or degree that a person may imagine.

Licenses to independent operators revel in legal shelter of the Marigny research preserve. Public prosecutors are forbidden to pursue victimless crimes within its raunchy domain. Keep the

customers happy and nobody can touch even the most outrageous extrapolation of human indulgence.

Marigny and Bywater have become lavish new playgrounds, catering especially to the affluent. Wealthy jet-setters from all around the world gather to sample and savor novel dimensions of titillation and indulgence.

A confederation of service providers, both licensed and unlicensed, quickly arose from ranks of traditional flesh-traffickers to become “legit” titillators of any taste, discerning or no. Dubbed the *Snake Zone* in media reviews of *reptilian brain* delights, this industry of pander now caters to any and all desires.

Whether from shabby crib, modest stall or lavish palace, immersive worlds of dream dispense a spectrum of imaginal delectation, from the most obscenely perverse to the most exquisitely delicate, from sewerred effluvia to divine ambrosia. And in the background, behind sealed laboratory facades, Nisus neuroquantal anthropology captures data from every engagement of any variant proclivity, as if sorting among mold cultures on dishes of agar gel, to catalog patterns of human attraction to unconstrained diversion.

Hemil publicly leveled a protest against Nisus, labeling them shameless purveyors of pornography, czars of prurience and traitors to ideals of womanhood. In response, Nisus Public Relations set a bunch of female professors upon him, to distract and divert attentions with academic gobbledygook. No one cares about Hemil’s rants, except maybe for Marilyn, who sort of thinks he has a point.

One reason no one cares about Hemil’s rants is that, through Nisus, Nola gushes a never-ending wash of prosperity. Fully liberated from its recent season of want, in an outburst of permissive indulgence, Nola has reached back into a tenderloin legacy of old New Orleans and willingly resuscitated, in virtual guise, a new *Storyville*, to provocatively flaunt its wiles at the edges of Bywater’s and Marigny’s anthropocentric Petri dishes.

Who Tolerates Intolerance?

“The spirit of open play innate within every child must everywhere be resuscitated and amplified, for there lies the optimal course of evolution for the human spirit. There lies our most fruitful of destinies.” One of the academic attack dogs even alluded to an “open delight of nature” espoused by the movement *One World, One Way*.

Play? Childish impulse? That is your image of what comprises humanity? rants the Reverend to himself. Why the gall! Love of God is the only sustenance, availed in straits of sinful creatures such as we, he snarls a fantasied retort. He wishes he had thought of it at the time.

One World, One Way. O, wow, or as many in his circle dismiss it: Ow-Ow. According to the Christian Brotherhood Ow-Ow is pagan heresy reborn in hi-tech guise from a defeated past. Of course! Nisus, is an instrument of Ow-Ow paganism, tricked out in trappings of pseudo-scientific garb, he reasons. Satan is at work here in Nola! There’s no way he’s going to let such heresy run rampant in this Holy Rec Room.

With a large red marker Hemil scrawls across the text of the request: DENIED! — DO NOT ASK AGAIN!



8



FAREWELL THE FLESH

In Nola there are two seasons: before Mardi Gras and after Mardi Gras. Even those who profess disdain for its dislocations and inconveniences get swept up into a swirl of mummery and illusion.

Mardi Gras is for those who know that children play at being adult, even as adults play at not being. Folly and madness — some fey civic enterprise drives this storm-wasted city through annual rounds of failing and forgiving. A saving grace has kept this region, alone, apart from icy embrace of narrow Calvinist pragmatics.

Apart from the closet fascism of Euromerica. Apart from grayness of this *Third Regime*.

Nothing is sacred. But here, at least, even bankers sometimes pretend to have seen the Grail.

ANX: life of a recog

Who cares if the rest of the continent has lost all hope; the Heart of old New Orleans still knows revelry in our annual carnival of libertine delights.



Our annual carnival of libertine delights

Recogs play at Mardi Gras like everyone else. In the Quarter we are the *Krewe of the Two Ton Worriers*. Like everyone else we howl through the season, except that Worriers keep really cool and cerebral. We often nervously laugh at the prospect of the entire krewe going down during parade just because everyone's ANX clamps open simultaneously.

The Krewe helps keeps me straight. If we didn't poke fun at ourselves and the fact that we are so different from CZs, I'd be truly insane. Dick says that recogs in other cities aren't like us. He says they have a distant, crazed stare. They're spooks with no place to haunt, except their own minds.

When the Two Ton Worriers march, watch out! Irony is on parade. Nothing is sacred.

We pour our souls into the mischief of merriment. There are no concerns for taste or good sense. Marching and dancing are some of the rare moments in which a recog manages to elude the bonds of ANX pain. Swirling and dancing to jetso at *Cafe Brasil* or swaying psychedelia in the streets, while forming up to parade, cheap bourbon and other chemistries heating up the veins.

Farewell The Flesh

There's no feeling like that primal course that wells up from depths, from beyond even the ANX, to respond in energies of thrumming insistence — decked out as the drum corps of the St. Augustine Marching Band.

If ever I cease to love



WOUNDED SOULS, TAINTED REGRETS

A continental French urge to celebrate might announce, *que la fête commence*. Or *allez, on va s'amuser, on fait la fête, qu'est-ce qu'on s'amuse!* Perhaps winding up in *qu'est-ce qu'on s'est bien amusés, c'était trop bien!*

But along the Acadian Gulf shores and bayous, and in Nola, there is no reticence whatsoever about Creole incitement to unbridled enjoyment. It often exults in Cajun French, *Laissez les bons temps rouler!* — That means only one thing: all notions of proper comportment are to be abandoned. Out the window. Forsaken. All must give way to a reviving spirit of fun and commotion, within universal community of celebration. Let it all hang out!.

Nowhere is such ethic of frolic more visible than in the French Quarter, though lately it has spilled on over into Marigny and Bywater, as well.

Back in olden days of industrial and maritime regime, police

ANX: life of a recog

would cordon off the Quarter and just let events unfold. They barred only actual violence, overt theft and the like. Staid officers of the law would stand passively by as humans disported themselves to proudly flaunt all manner of proclivity that normally were banned from open display.

Elsewhere, in Mid-City, Metairie, and the like, neighborhoods would try to keep their celebrations family-friendly. But in the Quarter, prudish parents and other varieties of the squeamish, caught up unaware, must endure summons to their own animal natures, to be fully unleashed into raucous frivolity.

In a nod to bygone, but still notorious, pre-recog identities, Quarter recog already acknowledge their now generally out-of-shape, portly and anxiously overwrought physiologies through their name, Two Ton Worriers. In a move to counter growing public perception of deviously conniving and generally unscrupulous recog, Worriers merged and mixed through Rollo's contacts among fellow artists and musicians. They reached out to other clans of ne'er-do-wells that still inhabited the city. For decades, the originally satirical festive impulse of Mardi Gras had been nurtured in affiliations fostered by an oversight and planning council, *The Krewe de Vieux*.

Therein, mixed in heady ferment, diverse social clubs draw members from every rat-in-the-wall tribe of would-be outcasts, misfits, malcontents and mischief-makers that reside within the metropolitan area. Joining the insouciant colloquy, the Two-Ton Worriers further formalized for Mardi Gras festivities their own *Krewe of G.R.O.S.S.* Its acronym touted a general motive toward *Glorious Res-Erection of Outrageously Shameless Shenanigans*.

In Nola, even the most pressing of concerns, whether gravid gravies of political process, economic transaction or private fortune, must halt for passing parades of festivity. Thus, despite complementing agendas of commiseration, or perhaps fueled by them, Worriers pressed on with plans for Mardi Gras.

The Krewe de Vieux had declared an overarching theme,

Wounded Souls, Tainted Regrets

spawned in curious percolations among political brews and gathering electoral ambitions of lower Sianassippibama's darling, former Nola DA and now Nola Mayor, Arden Reichart, who suddenly somehow had gained support of the upper Louimissiala Burke family that anticipated forthcoming election contests.

Announcing that his daughter Angela would wed AgriCo heir Grey Burke, Arden Reichart revealed about the same time, in public documents, that AgriCo was Reichart's chief corporate benefactor. Siding with prudish Louimissiala's dismay of the Nola Snake Zone, Reichart declared a campaign against its "surging tide of wantonness". Permeating their plans for upcoming promenades, the misfit krewes thus addressed a common theme, *Something Smells Fishy*.

Worriers were justified in their new-found concerns for the public image of recogs. Mayor Arden Reichart, as DA, had convicted them into their lowered estate. And now reportedly he had proposed that perhaps it was time to consider removing the ANX penal lattices from French Quarter and uptown neighborhoods. Perhaps, he mused publicly, all recogs should be relocated upstate, to work AgriCo plantations.



Following much inebriated deliberation and herbally-inspired consideration, Worriers free-associated a staggered path from Arden's broadcast rant against Nola's "tide of wantonness" into metaphorical tampons that staunch monthly red flows, which led to someone's wry call for a menstrual show, which occasioned reference to the fishing competition, *The Annual Tarpon Rodeo*, hosted at Grand Isle. And there it was, their debut G.R.O.S.S. theme: *A Menstrual Show of the Eternal Tampon Rodeo: Stemming a Red Tide of Wantonness*.

But immediately there arose a problem. The new krewes discovered there was no place for them to meet and work up costumes.

ANX: life of a recog

Once, the krewe might have counted on the rec room of the *Haven of Mercy*. But its minister, the Reverend H. Emil DeMint, had begun to convert it into a rather barren sanctuary that aimed to feature only oak benches arrayed before a podium, from which might be delivered sermons beneath a large wall-mounted wooden cross that DeMint had patchily gilded with aluminum foil, as a family crafts project, to “make it stand out”.



Rollo received an urgent text message from the Reverend: *Really!?!? A ‘Tampon Rodeo’ parade? Really!?!? That is disgusting!!! Not on my watch!!!*

Marilyn and I both shall emphatically and avidly lobby city hall to revoke your parade permit. You recogs shall not publicly mock and defile the Haven of Mercy with such despicable filth! Not on my watch!

Rollo’s reply: *What happened? What’s the problem with the krewe parade?*

Tapping awkwardly on an unfamiliar screen keyboard of his euPhone and unaccustomed to the only messaging tech sanctioned by the Reverend, Rollo sought out Penn. He found him in the partially revised rec room, sewing decorations on his costume. Rollo handed Penn his phone and grunted, “See if you can work this out. I can’t take his crap.”

Penn took the device, tweaked a few settings and then was able to dictate his replies aloud. Meanwhile, Rollo paced about, trying to sooth his own ANX.

Hemil’s reply now was audible, up-converted to speech, in an angry child’s voice, exaggerated for comic effect: *One of your guys, Ernest Barr, I believe is his name, came into the Haven of Mercy carrying a large item wrapped in brown paper, which he placed on some chairs while checking his mail. Marilyn looked up from her work and saw that the brown paper had come open to reveal what Ernest calls his “monthly bloody dickhead”, made of painted foam*

Wounded Souls, Tainted Regrets

rubber and papier mache. He plans to wear it in costume to celebrate certain unspeakable acts that he precipitates during his girlfriend's menses.

It's revolting! The entire parade theme — Tampon Rodeo?!?! — is despicable. I won't have it. It's abominable!

Penn: *What is abominable? Tampons? Or rodeos?*

Rollo laughed, enjoying the Reverend's exasperation.

Hemil: *Neither, by themselves, of course! They both have their place — but not in public. And certainly not together. Parading around in nauseating costumes to celebrate vile acts is not funny! It's revolting!*

Penn: *Sex? It's a fundamental biological function. Its natural cycle gives life to everyone on earth. Precisely how is that disgusting? Or does that make only the female part of humanity disgusting? Do males get some credit too? Where do you place the blame in such matters?*

Hemil: *You're twisting what I'm telling you. You make it into something political. You know as well as I do that people are revolted by such vile nonsense. Especially Marilyn. And she's female.*

Penn: *If you say so. I definitely agree that the whole thing is nonsense. But, then again, that's sort of the nature of Mardi Gras, Reverend. It's the whole purpose of Carnival. "Carne vale", after all, is Middle Latin for "Farewell to the Flesh", a last fling of having fun and laughing at all kinds of ridiculous human crap just before Lent turns everything serious and dour. That's how people always have let off steam down here on the Gulf. Even Jesus warns against putting new wine in old skins, Reverend. And down here, there is no newer wine than the ferment of Mardi Gras cheer.*

Hemil: *It's totally frivolous, the whole season. We don't put up with such distractions up north. What's funny about having a disgusting male member on one's head and parading about in a cheering crowd of mock tampons doused in ketchup? You should all be improving yourselves and taking care of more important matters. How about your eternal souls? What about faith, hope and charity?*

ANX: life of a recog

Penn: Well, Reverend, maybe it's a recog thing. But, after all, please keep in mind that we have had our brains rewired. For us, on the receiving end, it's non-stop — subjugation, coercion and exploitation.

The ANX screws around with what does or doesn't seem disgusting to us. Most of the Worriers, back when they were Teuton Warriors, had a lot of direct experience with blood. And a lot worse. But now the ANX makes violent blood seem so disgusting that no one can even reminisce about old times. But they have no problem — beyond some occasional male-chauvinist jibes — when their girlfriends or wives bleed once a month.

Lately having been solo, my own experience with blood has been very minimal, nicks or cuts or maybe medical situations, but blood doesn't upset any of us the way it seems to affect you and Marilyn.

But tell me this, Reverend. Why then is it not disgusting for you guys to sing about being “Washed in the Blood of the Lamb”? Just where do you draw the line? And how is the gory crucifix over in St. Louis Cathedral different than a lot of sado-porn imagery? Put a ball gag on that statue's mouth and suddenly it's no longer sacred, it's disgusting to your point of view. And all that's different is that the Romans didn't use ball gags to crucify people.

Maybe you'll say that's a special metaphor. But then so is the Tampon Rodeo. It's just making fun of silly claims made by certain well-known politicians regarding some imaginary “shameful tide of wantonness” here in Nola. So where's the shame? Outside on the street? Or is it in the pretentious eyes of beholders?

But like I said. Maybe it's a recog thing. I find a lot of supposedly normal CZ fixations curious, even hilarious. But that's just me, I suppose. Still, what's being mocked, if anything, is some people getting so uptight over ordinary nature at work in what is the core animal part of humanity at work in every person's body. Have you ever really thought about how comically tragic it is that so many are so horrified by what they truly are? You know, Reverend, as a friend of mine once observed, “even a kiss just sucks on a tube of shit”.

Wounded Souls, Tainted Regrets

For recogs, this particular subject is a crucial fact of life, you know, given how the ANX spews tantrums of nausea along with generally horrific revulsion as a whip to keep us conveniently peaceable. Meanwhile CZs get all tied up in knots over sex, blood and a long list of other presumably natural topics they'd rather not think about.

But I promise you, Reverend, canceling the krewes' parade permit will not gain you any credibility or cooperation among recogs. Welcome to Nola, Reverend. We're a lot different down here. Carpe Diem.

Hemil: "Carpe Diem" is from Virgil reminiscing Horace's more specific "Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero pulsanda tellus", or 'Now is the time to drink, now the time to dance footloose upon the earth'.

You recogs are so stubbornly carnal I reckon it will take time for you to come into the light. In the interest of fostering some sort of nascent community feelings I suppose a parade in the Quarter on one day can be tolerated. But you'll have to work somewhere else. I will not have such upsetting subject matter bandied about in the presence of my family.

Even so, you might keep one thought in mind as you prepare: "For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life." (Galatians 6:8) I pray that you shall all come to appreciate the grave implications of Eternity!

Penn: We'll definitely keep that in mind, Reverend. And I'm sure the krewes' outing will be spirited, perhaps even inspired, if nothing else! We do appreciate your patience.

Penn restored the euPhone's default settings and handed it back to Rollo. "So, I guess we're still on for a parade, but we'll have to find some other place to get ready for it."



10



WORDS SHE SPEAKS LIKE DIAMONDS ARE WORN

Penn rushes by the corner of Royal and Governor Nicholls streets where a wall-mounted plaque bears a quotation:
In the Rue Royale stands this quaint, old-fashioned house about which so much has been written, and around which cluster so many wild and weird stories, that even in its philosophic day, few in the old faubourg care to pass the place after nightfall, or, doing so, shudder and hurry on with bated breath, as though midnight ghouls and ghosts hovered near, ready to exercise a mystic spell over all who dare invade its uncanny precincts. — Marie Puents, The Daily Picayune, March 13, 1892

Penn's euSpecs fan out a display of category names associated with *1140 Royal Street: History, Real Estate, Architecture*. He declines to engage their offer of further information. A brief twitch of muscles tugs at ears on both sides to switch off the augmented view; it clears into ordinary vision.

ANX: life of a recog

He already knows enough to tremble in trepidation of this meeting. He doesn't need more cause for anxiety. But the leaky ANX, growling ominously in the wake of contents already seen, even though ignored, further informs him nevertheless:

Delphine MacCarty, born around 1775, was daughter of Barthelmy Louis MacCarty, whose own father Barthelmy had emigrated with his family to New Orleans from Ireland about 1730. The MacCartys were issues of a clan prominent in generations of struggle against Norman and English invaders up until the seventeenth century when, along with virtually all Gaelic aristocracy, they lost everything. Immigrants from such war-scarred borderlands settled a North American region ranging from the Appalachian mountains out to Arkansas and Missouri and down into the parts of Mexico that they later wrested away, first into a nation, and then into the state of Texas.

Far from New World holdings taken from native peoples by her kinsmen farther to the north, down in New Orleans Delphine was widely regarded as a great beauty. She coped with unfamiliar Creole-Acadian ways.

Through three very fortunate marriages, Delphine rose within French and Spanish society. In 1800 she wed Don Ramon de Lopez y Angullo, a high-ranking Spanish officer who by 1804 had been promoted to Consul General for Spain in Louisiana. Later widowed by her husband's death during a trip back to Spain, Delphine, by then a mother, returned with her daughter to New Orleans.

A second marriage to prominent banker, merchant, lawyer and legislator Jean Blanque brought her four more daughters before he died in 1816.

Delphine married her third husband, physician Leonard Louis Nicolas LaLaurie, a gentleman much younger than she, in June of 1825. Accustomed to managing her own

Words She Speaks Like Diamonds Are Worn

affairs, in her own name she bought property at 1140 Rue Royale where by 1832 she had built a handsome three-story mansion, complete with attached slave quarters. With her husband and two daughters she lived there and remained a rallying focus within upper social circles of New Orleans.

There are mixed accounts regarding treatment of slaves living at the mansion. Commentary from between 1831 and 1835 note their “singularly haggard and wretched” appearance. Harriet Martineau, an English social theorist and Whig writer (often cited as the first female sociologist) in 1838 recounted tales told during her 1836 visit to New Orleans. She reported that one of LaLaurie’s neighbors had witnessed a pitiful scene. Wielding a carriage whip Delphine had chased a twelve-year old slave girl named Leah up onto the mansion roof. The girl was being chastised for accidentally pulling too hard on a tangle while she brushed her mistress’s hair.

Pummeled by Delphine’s rage the terrified child leaped to her death. The incident led to an investigation, which resulted in LaLaurie being found guilty of cruelty and forced to forfeit her nine slaves, who were promptly auctioned off.

Wily Delphine, however, had her relatives buy up the unfortunate chattel and later sell them back to her. It was said, reported Martineau, that Delphine kept her cook chained to the stove and beat her own daughters when, out of pity, they surreptitiously attempted to feed her starving slaves.

During a party downstairs in the main house, on April 10, 1834, a fire broke out in the kitchen located over the carriage way. Police and fire marshals arrived and forced their way to the source of the blaze. There they found a seventy-year old female slave, the cook, chained to the stove by her ankle. She confessed she had started the fire in attempted suicide because she feared being “taken to the uppermost room”. No

ANX: life of a recog

one taken there has ever come back, the distraught woman told the officers.

Reports in the New Orleans Bee of April 11, 1834, recount that bystanders responding to the fire tried to enter slave quarters to ensure that everyone had gotten out safely. When Delphine LaLaurie refused them keys they broke down the doors and found “seven slaves, more or less horribly mutilated . . . suspended by the neck with their limbs apparently stretched and torn from one extremity to the other.” The unfortunate creatures said they had been imprisoned there for several months.

When confronted about these and other horrendous findings, Delphine’s husband, in a manner described as exceedingly insolent, told Judge Jean-Francois Canonge that “some people had better stay at home rather than come to others’ houses to dictate laws and meddle in other people’s business”.

When the story of the inhuman treatment of their slaves became widely circulated a mob of local citizens attacked the LaLaurie residence, demolishing and destroying whatever was available. The sheriff and his officers, upon dispersing the mob, found that scarcely anything remained but the walls of the building.

Delphine fled the mob’s wrath, escaping in a carriage to the waterfront of Lake Pontchartrain where she found refuge aboard a schooner bound for Mobile and then on to Paris, France, where apparently she died in 1842.



Dick Piron earlier had relayed a terse text message to Penn:
*Assistant DA, Mr. Abbot, 1140 Royal.
Knock at carriage gate, 0900.*

It is never good when a recog is summoned by any member of the DA’s office.

Words She Speaks Like Diamonds Are Worn

Ahead, a pride of tourists have gathered before the gated stone arch of the main entrance. They gape and gawk in the spell of their *Haunted Nola* walking-tour guide's effusions of gruesome highlight and ghastly aside. He carefully details the building's notorious thrills. Beyond his brooding CZ retinue stands the double-doored carriage gate at which Penn is to present himself.

As inconspicuously as possible, he scurries past the mostly elderly entourage to pound urgently on one of the massive wooden doors. He tries to ignore the guide's narrative, but even his own recitation of the recog mantra, over and over, fails to mute a litany of atrocities said to have incited malevolent spirits to haunt LaLaurie House. "It ain't happy, but it's staying alive"

A little slave girl — beaten with a carriage whip — is pursued to the roof and in desperation leaps to her death. Slaves to misery — men, women and children — chained for months, are beaten, tortured and subjected to horrifically disfiguring surgeries.

The ANX stirs against sense of vile obscenity, like a storm that rumbles in the distance, only to incite still greater apprehension of what is about to happen: an ANX seizure, here, before these boorishly vagrant CZs.

Penn tries to summon calming solace of goaway, a recog's only mental foil against an aroused ANX. His fist pounds on the door in new urgency. He intones fiercely, over and over, trying to drown out the guide's spiel, "It ain't happy . . . staying alive . . . it ain't happy . . . staying alive"

Removing his panama hat to wipe its brow band of sweat with a large and cheaply patterned blue bandana, the lightly bearded, middle-aged guide tosses an irked glance toward Penn's sudden distraction. The guide's oration grows louder to override the sudden ruckus at the gate, "Upon marrying Dr. Leonard Louis Nicolas LaLaurie, Delphine Marie McCarty, built this mansion in 1832 where, for the next two years many fashionable soirees and elaborate dinners were attended by the Creole elite of old New Orleans.

ANX: life of a recog

“During the fire that broke out in 1834, officials discovered atrocities inflicted by Delphine LaLaurie upon her hapless chattel in a continuing *grand guignol* spectacle of horror that was wreaked upon young and old alike. In later years tales were told of investigators finding buckets of genitalia, makeshift sex-change operations, brains stirred with sticks, women nailed to the floor by their intestines, tongues sewn together, and other ghastly innovations from a depraved theater of the deranged mind.”

Penn feels the ANX prepping regurgitation of his stomach's contents. Bolts suddenly are thrown back on the back side of the gate, one door of which pulls back slightly. A woman on the young side of middle-age glares impatiently from beyond its narrow aperture.



“I’m Penn Hebert,” he gasps, “I was told to meet Mr. Abbot here. Today. Like now.”

She snaps, “I’m not mister yet. And you’re late. Don’t recog know about clocks?”

“Oh, it’s ‘Ms’? Please, Ms. Abbot . . . I’m sorry.” Penn briefly rests his head against the arm that leans for support against the other door. “I’m afraid I’m not feeling very well . . . that’s just the way the message came from your office. The ‘s’ looks like an ‘r’.”

“Whatever. Come in.” She heaves aside the heavy door to let him enter. As the ponderous gate doors swing shut and the gruesome spiel fades, he focuses an internalized mantra into goaway.

Unsteadily, he follows her lead along a brick-vaulted carriageway into a spacious inner courtyard. There, scattered carpenter’s scaffolding and sawhorses punctuate a casually elegant garden of refuge from clamor of the street.

She is mid-thirties, slender and wears an oversized blue cotton dress shirt atop white denim jeans that descend to well-scuffed running shoes over white cotton socklets. Smudges of paint and

Words She Speaks Like Diamonds Are Worn

touches of soil, amid tools, boxes and ladders scattered about the interior testify that renovation is in progress.

Her dark-burnished copper locks are brushed back, away from green eyes that are alert and savvy in assessing Penn's shaky stance. Taking a seat in a cushioned wrought-iron chair, she motions toward one of the others gathered about a round ironwork bistro table.

"Ms. Abbot, I'm sorry if you've been waiting. I got here as soon as I could."

"Forget it. I've gotten used to delays and excuses down here. No wonder this region barely hangs on. People act like the route to salvation is dawdling. Be late for everything. But let's get to the point."

"Yes, ma'am." Penn sighs a little more easily as the ANX slowly relents, to settle back into a latent purr.

"Oh, God! You southern boys. You're not going to 'yes ma'am' me all day are you? I'm not that old. My name is Marlene Anastasia Abbot. You can call me Marla. Use my name, not ma'am."

From a slightly clipped briskness in her accent Penn gathers that she is from somewhere in the mid- to upper-Atlantic seaboard. "Yes, ma'a . . . , uh . . . Marla."

"Much better." Marla's face willfully brightens.

She settles back to study him. Penn senses untapped harmonies of vigorous grace, tactical resources available to any worthy contest. She is fit, energetic and carries herself in a regal bearing of deliberate reckoning. "Your last name — I gather from your T-shirt," she smiles at the visual pun, "that it's pronounced 'a-bear' and not 'hee-ber'?" She motions toward the emblem on his chest: a cartoon grizzly, erect in attack mode, standing on a platform of letters that spell H-E-B-E-R-T.

"That's me," he grins, "It's a common Cajun name." He looks closely at her face. Two ear twitches bring up euSpecs data about her: Marlene Anastasia Abbot, aka Marla, age 34. Born: Philadelphia, Cullen. J.D., Harvard Law. Prosecutor: New York,

ANX: life of a recog

Philbin. Father: Grady Eugene Abbot. Mother: Kristin Kay Banner Abbot. On delegated leave as Adjunct Assistant District Attorney, Orleans Parish, Sianassippibama, Winfrey. Registered Political Consultant: America Forward. More puzzled than informed by the splayed data points Penn settles back into the chair. Why is she here? More to the point, why is he here?



“This is why we’re here.” Marla abruptly gestures toward outer rooms and upper stories of the mansion. “LaLaurie House.” She pushes some papers and drawings toward him. “Some of my friends have acquired this property. To support its maintenance, they plan to develop it into a tourist attraction. While I’m in town, I agreed to oversee renovation of the downstairs — they’re converting it into a sideshow, of sorts — in exchange for living quarters upstairs.”

“You don’t mind living in a haunted house?” Penn jokes as he takes in the layout and elevation renderings she tossed toward him.

“Get serious.” For a moment she looks toward French doors at the far side of the courtyard, then turns back to him, “Apparently this place already draws a lot of interest among tourists. But it’s really not my kind of thing.”

Her right eyebrow disavows wayward tastes. “Nevertheless, my friends, the owners, want to install interactive holofield tableaux. The hook-and-draw they plan to advertise is to play up scenes from the grotesque history of this place. You know? A real grindhouse attraction, a horror show, through the eyes of the ghost of Delphine LaLaurie herself. They want a visitor to feel like a time-traveller immersed in its scandal, circa 1834. StimuVu will deliver, at cinematic scale, a pretty vivid and ghastly experience, but it needs to be the very best, using the latest holotech. It has to be overwhelmingly convincing.

“I’m told by very reliable sources at Nisus that you were — or

Words She Speaks Like Diamonds Are Worn

are — one of the best optronics jocks around. That you work magic in holofields.” Her eyebrows raise slightly, testing his openness to such a project.

“For a time, yes, I was at Nisus.” Penn takes a deep breath to add, “But I can’t — help you.”

“Why not?”

His right index finger points toward his throat. It gestures upward toward the core of his brain. “The ANX. It won’t let me get involved with anything like this. Even thinking about what has happened here. Listening to the tour-guide outside — already, it’s snarling inside my head. I’m a little queasy even talking about it.” His eyes gather toward the verge of revulsion.

Marla frowns annoyance. This is an unanticipated glitch. “Can you at least spec requirements for the tech — and maybe help set it up?”

“Ma’am — I mean, Marla — every time I interact with that equipment you’ll have to scrape me off the floor. And the images, that sickness. It just makes it ten times worse — I’m telling you, the ANX won’t let a recog even think of that kind of depraved mayhem.” He was having a very difficult struggle. As he spoke, his voice threatened to close up into a squeak. He managed to keep the ANX at bay only by mentally juggling abstract properties of triangles.

“But it’s not just the subject matter. StimuVu tech itself physically triggers the ANX by electromagnetic interference. Simstim drone frequencies drive it to clamp wide open. Plus, it interferes with reception of lattice node signals. That’s how it works. If I move too far from the node beacon over behind St. Louis Cathedral, the ANX clamps open and I go down in uncontrollable spasms of nausea.

“And the same thing happens near a StimuVu rig. Switch one on and watch every recog within a hundred feet collapse into spasms, upchucking breakfast all over everything. I had to walk the long way around, up Decatur, just to get here this morning.

Otherwise I wouldn't have made it past any of the places on Royal or Bourbon. That's what made me late. It took longer than I thought."

"But," Marla homes in on an apparent flaw in his reasoning, "how do you service those very same thrill shops for that brothel queen, Claire Latrice?"

"I don't have to go anywhere near them. Mamma Latrice has other people do actual equipment overhauls. I work remotely, from a linked rig in my apartment. Mostly I lock down maxnet access, to keep out hackers and freeloaders. But even then, sometimes I may have to work from inside a Faraday cage, just to keep the ANX quiet."

"Well, this is a big disappointment. Nisus says you're the one to talk to."

"Nisus doesn't even know me anymore."

"Oh, don't be so defensive," Marla scoffs, "You seem to have been on the inside lane of a very fast track. They remember you very well." Her eyes fix on his face, to search for a route past, or through, these new hurdles, "That's what I don't understand. How you fell into . . . this . . . being recog."



"I'd rather not talk about it," Penn shifts uneasily, looking about for distraction.

"Oh, but we need to talk about it," Marla insists. Beyond a moment of edgy silence, she somehow finds a warmer tone. She prompts, "Look. I first heard of you from contacts at Nisus. Then Luther Reichart talked about Angela's genius ex-fiancee. That made me curious. I looked up your case record and read the transcript of your trial. It just doesn't make sense. A bright, upcoming technical whiz kid with all the right contacts — suddenly he gets indicted and convicted for the rape and murder of some complete stranger? And in such a vicious manner? It was ghastly. Horrible!"

Words She Speaks Like Diamonds Are Worn

Gloomily, Penn resorts to the triangle properties to divert the ANX from this revised tack she has taken. Then he corrects her, “Burke. Luther is a Burke. He’s not a Reichart.”

“Oh, that’s right. He’s Arden’s step-son. Whatever. Anyhow, the question remains. What happened? Were you on majik? Was that it?”

“Majik? No.” Penn is adamant. “I’ve never even tried majik. Or anything beyond caffeine, for that matter. I like clarity. That kind of stuff is so limiting. You get distracted, can’t think straight.”

“Down here majik seems available on any street corner. It makes Nola gateway to the third world! And it was epidemic until Arden cracked down on the gangs. A lot of innocent people got hurt. And for what?”

“I know nothing about majik, or coke, or meth or any of that stuff,” Penn shakes his head.

“Well you certainly know that your Teuton Warrior buddies used it to crank up their insane savagery. And against innocent, ordinary people.

“In Philbin, majik is seen as the worst kind of addiction. What we saw on t-vu was horrifying! It showed a plague of pumped-up high, risk-taking goons who romped and marauded their careless way through every conceivable pathology of outrage.”

“My friend Dick Piron says it’s the love of money that brings on the worst addiction,” Penn free-associates against the ANX warnings, then elaborates, “And that ultimately brings about all the others. Including majik sprees.”

“Ha,” Marla dismisses the allusion, “Blame capitalists. I take it your friend isn’t wealthy.”

Coolly defiant, Penn counters, “The super-wealthy spend exorbitant amounts just to make still more money. And, left to their own devices, that lust for more just cascades and builds, unchecked, until nothing remains to anyone else. It proves to be the root of all evil, especially, when elite sense of privilege decays into schadenfreude.”

He acknowledges an ANX growl by saying firmly, but calmly, “I don’t know about any murders. I wasn’t there at any of them.” His fingers play at wrought iron filigrees along the chair arm. Then he asks, “What’s your interest in this, anyhow? Why do you care? And are you really in the DA’s office?” Although he wanted to convey outrage, the ANX only allowed him a quavering tone of pissed dismay.

Marla hears Penn’s sentiments resonate among stories told of her own mother’s struggles during early days of The Great Fall.

“Listen,” she seems to relent, “I worked as prosecutor in Philbin. I’ll be the first to admit. I’ve seen a lot of nonsense, both in court and out. But eventually even the worst madness dissipates. And you find the same tired story: somebody found a shortcut to something they wanted, rules be damned. It comes out if you dig deep enough. But right now, your situation doesn’t even begin to make sense. I’m trying to get into it. Why won’t you help? If you truly are innocent it’ll only help your situation.”

“In Nola? Ha!”

Mimicking his fidgeting, her own fingers now idly trace along grillwork of the table top. “I’ve been engaged to represent certain globally-connected parties interested in the outcome of forthcoming elections down here in Winfrey. A lot rides on who people choose to represent their interests to the Commerce Council. I’m here in Nola for the duration, to see that elections are fair — to my clients, at least.” She pauses to watch his reactions, then continues,

“To give me investigative clout, if needed, I have adjunct appointment as Nola Assistant DA. With full subpoena power if I smell something fishy. And in my humble opinion your situation already stinks to high fish heaven.” Again there follows silence.

“But it’s not just you. This whole town is weird. It’s the city that isn’t, but still pretends to be. The whole place is sinking into the Gulf, but fascinated in droom of yesteryear glory.

“Now it’s up to you, Penn. I’m in a position to help you,” She lifts a cautionary eyebrow, “or to hurt you — it’s your choice.

Words She Speaks Like Diamonds Are Worn

“You can cooperate, help me do my job and I’ll look into your case, find out what tagged you, what put you here, maybe even find grounds for retrial, if you’re innocent as you say.

“Or you and your recog buddies can do nothing, let Arden have his way. When he wins, he’ll send you to plantations upriver where they’ll literally work you to death.”

Alarmed, Penn asks, “Upriver? Why would we go up there?”

“Because most of the good citizens of Nola are sick and tired of what has become a pestilence of recogs. Petty crime, never-ending scams and non-stop begging. They just want you all out of here. The neo-liberal fantasy of happy rehabilitative penology has been shown to be a truly ridiculous exercise in sublime fatuousness.

“Arden Reichart says he’ll clean up Nola. He means it. He’s positioning his bid for governor as the start of reclamation of all of southern Winfrey, all across Sianassippibama.

“But, being from here, he needs support from up in Louimissiala. They are suspicious of him. The upper counties of Winfrey have never approved of free-and-easy ways here along the coast. To them this is *Sin-sippy-bammer*.

“Their ridicule is because they don’t like it. Any of it. And that makes my clients nervous; they sense a storm gathering to threaten their investments in Marigny and Bywater and out into the Gulf seasteads.”

“You’re fronting Nisus? Or ConRelCo?” Penn interrupts.

“Neither. My clients are players who prefer their names to remain unspoken.” She leans back into her chair; her lips lightly twitch side to side, briefly regarding his surly stubbornness.

“Arden will highlight his role in breaking up the war between Shaka Natchez and Teuton Warriors. He’ll be portrayed up in Louimissiala as the one to marshal Winfrey resources to finally subdue coastal blights of petty crime, sleaze and aggravation.

“Recogs will be featured as chief exhibit for all three. Even if Arden never changes anything, you recogs are headed across the

lake. There you'll work, and work hard, until you die. Long, slow capital punishment, the old-fashioned way."

She ponders briefly, then adds, "The more I think about your case, Penn, the more bizarre it all becomes. How you were suddenly picked out of thin air as chief suspect in a vicious rape-murder.

"I just can't see you doing what was done to that poor child. Such hatred. To destroy her in so humiliating a way.

"And then there's your cousin's majik-trafficking. How it so conveniently got you implicated and convicted along with right-wing riff-raff Warriors.

"Something tells me there was a mistrial. There's a chance you could win a new hearing. Get a real defense to present your story."

"I'll still be stuck with the ANX in my brain."

"If found innocent, they'll have to provide you a lifetime supply of keepers."

"All a keeper does is mimic the ANX node signal. I still wouldn't have half of my emotions available. Do you know what it's like to be unable to get angry? Or even to resent its absence? It's a hole, a vacuum — in me! The ANX is permanent. No one has ever survived an attempt to remove it."

"That is the conventional wisdom," Marla acknowledges, "but in Philbin when we looked into whether ANX tech might be an option for our penal system we learned that Chinese neurophysiologists have developed a way to extract it. It's a little risky, yes, but it can be done.

Marla waited for Penn to absorb the implications. Then she nudged the morsel of hope a little closer. "If prosecutorial misconduct were demonstrated, then the city might even be forced to pay for its removal. If you were to choose that route, of course."

Penn stares at her in dismay that teases disbelief. A fugitive glimmer of liberation kindles on a far horizon, however remote.

From a pants pocket Marla withdraws her euPhone, which she places on the table between them, quickly setting it to record

Words She Speaks Like Diamonds Are Worn

mode. “Go ahead. Tell me what you can. Leave nothing out, however trivial it may seem to you. My gut tells me it’s in our mutual interest to look into this.”



Penn stares mutely at the device, stunned by an invigorating reverie of freedom’s delivery. He softly mouthes its marketing come-on, “EuPhone is euphony.”

After a moment, eyes still cast downward, he finds a starting point. “Angela and I had quarreled.

“It was a big blow-up. Funny, I don’t even recall why — lost behind the ANX, I guess. Probably she felt I wasn’t paying enough attention. And I wasn’t — at least not to her. I was swamped in work at Nisus, and at school, prepping my dissertation defense.

“Anyhow, we’d broken off our engagement. Several days had passed and I was feeling bad about it. Maybe she was right, I didn’t give her enough of me. If that was the reason. I wanted to patch things up, if we could. I had messaged her. And I tried calling. Again and again. But she wouldn’t respond.

“Luther told me she’d be attending a party at one of the places on St. Charles Avenue, near our Tulane lab. One of her friends lived there, in one of the more extravagant mansions. Angela always loved going there.

“But I was supposed to man a shift in the lab that night and nobody could cover for me. I had once rigged up process monitors to link with my euPhone so I didn’t physically have to be in the lab.

“Nothing unusually sensitive was in the works; I could track and control everything — even come back if needed — I’d be only a few blocks away. So I decided to walk over to St. Charles. I hoped to catch Angela on her way into the party. I just wanted to talk with her and try to make things right.

“Outside, I waited. And waited. I was sure she hadn’t already arrived. She always insisted on being fashionably late. She likes to suddenly show up. To bask in everyone’s marveling over her

appearance. She's just like that. Striking. And she comes alive among adoring fans.

"I waited longer. It grew dark. Eventually it got very late and people were leaving. On the chance that I had missed her, that she actually had been inside, I waited until it was pretty obvious that everyone had gone that was going. By then it was way past midnight. But I had been constantly checking the process monitor and all was well back at the lab."

"Why didn't you go in earlier to double check that she wasn't inside with her friends?"

"I didn't want to talk to anyone except her. They would have made a big deal over our split. I just felt it was better not to discuss it with anyone else. Until I had a chance to work things out with her."

"Then what happened?"

"Nothing. I went back to the lab, finished out my shift until dawn and then handed it over to the next tech. I went home and went to sleep."

"Did you ever get a chance to talk with Angela?"

"No. I was getting ready to defend my dissertation. I had to spend every minute on getting that ready."

"Was your dissertation about optronic innovations you told Angela about?"

Penn stares at Marla, his brow furrows suspiciously, "Oh? You mean she actually heard some of my ramblings about work?"

"She knows you thought it important. Was the dissertation defense about what had you so excited?"

"Only indirectly. I argued a new approach to photonic processing I call infra-packet coding. But the dissertation only dealt with fundamental mathematics needed. To represent a specific class of transmission-synch determinants.

"My dissertation pretty much just anticipates and rebuts expected avenues of critique of the concept. There's very little about potential applications. I had only just begun to grasp some

Words She Speaks Like Diamonds Are Worn

prospects for quantum computing. They point beyond any Turing machine toward multi-potential holoflux instantiation. Corollary applications could be in code decryption and maybe even for remote holofield telepresence.”

He checked whether she had grasped any sense of his dimly sketched speculation, “Telepresence alone might enable a totally new kind of surveillance. Of being at a site without being seen — something like a ghost. Of being invisible. And able to inspect any aspect of anything, however minute. As it happens.

“I hadn’t told anyone except Angela about why I was so preoccupied. And that was usually to fend off her accusation that I was ignoring her. I didn’t think she had even listened. She was very resentful of the time I spent away from her.”

“Angela is a very high maintenance female.” Marla sighs, “Arden says she’s a lot like me — ha, there’s a laugh! But who else might have understood those aspects of your work?”

“That’s just it. Angela wouldn’t have told anyone. She didn’t understand it well enough. Hell, she didn’t even care, except that it might bring us fame and money. And no one else had access, at least not until my dators were confiscated. And now I don’t even know what happened to my notes.”

“Dator? Would that be some kind of computer?” she asks.

“System q-data processors, dators, yes. Massively parallel computers rigged and optimized for pattern processing, especially of multidimensional quantized particle states.”

“Then tell me about that. About how you lost your notes.”

“My notes? How about my whole life?”

Again the ANX snarls to fend off sudden resentment. Penn inhales deeply several times, At the onset of a meditative state, his eyes fix on the center of the tabletop mandala of lacy grillwork.

“I’m just trying to understand the context in which everything took place,” Marla prompts, “Maybe you can recover some of the life you’ve lost. Try to stay on message. Tell me what actually happened.”

“Okay.” He sighs, then begins speaking in an even but softened voice, “I was coming out of my dissertation defense. On top of the world. I could tell the committee had been impressed with it and with the directions I’d hinted for further research.”

“Had you touched on any encryption or surveillance tech? During your presentation?”

“No. There still was too much yet to be demonstrated in that respect. It would have been premature, detrimental to academic reception of my work. A dissertation has to be air-tight and empirically sound.

“Anyhow, I knew my post-graduate career was off to a good beginning. Already I was working part-time at Nisus. They seemed very interested in my moving into a full-time research position there. Plus, through my major professor there had come hints of several offers that would have been very competitive. Some even came with stock options. I suppose that’s what caught Angela’s attention.”

“Someone must have really wanted you silenced.”

“I guess. Anyhow that high was very short-lived.

“I walked out of the lab hallway and down to the parking lot. As I approached my coaster three men came up to me, flashed badges and said I was under arrest for the murder of Amy Trinh.

“I’d never heard of Amy Trinh. Then I saw that the far side door to my coaster was open, that they had removed the old blanket I kept on the rear seat to cover a tear in the upholstery. A nearby police van was the mobile crime scene lab. They had already determined that the blanket was covered with DNA from this Amy Trinh, who I later learned was a young Vietnamese woman that’d been horribly killed, her body dumped out off Chef Menteur near the Rigolets. Later they gave evidence in court that my DNA even had been found all over her body.”

“The Rigolets?”

“It’s where the Gulf of Mexico meets Lake Ponchartrain, out beyond Nola east, beyond the Bayou Sauvage wildlife sanctuary.”

Words She Speaks Like Diamonds Are Worn

“It sounds very remote.”

“It is. And I haven’t been there in years. I told them there must be a mistake. They asked where I was on that night. I told them that I had been working. But it turned out that one of the other techs had come back to get something he’d forgotten while I was out waiting for Angela. He found the lab empty.

“I tried to explain that since I could monitor the process on my euPhone I had gone to wait nearby for my friend. Then they told me that a security camera had picked up an image of my coaster near where the girl was abducted on Downman Road. And also again, later, going out toward the the Rigolets. In court they played back oprock surveillance recordings and there it was. My coaster. Its tag in plain view. But the angle didn’t show who was driving. I just know it wasn’t me.

“And when I left the lab the next morning my coaster was right where I’d parked it. I didn’t notice anything out of place. Except maybe it was angled a little differently than how I thought I’d left it the night before. But I really couldn’t be certain. Anyhow, the cops just ignored everything I said. They hauled me to Central Lockup. And now here I am.”

Marla’s eyebrows hoist slightly as she senses new options sprouting among these shards of information. The personable young man before her dangles in a pivotal moment, a pawn at play on a field of tectonic forces. She’ll need to keep him close by. He may even ease her personal circumstances. But beyond that, several auspicious avenues are seen opening which must be probed.

She needs him ready at hand. Her lips slowly curl into a complacent, slightly askance smile as she considers her next move. This boy is now hers. Whether by whip or carrot, she intends that it shall be fun and perhaps quite profitable.

“Do you know what this is?” Marla fingers a gold chain from which a small diamond pendant suspends from her neck.

“It looks expensive.”

ANX: life of a recog

She smiles, “It is, but not because of jewelry. It’s just nano-diamond, or something. But the tech work that guys like you charge — oh boy! Just to make this thing, an ANX-link. It’s my connection to you. When I say your name, it automatically relays my wishes to you via the ANX lattice network.

“This is how it works,” she smiles into his dismay, to let him know how completely she now owns him, “Penn Hebert — I want you here, now!”

In his mind, among scraping ripples of thought that aimlessly elaborate floating snippets about her, about the tormented history of this place, even about the weather — he distinctly hears her summons. It enunciates from a distant specter of Marla-ness that bears in upon his thoughts, “I want you here, now!”

~ END OF SAMPLE ~

ANX: life of a recog is available from

Barnes and Noble

and from

Amazon

Read about the birth of *The Grasshopper Band AiPAL* in

O, Wow,

also by Howard Jones.

And learn about ***Manifest Orders of Attentiveness.***