

VID

By

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VID

"YES!" I hear my voice crying, much to my surprise. And "YES!" I find myself kneeling in samurai posture before the dwindling void, a vortex of darkness forming before me and although I cannot see it, I can sense a tunnel within, leading out from me.

Eeeeeee! There's a high blood-pressure siren. Then the onset of the VID music theme, "Bom bom bom bom bom bom" ...A face appears in the dark with synthesized neon eyes, one red, one yellow.

"Hi, I'm Bog Pie. Come on, Soldier, let's tussle!"

"I'm ready," I shout, gripping the sudden sword at my side made of wood carved from the rudder of an old ship sheathed in a scabbard of leather, the faint tracings of a map etched on its side.

I trot through the darkness, sparks like Fourth of July whirligigs spiking from my feet I'm in full loin gear like Peter Pan gone porn. A steely spear of tensile alloy is strapped to my back. My eyes goggle in the darkness like blue dream babies painted by Minnie Mouse. My nose twitches accompanied by an eruption of elfish thoughts. I am the apprentice, Gig at the threshold of VID'S first level.

"I'm ready!"

The music has become a rainfall.

"Oh hoh nae eo coe eee..."

"Ping! Ping!, there's a stinging sensation in my left hand and the smell of smoke. Smoke! There are two holdes in my hand.

Punk. Something's hit my head.

There's a hole in my head!

Pong! *There's a stinging in the center of my right hand and yes, there's a hole in it.*

The top of the cave is dripping video acid.

"What can I cover myself with?"

There is a bag hanging from my shoulder. A voice comes from the bag, "Inside of me are various items. Pick the right one to get you out of trouble. Pick the wrong one and the "Gig's" up. Good luck." I tear open the bag.

There's a big pill in there, a box of wooden matches, two dog biscuits, a razor frisbee, a Life Saver the size of a steering wheel, there's an old crow's head, I eat it, it crunches between my teeth, it tastes salty, Vvwwzzzzz! two blue beams of light break from my eyes. I look in my shoulder bag. There's a plate in there. I put the plate on my head. Plink! The acid drops burn through it. The bag is beginning to melt, video acid has broken through my back!

"Wrong one, bye-bye!"

I cast my blue eye beams into my melting shoulder bag. There's a tube of underarm deodorant, the word "Shield" written on it.

"Do you wish to continue?"

Children in bandages and hospital gowns are gathered near Dragon Smasher. A few are maneuvering through Gory's Hole, the rest are scattered among the old machines, lazily plucking at the electronic images. Plastic tubes are coming from their noses and out of their arms, black boxes with beeping graphs are over their heads. Attendants in white are giving them quarters to put in the machines.

There is a beep. My hair rises. It's a count down!

**"Do you wish to try again where you left off?
You have ten seconds to decide. Ten, nine, eight, seven,
six, five" ...**

I...

"four,"

reach...

"three",

for the...

"two",

quarter in my pocket and pop it in the slot.

Djeep!

*I open the bag, grab hte crow's head, ram it into my
mouth.*

Vvvwwwzzzz, blue beams break from my eyes!

Pip! Pang! Poom!

Splatter-drops spank my heel and pain eeks out.

Ping!

*My cheek burns as an acid bead eats its way into my
face. I uncap the deodorant stick and rub it on the hole.*

Djreet! A gritty scab rises.

Pop!

Another, this time just above my elbow.

"God!"

*I swing toward the pain, a strip of leather stretches
in the space in front of me.*

"Aha, it's Liquid Shield!"

I scribble in the air. (Triumphant blast) A shield appears. Holding the shield over my head, I inch forward...

The first video game I ever saw was Pong. It was around 1974 in the basement of a "Frat" bar in Berkeley on Telegraph Avenue. I was living in my VW camper at that time and a few of my friends who were living in houses had decided I needed a good meal and a change of scenery.

We were sitting at a table and gathered near us were a group of pitcher drinking Frat boys. Two of them were hovering over an upright cabinet, their faces lit by an eerie, almost numinous glow as if they were gazing at some kind of synthetic nativity scene. There was something about the energy coming from that box that drew me to it.

"Come on, sucker."

There was a languid "beep" then "bonk" then "beep" "bonk, "beep" "bonk."

"What a wimp. I got your ass."

At first I was distracted by the familiar homophobic ritual of Fall Rush.

"Jesus Christ, are you cross-eyed or something? Ha ha, got you again, maggot."

It was a screen they were hunkered over. Black with white stripes delineating what was obviously a ping pong table. But it was electric! No messy balls to chase, no old paddles with worn rubber facing, just two white rectangles.

I wondered as I strolled back to my friends if I could play the game against the computer. It cost a quarter and in my present financial condition a quarter went a long way towards eggs and hash browns or a bottle of Rossi Varietal.

When I stumbled back to my camper that night, my usual haze of depression was broken by thoughts of fresh possibilities. Perhaps the dim-witted convulsions of the human race could, with the sheer weight of time, fumble itself into another dimension. Perhaps we bad monkies were just the crippled midwives for a nascent entity, and this was its dewy-eyed child. Yes, perhaps in this simple game of Pong there was hope.

I inch along, hunkered down beneath the shield, the rain sparkles, lulu and lush. Behind me is the darkening cave, zapped out into video death, before me, a bridge of stone and beyond that the swirl of just-forming cavern walls.

Zzzzsssssss...The rain stops. I bring the shield down, pull the spear from the hasp Shrrr--t! and gaze into the void.

"Tick-tock-tick-tock," a clock is somewhere clacking in my brain.

"It's my eyes, they're going out, I ate the crow's head too soon!

I pull the plate from my pack, fling it into the darkness. Ww-ww-ww-ww-ww! The plate frisbees out of sight, then... Trssh! there's a crash.

"Ah ha! I can go through!"

Of course I can go through. It wants me in there! And with every step I take, the world behind me Fffffff! evaporates.

"I've got to keep my eyes!"

"Ticktockticktockticktockticktock..."

A wall of darkness is moving towards me.

*A voice in the wall whispers,
"Once you're inside of me you can't get out."*

My eyes are dimming.

*A shadow moves over my fingers, the muscles are
screaming at the bones. The darkness closes around me like
a closet within a closet within a dark room in a house lost
in the country.*

"Too late, bye-bye!"

My eyes go out.

The wall (Sound of huge swallow) swallows me.

The countdown screen is already appearing.

"Ten,

Nine,

Eight",

**A kid with bandages over his hands is leaning on
my leg. I push him away.**

I live in a camper in a parking lot in Berkeley in 1974. Not actually. Actually, I'm in the middle of a video game. A very special video game. But this video game and that parking lot in 1974 are important to me. I don't like to write about artists. I think artists should write about other people, important people, like nurses, garbage haulers, firefighters, and people who live on the street. But I excuse myself in this specific case because if it wasn't for my camper, I would be living on the street. And I think what is most important about the story of this artist is how he wound up in a camper in a parking lot in Berkeley for two years, a mere six inches above the street. I peed on the walls and when I couldn't get into the warehouse. I shat in

the bushes just like any street person. In fact I'd really prefer to call myself a "geek". Which is funny because that's what got me out to California, a play I wrote about someone becoming a Geek.

One day when I was still living in Iowa. This was around 1972. I got this phone call from the Magic Theater. It was in Berkeley at that time. They wanted to do a play of mine, "Jimmy Beam." It had been my MFA project. They said I could direct it and bring an assistant. I'd heard about California actors; their propensity for mellowness and careerism, and decided to bring with me as a safeguard one, Bob Ernst. Bob had just resigned from the Iowa Lab Theater, one of the most intensely physical ensembles in the country. When Bob did something he did it with the passion of a Turk and the precision of a Samurai. He was to be my trainer. So Bob and I got into my warrior camper, Seigfried, and headed out to California to sow the seeds of a new theater.

**"Seven,
Six,
Five",**

There's a quarter in my pocket. I don't know where it came from. I'm not asking any questions, I just pop it in the slot. Kids in oxygen tents are staring at me.

Ready!

Zzzzsssss! The video rain is just disappearing behind me.

Tick-tock-tick-tock my eyes are going out, cracking like blue stained glass breaking under the heat of an alien sun. I don't wait for the wall to enclose me. I dash into it before my eyes can burn out.

People are somersaulting down a hole. An old guy in jockey shorts pauses momentarily before the hole and grins at me, then dives through. I know who they are -- other VID players like me!

"Right! Dive Gig. I'm waiting for you on the next level."

"Here I come!" I shout and dive among them.

Sssssss suddenly, I am airborne, my blue eyebeams streaming blue tears in the rush of the wind. A vast honeycomb of tunnels glows beneath me.

My fellow VID players stretch out like diving angels. I hear their cries, some in terror, some in glee, some in abandon, that's what I choose. Abandon.

Skaa! The honeycomb of tunnels is nearing. Some players smash against the surface of the honeycomb like bugs on the windshield of a mammoth Peterbilt. I've got to cut through that cell! I grab the razor frisbee and hurl it. Wzr! Wzr! Wzr! Wzr! Wzr! It catches the wind, flies back in my face and splits my head open, blood fills my eyes. Shit! Wrong one. Briefly, the unholy wind of my acceleration blows the blood from my eyes and I see the surface of the comb. It is filled with spikes, dripping with venomous honey. I know what will come next. (Donald Duck sound) It does.

"Not quite right, Gig! Try again. Bye-bye."

I think as the screen of continuation breaks through my agony with its descending numbers, maybe I should have used the Lifesaver.

The attendants have pushed the kids in the oxygen tents against my game cabinet. They are gawking at me like fish in old water.

**"Ten,
Nine,
Eight",**

Yes, there's another quarter in my pocket. Yes, keep them coming!

"Jimmy Beam," my MFA play, is about the son of an alcoholic mother who is taken away from her and passed around from family to family, used and abused, only to end up in a cage in a carny show where he's become a Geek, his mouth covered with blood and feathers from biting off chicken heads.

Bob did his job. The troupe was tight. I worked night and day directing and revising the script. The theater itself seemed strangely uneasy but we worked on. We felt that Berkeley was in for a night it would not soon forget.

Bob and I took our seats. Three guys sitting behind us were hollering and stamping their feet.

"Come on, what's taking so much time?"

"Let's get on with it."

Kelly, my assistant director, leaned over and told me they were a street theater ensemble with revolutionary leanings. They were called the "East Bay Sharks."

The lights started to dim. My debut into the world of professional theater was about to begin. Papa Papple, the owner of the carny show, stepped into a pool of light.

"Good evening ladies and gentleman..."

"Boo!"

"Hiss!"

"Speak up, Fatso!"

I turned around. One of the Sharks grinned at me. I could count his teeth.

The actor went on... "If you'll but bend your ears up and to the right a bit..."

"Ooh, he's the bad guy."

"Wow, oh boy, I'm scared."

The actor went on "...you'll hear in the background a song that is near and..."

"Ooh, mean."

"Tough guy."

"Bullshit".

It wasn't long before my whole cast was tripping over their timing. After braving the "Sharks'" cacophony for a good twenty minutes, Papa Papple stepped out into the lights and said,

"Would you please quiet down. We've worked very hard to put this production together."

"Oh, too bad," was the "Shark's" response.

I turned around and whispered loudly to the "guys" to quiet down.

"Shut up!"

"Who the fuck are you, asshole?"

"I'm the playwright and the director."

"Ooh, wow, big deal."

Be quiet or...." I could feel the void beneath my feet, "...or you're going to have to leave."

Suddenly a French guy behind me stood up and shouted with revolutionary zeal, "I defend zis man's right to protest."

I thought he meant me, but he didn't, he meant the Shark. The audience, by now, had shifted its attention more to the back of the room than to the stage.

The artistic director, John Lion, finally stood up and asked for calm.

One of the actors leapt from the stage and threw Lion against the wall screaming, "You shut up, this isn't your theater!"

There was this troubled feeling in the air, the kind you get when a crowd is about to become a mob when a midget woman (she later played the psychic in Spielberg's "Poltergeists" -- all three of them!) stood up and said, "Why don't you guys just quiet down, I want to see the play."

One of the Sharks answered, "You having a problem seeing the action, 'little lady'?"

The house went stone silent.

The three-foot lady turned to the audience and said, "Everybody who wants to see the play say 'Aye'."

There was a silence, then a shout. The Aye's had it.

After the "show" the French reporter asked me if it had all been a set up. I told him it hadn't been. He answered, "Too bad, that was the best part." I said, "How do you know, you didn't get to see the real play?" He answered "Plays aren't so important, protest is."

**"Seven,
Six,
Five,
Four",**
The quarter's in the slot
"Three",
I brace
"Two,"
Myself
"One,"

A teenager with dripping burn gauze is reaching for the joystick.

"No!" I scream, "it's my game!"

Skaa! I am in sheer space, rushing again toward the honeycomb and its poisonous spikes. I grab the gaint Lifesaver and hold it in front of me. The hole in the middle begins to whistle in the updraft. The whistle becomes a shriek, light twists out in a thin ray. Zzzzzooo! the toxic honey melts, exposing a dark passageway.

*"Come on in!" croons the voice from the hole,
"Come on in and catch me! "*

I am standing before a cereal box landscape, rolling hills with a lollipop sun. The air is sweet with a slight tinge of strawberry kool-aid, the trees are asparagus green, the meadows of corn-cob yellow hay roll down to chocolate-colored fire trails, the sky is isotope blue.

I remember my sword made from the rudder of an old ship and a scabbard with a map now deeply etched in its side.

"This is the map of my journey," I utter, my voice strangely high in the helium air. A sparrow flies across the sky, stops, stuck there as if someone had cut the frame loose from the film and left the world in frozen photography.

"Can I move?"

Yes", I hear this voice within me whisper, "If you make the world move with you."

And I do. I don't move my foot over the path, I move the path under my foot. The bird unsticks and flies east.

There's this tinkling. Tl-tl-tl-tl-tl! A cloud of birds is rushing at me. Suddenly my face is covered with hundreds of chickadees. Fl-fl-fl-fl-fl! They scatter and land in a tree. My face is moist. It's blood. They've made hundreds of perforations in my face and scalp. Again I hear this eerie tinkle. Tl-tl-tl-tl-tl! From the sun a cloud appears with the high lisping calls of cedar waxwings. Suddenly they're on my body, their shining eyes abur, their lovely crests moving like tiny, delicate hammers. Fl-fl-fl-fl-fl! Once again, like the chickadees, they're gone. I brush the blood away. My arms and fingers are aswirl with vines and alien insignia. I figure my face is covered with them too. Tattoos.

I hurry the path along, the lollipop sun melting like a hot orange oyster. As I walk the sky grows dimmer. So that's the way it works, the faster I walk, the darker the sky. I walk faster and darkness surrounds me.

John Lion invited me to join him at a national conference on Buddhism and the Theater in Boulder Colorado, hosted by Chögyam Trungpa, a guru who was

one of the major spiritual leaders from Tibet on the run from the Red Chinese. The major theaters and performers from around the country were to attend. It seemed like perfect timing to get out of the Berkeley storm.

When we arrived at the airport we were greeted by a famous playwright, Claude Vanatalli. At last, I thought, I'm going to meet some famous people. I could use some spiritual grounding too. Things were looking up.

When we got to the ashram we were welcomed by a good 250 avid Buddhists.

A woman in her late thirties followed me around the whole week. It seemed to me that everyone was assigned a special "person;" perhaps it was only my paranoia, but I called her my "Shadow." Anyway, there was this huge feast of Tibetan delicacies. Wine, beer and whiskey in abundance. Everybody was getting inebriated. People were beginning to get "zealous" about each other when someone whispered, "He's coming!"

Two young women came in, one carrying a cushion, the other, a small table with a large bottle of sake and a glass. I felt someone's eyes on my back. I turned. My shadow was smiling at me.

Everyone went quiet. A short man with a jack-o-lantern face came in. He had a shriveled arm that dangled lifelessly from him. He sat down on the cushion, the two lovely Buddhists on either side. One of the young women poured him a glass of sake. Trungpa sipped his sake and smiled hungrily at us. He welcomed us in a strangely high and innocuous voice. He introduced several members of his staff. They had that kind of "gung ho" casualness.

"Now -- go and dance!"

The guru retired, followed by his handmaidens. The lights were dimmed, the doors in the hall were opened and rock-and-roll music was sent over the speakers. The theatre people almost immediately followed suit as if they had read some itinerary that had slipped my attention.

"You didn't like the girls serving him, did you?"

My "shadow" was standing there at my right elbow. Maybe she likes me, I thought in her defense.

"Actually, I didn't give a fuck" I answered in an all too quickly beligerant manner. It was if she had pulled it from me.

"Are you angry that I asked you?"

I answered "No, man! I just want to party!" I realized then that the whole Jimmy Beam theatre rift back in Berkeley had sprained my nervous system, that my threshold for tolerance was at an all time low.

"You're an angry person, aren't you?"

I looked at her squarely in the eyes. "Fuckin'-A" I said.

I don't remember much of what followed the rest of the night. There was a lot of making out and screaming and finally several fist fights. The art luminaries seemed enchanted and perplexed by it all, as if perhaps what they were witnessing was some kind of secret Buddhist ritual.

Next afternoon, several theaters displayed their wares. Robert Wilson took an hour to walk across the room while a teenaged girl counted from one to ten. The Open Theater performed Native American chants shaking big Native American rattles and intoning things in English like, "We are separate from each other. We should be one!" Jerzy Grotowski was supposed to come but he was delayed in

Europe having his blood changed. Andre Gregory filled in his slot by taking members of the audience and whispering instructions in their ears, creating a kind of personal mystery play between him and the performers. I was beginning to nod out when a group from California came and improvized people's dreams. It all ended with a two-hour critique in which they slam-dunked each other unmercifully. My "shadow" remained to my right about three heads back, glancing at me to make sure that I was aware that she was aware that I was aware of her. I stumbled out into the streets of Boulder in search of a red-neck bar.

Later that night Trungpa gave a lecture. I heard during the dinner break that he had bunged up his arm in a fit of intoxicated inspiration. He thought he could drive his car through a mountain. He tried. It didn't work. After that he switched from Seagram's Seven to Sake.

The guru appeared an hour late, accompanied by two new young women. Everyone went silent. The tape recorders were rolling. One of the female staff, a higher-up, severely cheerful, performed Tibetan yoga positions while Trungpa made commentary and sipped bottles of sake. It started out normally enough but when a disciple, a drunk boy of 20, began to tease Trungpa, the Bodhisattva started stabbing the boy in the arm with a pencil, and things began to break down. Suddenly, half-slobbering, Trungpa pointed at the woman and shouted, "You're doing it wrong!"

The woman stopped, stood up, quelled her tears and started to leave. The guru shouted at her "Come back and

do it right!" She turned around and went back to the middle of the room.

"Put your thing up!"

She didn't know what "thing" he meant so the Trungpa stood up, staggered to her and smacked her on the rump.

"That thing!"

She got on her hands and knees and stuck her butt in the air. The crowd laughed. She battled her tears back and laughed too.

"No, no, that's all wrong. I'll show you."

Trungpa went to the floor on his two good knees and his one good arm and tried to stick his "thing" in the air. After several attempts amidst the howling of the crowd he was able to stick it up there. He crowned the moment with a loud fart. The crowd cheered.

Later that night I was invited to sleep in a cabin some miles away from the compound. The owners spent the night showing me a board game they were trying to market. They called it "The Eight-Fold Path." We sat around the table and drank, the Buddhist entrepreneurs on one side, a well-known Scandinavian actress on the other.

"Isn't he vunderful, the vay he brings out the children in all of us?"

"He's quite magical."

"You should hear him some nights, it's unbelievable."

They looked at me. It was my turn. I vaguely remember my diatribe which went something like, "This chicken-shit crap with the this potbellied chink, that's what bugs me about you all, you shit on your own religions without even knowing what they're about and you suck up to this bullshit theocracy from the East where they've

subjected their people to poverty for centuries while they made golden prayer wheels and eight foot cows made out of butter."

It seemed like a reasonable speech at the time but it didn't go over that well. The Scandinavian actress picked up a napkin, dipped it in her half eaten plate of food and threw it in my face. It flew into my mouth. I involuntarily half swallowed the contents and then spit them back in her face and left the table in tears. That night I fucked her.

One final moment. The night before we were to leave we were each graced with a private 3-minute audience with the Bodhisattva. He watched me with his inflamed eyes and his swollen face.

"Goodbye, thank you for having me."

He just kept watching me. I just got up and left.

After the audience, each of us was led down the hall, various pictures of us had been drawn by our "shadows", some depicted cross-eyed faces, some with leering grins, some with melting heads, mine was a mouth gashed with rage. My "shadow" was standing next to it.

"I like you," she said, smiling at me "Good luck".

She took the picture from the wall and gave it to me.

I got on a plane, I buckled up, it lifted off and immediately we hit a three hour electrical storm. The plane lurched, bobbed, shuddered. I swear I could hear the metal groaning. John Lion looked like he was praying. I watched the passenger's faces with horror and fascination. We were all experiencing it, that special moment of incipient catastrophe. It was a strange, ugly union. Oh, God, just give me a bicycle reality.

I walk the path along, the sky black, no stars. I feel the landscape all around me and although I can't see them, I sense the hills in roller-coaster shapes just behind the darkness. I sense the air moving too, as if it were an independent animal roving the terrain in secret.

(Sung opera style)

*"Magic Dee
Magic Dee
Here I come
Come to me*

*I'm coming.
I'm coming.*

The words spring from my mouth like salamanders and basement bugs and as I sing the tattoos glow, forming radiant configurations. My path materializes in their lights sending back its own in response. Dim trees with dull-eyed owls, horses caught in the branches, vines of kudzu, fish sucking at the air, everything caught in a web of sleep.

I have a sense as I sing and the tattoos glow, the sleeping jungle reluctantly leaking its dreams, that I am learning a new language.

"Go get him Gig! He's out there. Bring him back."

When we got back to Berkeley, we found the theater gutted. The actors had had a revolution. The lights had been taken away, even the seats were gone. "Jimmy Beam" was shut down.

A week later I got a call from John Lion. He had gone into hiding somewhere in Oakland in a little shack near a culvert and a Safeway. He said that one of the actors was stalking him. He reluctantly gave us his address and asked us to meet him at his home. He made a proposal, namely, that me and Bob teach classes in experimental theater while he worked on relocation.

I could sleep on the stage rent free. Make a change, do the impossible, stay in California.

We agreed.

I went back to San Francisco and my little apartment behind a house. I reluctantly gave notice to my Irish landlady. When I came back that night, I found my clothes all over the lawn, my shirts and pants torn apart, my room in shambles, my manuscripts ripped up, my typewriter smashed. I called the police. When they arrived the old Irish landlady came out. She was crying. She said her daughter had done it because she was upset that I was leaving. I looked at the old distraught woman, remembering my first night there. She had brought me a plate of fried chicken. I noticed her daughter, a woman in her 30's, dressed like a little girl with high hems and blue bows, peeping from behind the front curtains, and I didn't press charges.

I gathered my stuff up and stayed at the light board operator's place that night. The next morning I found that my camper had been broken into, my short-wave radio

stolen. They left the mutilated typewriter and the torn clothes but took my fly rod. Who cares. There are no trout in Berkeley.

The class went on for six weeks but after that the Magic Theater found new headquarters in San Francisco. We had to come up with the rent ourselves. We advertised for partners. A clown class agreed to split the rent with us. The next morning I woke up surrounded by a crowd of white faces and red noses. They were all giggling and "clowning."

"Good morning! Good morning! Time to rise and shine!"

That night I bought several quarts of beer and watched three Kung Fu movies at a nearby theater. And moved into my camper in the parking lot.

I tried to continue classes on my own. I had all of five students and in the middle of a demonstration of voice and movement all my energy left me. I just stood there looking at them. "I'm sorry, I just can't go on." Since they paid me by the hour I didn't have to pay them any money back.

Gradually this phenomenon set in, a feeling of the shrinking of possibilities. I found myself walking the same routes to the same places, rehearsing my memories with nothing to do at the end of the same mysterious border but stand, briefly scanning my surroundings and then return to my camper, hit my bottle early and stretch out in the back as afternoon passed into evening, waking in terror in the night under the glare of the parking lot security light.

*"There is nothing so terribly hard about this game."
I move through this strange space, bats and bugs
and birds coiling and waddling in the trees and reeds
glowing back at me.*

*Eee-ah-loo-eeah
Lee-ah-loo-eee*

*Suddenly it strikes me. "Where am I?" I stop.
Everything is bright again. Rolling hills with sign-yellow
roads by the hundreds! The little Gig on the scabbard has
advanced too. His landscape is also covered with paths.
There's also an image of a dog. That's what the dog
biscuits are for! I toss a dog biscuit on an empty
intersection. (Panting sound). A cloud of dust is rocketing
toward me, a pink tongue in the front of it flying like a
Chinese banner. Grrrrrr! It's on the biscuit in an instant.
It stands there on its haunches, this little dog that looks just
like "Spot".*

*"He's a cute little feller", and I know his name
immediately, "Tracy." I call his name and bend to pat him.
(Teeth click) Grrrrr! He snaps then growls and runs down
the path ahead of me. The sky grows dark behind him. I
follow. He trots along, just fast enough to keep a constant
twilight. I keep his pace.*

*"Tracy", of course. That's what he's for. He's going
to trace me along the right path!*

I got a part-time job at a nearby hash pipe screen
factory and made just enough money to keep me in
breakfast and wine. I ate my evening meals at the free food

shelter with the street people. I wasn't one of them, of course. I was an artist on sabbatical.

My connection to the outside world was becoming tenuous, so when this kid showed up outside my camper with a hot AM/FM Sony radio with a Public Service Band I bought it. It had an uncanny power for pulling in Oakland Police calls. It was my connection to the world. Life down and dirty. Good old fashioned red neck cops checking out drug addicts and kids camped out on someone's lawn drinking beer. And once in a while a good old chase, but for real, and real was what I craved. "Tsh Car 32, rolling, got a Tsh 264 at 8th and Grand", hear this officer running, out of breath, (Out of breath) Tsh "He went that way. Copy, 34, rolling." And then the sound of this woman wailing, "Oh my God, oh my God " in the middle of the night and me hunched over my little Sony, drinking wine while the winter rain battered the roof, one candle burning, enough to heat the whole camper, stars twinkling between storm clouds outside the mesh of my window. Some nights were so good I wanted to howl.

It wasn't long after that that I met Russell. Russell was a good 14 years younger than me, with Aquarian blue eyes, an ever-ready Mona Lisa smile and a loose, shuffling gait. He had rented a space across from the rehearsal room and was in the process of making an art studio out of it. It took us approximately .05 seconds to become best friends. He taught me the beauteous world of peripheral vision. "When you look at the world from the sides of your eyes you change its speed, John" he would say, looking at me mysteriously.

We spent hours moving through the canned soup section of a nearby grocery store catching the tapestry of cans and cracker boxes with the sides of our eyes. At night we drank wine and threw latex pigment and vegetables at butcher paper, catching the bulldozer tracks of god and the flies of entropy, disposing of the night's work in a nearby incinerator, then offering its ashes to the wind. We named our hellish little paradise "The Pit".

It didn't take long for things to change. One day upon returning from my third constitutional, I strolled into the warehouse to see if Russell was there. He wasn't. I heard hammers. I hate the sound of hammers. They're like guns going off, killing all of the available space with architecture. There were two guys on ladders.

"I'm Chas", said one, his curly hair looking like it had been blown that way by three centuries of suburban wind.

"Hi, I'm Doug", said the other guy who looked like Ichabod Crane with a pony tail.

"Hi," I hissed.

"Who are you?" Doug said, thrusting his head at me as if it was on the end of a stick.

"Where's Russ?"

"You're the one that lives in the camper."

"Yes," I hissed.

"We're building a screaming room."

"Great. Where's Russ?"

"The painter?" Doug asked. "He went for a walk."

I found out from Russ that the two new renters were indeed building a kind of padded cell where they could scream. Russ said it was kind of cool, maybe we could

scream in there too. But when he asked, (we called them from that point on "The Screamers") the two became reticent and protective.

"No, this is serious."

"We're not just screaming, Russ. We're searching for "The Scream."

"What's "The Scream?"

Doug stepped forward. "The Primal Scream."

"Janov," Chas answered. "Get the book."

Russ didn't get the book, I did. The Primal Scream was a psychology you might dream up after seeing a Joan Crawford movie. It was the scream you should have screamed at birth, the ontological scream of existential release. Until you screamed that scream you did not own your life. Until you screamed that scream you put your future away. All around you the zombies of fascist America performed their dark illusions. And until you screamed your way to freedom you were one of them, subject to a virus called, "the mystification of experience." Once you screamed out all of your primal pain you erased the thirty-five hundred years of sexist, patriarchal, Judeo-Christian conditioning. Doug and Chas had come to build a soundproof room so that they could scream that scream.

(Tired and panting) *We trot together, me and Tracy. I'm getting tired and hungry. My stomach is cramping and my legs are starting to burn. I stumble, my temples pounding.*

"Tracy?"

As I stagger the light grows brighter and the "night life" with its undream creatures disappear into the bucolic cereal box scenery. My eyeballs feel like lead. I fall.

It wasn't long after the construction of the primal screaming room and the acquisition of a small black-and-white television set that the Pit moved into full swing. Besides Russ and me and the screamers, there was Lynn, a poetess from Iowa, moody, intelligent, suicidal. And there was Alma.

Alma was an American with two passports. He was born in Texas but raised in Mexico. His mother lost his passports and through some American version of a Kafka story he could never get them back again. At that time he was in his mid-twenties and beautiful, Christ, was he beautiful. He had long silken chestnut hair that hung about his shoulders like the mane of a horse. His face was chiseled yet soft and erotic. He looked like an offering for the Aztec gods. And he loved women. And they really loved him, not just because of his beauty but because he really loved them, not lecherously, but fully and all of them. "I j'ohst loaf they'm," he'd say, and his face would melt like hot fudge on ice cream.

One night after a long spell of growing depression and poverty about five of us huddled around the just cooling TV set. Doug sat with us cooling out before a "session." There was Russell and me, Lynn and Alma. There was a roughening edge to the atmosphere. I had dirty clothes on and I smelled. "Jesus Christ, I'm a bum." I wanted to say it, I wanted to belch it out.

"What would you do, if you had to spend a million dollars in one night?"

"Oh Christ, Russell," Lynn groaned and turned toward the dead TV set.

"You couldn't show anything for it?" Doug asked.

"Exactly."

"I'd buy a church and set it on fire," Lynn said.

"That would be tough," Doug said.

"I'd throw a party," said Russell, "I'd hire a few jets, about twenty operators, and I'd have them call people at random, in the middle of the night and have them picked up in limos, I'd buy a few tons of drugs, an army of whores for both sexes, and I'd fly them all to Rio where we'd gamble all the money away."

"That's possible," Doug said, crossing to the black board which had been confiscated from a dumpster behind the hospital. He started writing figures. "A jet would cost, say, two hundred thousand to rent."

As he went through the figures and I shouted out my desires I could feel money flowing from my fingers. I was on a sugar high and for a brief time I really felt rich until the money was all gone and we were sitting in the room again, lower than before, a spray of insane figures written on the blackboard. We sat in silence.

"I think there's flying saucers," said Alma.

We all looked at him in spite of our gloom. It was very rare for Alma to speak out.

"I think they come as a result of our wishes. I think that's how you talk to spacemen. You just wish for them. "

"You sound like Bambie," Lynn hissed,

"Man, I think tonight the flying saucers are out."

"I'm going home." she sighed, gathered her things and left.

"I've seen them," Alma persisted, "In Hawaii. They have a big port there in a volcano. Seven of them in the night, going too fast to be jets. Zapped into that big smoking mountain. Just before I saw them I got this feeling, like I wanted to go hide from something big. And then I looked up and saw them. I got that feeling now. I bet you if I went up on the roof right now I'd see one of them. Anybody want to come?"

"I can't, I got to scream" Doug said.

Of course there weren't any flying saucers. But what the fuck, who was I to dismiss such a possibility when I had considered all the others?

"Yes, I'll go up with you."

"What about you, Russ?"

"Nah, I'm gonna paint."

Alma looked at me with a satisfied smile.

"Come on, John."

We stood out on the roof. The night was crystal clear and balmy. The hills sparkled with lights. It looked like Italy on a festival day. The stars twinkled down on us despite the city's glare.

"It feels like a space port," Alma said smiling.

I pulled out a beer I had stuffed in my pocket. I was just about to pop the top when he put his hand over the can.

"We don't need that kind of stuff, we're going on a trip and we aren't coming back."

"We aren't coming back?"

"No, man, that's the price of the trip. "

I stuffed the beer back in my pocket.

"Will you go with them when they come?" he asked.

"Sure."

"I wouldn't say it so quickly, you aren't ever coming back."

"I don't care."

"You aren't ever going to see your friends again. You aren't ever going to see a tree or a girl, or even the same colors. Sometimes you're going to be very homesick."

"For this?"

"Yes."

"Would you go?"

"Yes, in a second." He looked at me, his soft animal eyes unblinking. "I don't care about any place. I have no place. "

I thought about it.

"What the fuck, me either."

Just then his eyes became violent.

"I feel them, man, I feel them."

He turned away from me and searched the sky.

"Look! " he shouted.

I looked but I didn't see anything.

"There!" he shouted and pointed toward the eastern horizon.

A light was coming toward us.

Alma looked at me savagely, "I told you, John, I told you!"

I squinted at the light. There was no doubt about it, it was coming toward us.

"It's a jet," I said.

"Yeah? Then where is the sound?"

I listened. It was silent. "It couldn't be," I thought, "it just couldn't be." But involuntarily I felt my hairs prickle.

"Do you feel that energy, John?"

"No, Alma, it's a jet, it's got to be."

"It's no jet. Look at the light."

The light had a piercing quality. I felt a strange thrill. The air around me became alien, magnetized. The light was coming closer and still there was no sound. Alma looked at me transformed as if standing on a mountain, his hair whipping in the wind.

"It's coming, John, do you want to go?" he shouted.

I stared at him.

"Are you coming or not?"

We started jumping up and down waving at the approaching light.

"Hey! Hey! We're here! We're down here!"

There was a roaring around us. My heart felt like it was going to break out of my chest. I screamed. The sound smothered it. We threw our hands in the air toward the light, both of us screaming, eyes streaming with tears.

"Take me home! Take me home!" we shouted.

The thunder rolled over us. We turned and watched it pass, its tail light blinking a mocking red as the jet liner flew over us. We stared at it as it banked around to the east on its way to the Oakland airport.

I gazed at Alma, his face was transfixed with pain and bliss. "That was something wasn't it?" he whispered.

I wanted to feel let down, cynical, but I couldn't. I looked at the Berkeley hills, the amber strand of Shattuck

Avenue street lights, the peeling top of my camper, the rough gutted asphalt of the parking lot, the bamboo violently breaking out between the buildings, and finally at the black shadow of the Bay with its light-beaded bridges and I was glad that I was still here.

"Yes," I whispered back.

Below us, in the middle of the night we could hear a soft mewling. It was Doug screaming in the screaming room.

Grrrrrr! *I hear this growling and I feel this pain like a piranha gnawing its way through my shoes. The Tracy's dragging me over the path! I stumble to my feet.*

"This sun is gonna burn me up!" I tear open my bag. There's a dog biscuit in there, a big pill, a razor frisbee, and the box of matches with the words "Night Light" written on it. I open the box. There's a match in there. I draw it along the matchbox and it bursts into flame, but it's a black fire! I pluck a branch of greasewood from the undream—darkness, hold the match near it, it breaks into flame. I grab more branches and have a fire going in the middle of the day, a black fire that blots out the violent radium sun. I can sleep now and undream until I'm ready to move again. I look over the black fire. Tracy lies on the other side, head on his paws. He is already sleeping, his legs twitching in undream tracings of our journey together.

One day Russell suggested that we take a couple of "slivs," tiny slivers of window pane acid, a kind of psychic cocktail, just enough to reset the perceptual firing mechanism. I sat in Russell's studio. There was a brick

sitting in the middle of the floor. I realized suddenly that most of the time I looked at the world as if it were a page out of a book, its objects and people as if they were drawings. But finally, at least in this moment, I was seeing that brick, the actual brick for the first time and it seemed to me that I had escaped Plato's cave and was witnessing the dancing actualities that formed our image of the world. I could see the forms that cast the shadows. At that moment I realized that my body was not just some corpulent unfried shank of steak. I was an animate, living mass. And this animating force filled my every fiber. All of a sudden I got an image of how to trot in this certain way and that if I trotted in this particular manner, I could probably trot forever. I got up and began to trot in place. It was a loose trot, the feet barely leaving the ground, as if just brushing the dust from the surface, the elbows slightly cocked and the hands dangling the way dog's paws hang loose when they're in mid-air. I trotted out of Russell's studio and down the warehouse hall past Arm and Hammer, the hippie carpenters glancing up at me with their old world eyes, past the ham operator's place, abuzz with new static as he attempted even now to reach some far side of the planet. I burst into the sunlight past The Howling Dog Volkswagon Repair Shop and the Geodesic Dome factory, around the corner into the sycamores that lined the Mental Health facility, past sweet, ripe Sasha's house, the neighborhood beauty, past the front of Herrick Hospital, ambulances dozing and at last onto Shattuck Avenue which went on and on into the North. I looped around the streets moving easily between the people, their faces popping up and vanishing like snapshots tossed in the air. I let my body

and its animating force lead me where it may, all the while my heart pounding at the excellence of it all. I found myself suddenly once again at the warehouse passing through the hall into Russell's studio. People had gathered and were drinking beer with him. I trotted in and immediately Russell rose from his chair, beer in hand and trotted out the door with me. Three hours later we trotted back to the warehouse, his studio empty, its doors thrown open.

In celebration of this discovery, I pulled my Coleman out of the camper and we had supper on the asphalt.

Light cracks into my sleep like the lid of a chest thrown open in a bright room. There, glaring down at me is a gangly, Gumby—gone—wrong guy, a cross between a tree and a slug, with synthesized neon eyes, one red, one yellow. "Hi, I'm Bog Pie. Guess what I got. What are you waiting for, soldier?"

*He grabs the space on either side of me and slams it together... **Svwap!** It's night again. Tracy is gone in a flash. I take off after him, leaving the black fire burning behind me. I remember that voice. It's the voice at the beginning of the game. "Bog Pie!" the tattoos shimmer, "Bog Pie," the undreamscape glows back like deep green ice. Vines and black moss, gator stumps and huge *Phylolapis* leaves sway in the oily wind. The tattoos beam and their words spring to my throat and I sing, "**Harpie Frogs Harpie Frogs in Bog Pie Swamp.**"*

Although I had these strange friends, and strange they were, my personality continued to erode. I was unbecoming in more than one sense. Even my individuality was suspect, being the result of an American conceit fostered by a secret sense of Manifest Destiny. Even being horny was suspect. It was in Berkeley I realized that my image of women was the result of continual zapping by the System's zombie night station sending its rays in dream worlds masked as booze ads and co-eds straddling motorcycles and motel beds. In any case, it didn't matter. Right or wrong I had to get laid. It had been a year. But how could I, looking like I did? That night I woke up gagging on something and found my camper was filling with smoke. There was a fire on the floor. My candle had fallen over during the night. I grabbed my pee bottle and dumped urine over it. (It was all I had!) I spit something into my hand. I lit my lighter. It was a piece of my tooth. I lifted my lighter in the rear view mirror and looked into my mouth. There was a fresh hole in my lower jaw, but that wasn't what startled me. It was my face that startled me. My mouth was covered with a big red stain, my breath reeked of half—digested wine. My camper smelled like there were several unburied corpses inside. It was stuffed with garbage. "Yes, I'm becoming a Geek."

*Stars glow in the shape of bats in the flat black sky, their flapping wings sounding like creaking doors, (**Door creak sound**) hundreds of them filling the sky with fluttering stars.*
"What are they?" The tattoos shine, "St..St..Star Bats."
***Zzzeeyou!** The trail dips and I fly down it, faster than my legs can carry me. I look at my feet and scream. The path*

is covered with thousands of boot brown snakes, thin as shoelaces.

"V...V...Vid Vipers," beam my eyes. "Aaaaaaaaaa!" I scream. "R...R...Ride them," gleam the tattoos on my feet. I look at Tracy. He's crouched on the snakes, riding them on his stomach like a surfer chasing a wave. They rush over the trail like a swift current of curdling mud. The only sound is the quick hiss of their oily skin. Together we ride, Tracy and me down the rivulet of snakes. Out in the distance I can see the back of a tall iridescent tree. "That's no tree, that's Bog Pie!"

*I shout his name and the swamp booms it back, "Bog Pie! Bog Pie!" In the distance I hear him cry "Maaaaa! Maaaaa!" Tracy begins a headlong dash over the snakes. I follow him, skating over their backs. We're catching up with Bog Pie. A fist comes out of a tree and punches me in the face, a blunted blow but deep. **Bonk!** "Hi yuh, guy, hi yuh."*

A guy in a monkey suit steps in front of me. "The Gig's up, ha ha," he laughs and shakes a bloody fist at me.

He gazes down. "I'm a bad monkey." Blood is pouring between my fingers. I can feel my head breaking apart. I look into my bag. I see the Razor frisbee, a dog biscuit, a big white pill. Then my eyes flood out.

**"Do you wish to try again where you left off?
You have ten seconds to decide.**

"Ten, nine, eight,

I...
 "seven,"
reach...
 "six,"
for the...
 "five,"
quarter...
 "four,"
but my pocket is empty.

Children are sitting in their beds staring at me, mouths open like still, curious ghosts.

"Go get him, he's in there."

A seventeen year old boy is standing next to me, an eyeball hanging from its socket, a sneer on his face.

"What's ectoplasmic off-white, stupid?" He says and slams a quarter in my hand...

"three,"

I slam the quarter...

"two,"

in the slot.

The Bad Monkey is bending over me. "Get back, you son-of-a-bitch!" I throw an upper cut into his jaw. His head sails up into the trees, his neck stretching up with it like hot gum accompanied by the sound of a siren. (Voiced inhaled gliss up). I grab the pill and gulp it down.

I feel something shake loose inside of me, (V-trill) a tearing away and a sudden lightness. I begin to rise above my body. Wow! That was an ectoplasm

pill! I look down; dozens of people from every walk of life are standing around my cadaver as it twists and breaks apart. They don't see my astral body rising above them, only the Bad Monkey sees, his eyes shine and his teeth gleam as he grins up at me. I grin back, and for a while, I fly with the Star Bats.

Bog Pie Swamp falls far behind me. Lightning bugs the size of plates light up the vines and undream creatures.

(Voiced inhale.) *I feel a faint buzz around my ghost. My flesh returns and my tattoos sing **BL-bl-bl-bl-black b-b-b-b-rn'd W'w'w'w'w'ood** (Black Burned Wood). I drop through the trees. They break beneath me like burned cookies cushioning my fall. Silence. Tracy's nowhere in sight.*

I met Jen-Ann at a party at the Pit. According to Jen-Ann, she had met me a couple of times before at Pit parties. She said I always seemed to be leaning 45 degrees into the wind, and that we had had several conversations, that is if you can understand "Slur." I told her that I didn't remember her or the conversations.

One night, after cleaning up my camper, I was listening to police calls when there came a tapping at the window of my sliding door. I looked out. It was Jen-Ann.

"Here, you like to make music." She handed me this long black case. "I'll loan it to you for a while."

I pulled out a couple of lukewarm beers from my inner stash under the back seat. It was windy and we could see the stars behind the glare of the parking lot security light. We talked about how we liked cool weather and lakes and trees. I

dug out my old fishing boots and showed them to her. We drank some more beers and exchanged stories about an awesome fish, the Muskie which was known to have pulled fishermen from their boats and eaten them whole. I excused myself and went in the warehouse and took a leak. When I returned she was standing there in the middle of the parking lot with my fishing boots on, holding a six—pack of beer. She really looked good. I pulled the camper door shut and Sigfried glowed in the candlelight like a Bavarian cabin. She told she had a four-year old kid, his name was Dee. That he wasn't any trouble and that she loved him very much. Sometimes she painted houses and when he was younger she strapped him on her back, climbed up on the scaffolding and painted with him hanging there. I heard everything she said, but it was like murmuring behind a plastic sheet. A kid? I couldn't handle a kid. Anyway, she'd said "I'm a painter, and I'd like you to see my paintings and the new studio I'm building ." We made love that night. Next morning I woke up alone. I opened the black box. There was a flute in it.

One day I got up the courage to visit Jen-Ann's studio. She had built it from scratch, walls, plumbing and all. She showed me her newest work, a series of huge oils she called "Sound Paintings." She said that they were based on the idea that everything is alive. I was awed by the size, colors and virility of the work. This definitely was not house painting.

Dee was delivered to her door around seven o'clock. He was four-years old, blond with big brown eyes and enough testosterone to invigorate an army. He handed Jen-Ann his day's work and was on the floor rolling a dump truck toward a work site he must have started in the morning before school.

Jen-Ann introduced us. He looked up and said "Hi," as if I had just been beamed down from the Starship Enterprise. I felt like an giant wino imported from the '50's. I towered over the kid trying to stash my six-foot hands into my pockets.

"Hi," I said. "I'll fix supper," Jen-Ann said, "Wisconsin burgers and baked beans." "Yippee," Dee yelled. I felt a flush of something I hadn't felt since I left Iowa; Heaven.

After supper Jen-Ann asked me to put him to bed while she did the dishes. We climbed up in the loft. I was a bit acrophobic, and the fact that there were no railings didn't help. Dee jumped into bed and immediately began sucking his thumb. He looked at my t—shirt and said, "Your nipples don't look like my Dad's. My dad's are smaller." I didn't know what to say. Then I remembered the videogame at the Frat bar. I explained to him the principles of Pong.

"I could make a better video game than that," he said. "You could run in my game, you could jump and kill monsters and fly."

Dee began dancing near the edge of the loft.

"I'm Magic Dee, I'm Magic Dee."

"Don't get me Magic Dee! Don't get me!"

Much to my relief he ran and dove on me.

"What would you call that video game?"

"I'd call it ... VID."

He began sucking his thumb again.

"There's only one thing that can catch Magic Dee."

"What's that?"

"The Bog Pie monster."

"Who's Bog Pie?"

"The Tree Man who lives in Bog Pie Swamp and Black Burned Wood."

Dee gazed at me. I think he wanted me to comfort him.

"I got a magic guy."

"Who?"

"He's little, and he wears green and he's fast and he's smart and he can fly and I'll bet he can catch Bog Pie."

"What's his name?"

I thought a second, "Gig!" I said.

"He can't catch Bog Pie!"

"Oh yes he can!"

"No he can't."

"Yes he can."

"Can't."

"Can."

"Can't."

"Can....."

Finally he closed his eyes.

I left Dee sleeping and joined Jen-Ann. She lit a candle, brought out a jug of wine. This part was much more familiar. Later that evening we climbed up the ladder to Dee's loft. She laid down on the bed next to Dee. I laid next to her. I felt uncomfortable.

"I feel weird being in the same bed with Dee."

"No problem, we can sleep in the other loft."

We picked up the candle, descended the stairs and climbed up the other loft. We blew out the candle. I couldn't sleep worrying about Dee alone in the other loft, exposed to space and away from his mother. And then it happened. I heard the sound of his feet moving across the darkness. I sensed him standing on the edge of the loft.

"Jen-Ann, . I think Dee's awake."

"What?" she said.

And then I heard this sound.

"Maaaaa..."

Dee," I said as calmly as I could, "Stay there!"

It was a long, drawn out dreamy sound.

"Maaaaa...."

There was a hideous silence. I saw him fall like a video game character in the dark. And then came this "Thud." I waited breathlessly for his cries of pain but there were none.

"Jen-Ann! He's fallen from the loft!"

Heart pounding, my mind rejecting the thought, I clambered down the stairs. "Where is the light?"

"It's on the wall."

"Which wall?"

"Here, I'll get it."

There was a horrible fumbling in the dark. The fluorescent lights blinked on and there on the floor was Dee, curled up, quivering, silent.

"We've got to call an ambulance. Do you have a telephone?"

"No, there's a pay phone outside."

I ran outside. I searched my pockets and found two quarters. I dialed the operator. There was an ominous click, and then it came; the dial tone. I had one more quarter left. I slammed it in the slot and dialed the operator. This was before 911, mind you.

"This is an emergency! Get me the Police Department!"

A voice came on, low and calm.

"We need an ambulance. A kid's fallen from a loft and hit his head on concrete."

He asked me the address.

"We got it," the voice said, "we're on our way."

Jen-Ann was walking back and forth with Dee in her arms whispering to him. There was blood coming from his ear.

"You'll be all right...you'll be all right," she murmured.

"Tracy? (Tr—tr—tr—tr—tr) Tracy?" (Tr—tr—tr—tr—tr) The trees crack at the sound of my voice—sss. I take the last dog biscuit and throw it on the charred ground. There is the sound of panting. He is there on it in a flash Grrrrr! devouring the biscuit. Tracy sits there and looks at me.

"Come on boy, let's go."

He doesn't move. He lowers his head and growls. He bears his fangs. His eyes begin to glow. The hackles on the back of my neck rise. Slowly I turn. Behind me glaring down is a great tree, one eye red, the other yellow.

"Guess what I got?"

A hot foul wind blows out of the south, accompanied by the sound of breaking bones (ww 'ww 'ww 'ww 'ww). A smog red sun rises. Black Burned Wood shivers, limbs breaking from the charred trees. (Tr—tr—tr—tr—tr).

Bog Pie spreads his branches and yawns then looks down at me.

"Come to get one of my kids?"

His lips, the color of nightcrawlers, bloat and twist into a sneer. His branches crackle and chatter and I hear in the air the sound of children's voices.

"Help me, help me"

"Let's race!" he shouts and shoots away, his legs propelling him like long rubber bands. Tracy flies over my head and is off

after him. Me too! I watch him dwindle in the filthy light fast as a spider in a fire. But I'm fast too.

"Ya hoo! Ya hoo!"

"Shit shit, this can't be happening. I shouldn't have come here. It's all my fault."

In the night I heard a far—off siren. It grew louder. Rounding the corner, like some alien vehicle, its lights flashing, came this wondrous sight -- an ambulance. They loaded Dee in the ambulance, Jen-Ann got in with him.

"Sit in the front," the driver said to me. And suddenly I was in that special moment, in an ambulance, the lights flashing, siren wailing, rushing toward the Oakland Children's Hospital.

Bog Pie dwindles no more but grows so slowly in the poisoned sky, Tracy and I running him down on fervent legs.

"Bog Pie! Bog Pie!"

In the distance I hear him cry...

"Maaaaa... Maaaaa..."

Branches begin to fly from Bog Pie like torn violent kites, their barbs catching in my skin.

"Help me! Help me! Help! Help! Help!"

Crying, clinging to me, shrieking. "What are they?"

"C...C...ComaCumers," shriek the tattoos.

I realize what they are, children out of their bodies, lost in the land of Coma, the Undead seared with pain so deep their souls have taken the shape of clustered thorns.

A daughter of a hobby pilot falling from the sky.

"Take me! Take me!" she screams. I pull her from my hair.

A baby flying through the window of a car. It's hard to get it off my face for it is savage and beyond communication. A

fifteen-year-old-boy with red hair skateboarding down a highway screaming "Ya Hooooo!" flying at my legs. I leap over him. I throw them off, I throw them off, tears flying from my eyes. "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry." ComaCumers ComaCumers, peeling off of Bog Pie. I grab the razor frisbee.

*"I'm sorry! I'm here (and the words finally come to me)....for Magic Dee." I hurl the razor frisbee **Wzr! Wzr! Wzr! Wzr! Wzr!** into the flying branches, slicing through them, exploding them, beads of ectoplasm sweep up into the sky. **Boom—Boom—Boom!** There is chanting behind me.*

"Go get him, Gig, go get him." Children are rushing toward me in their hospital gowns, flying like nightmare Wendys come to scare Peter Pan. "Go get him, Gig, go get him."

Dee was under an oxygen tent, anti—coagulants and glucose being pumped into him. I could hear the beat of his heart on the cardio-monitor. He was in a large room filled with other children in various stages of trauma. The doctors in their white suits took on the aura of oracle-reading Druids.

"How is he?" was our constant question.

"He's in a coma" they said, followed by the words "critical condition."

I couldn't get the dancing kid out of my head, shouting, "I'm Magic Dee! I'm Magic Dee!"

Bog Pie is just ahead of me. I can see the red sun shining through him. I bear down on him, a strength from an unknown source welling up in me. For the first time I see Tracy falter. I'm catching up with him. I hear his panting grow rougher. I notice as I pass that his paws are bleeding, he has run the pads off his feet. My Gig appearance is dropping away. I feel a human body, with a bad knee, a cigarette chest, and a heart too old to

run this fast, but Bog Pie is only an arm's length away.

"Maaaaa," he cries, "Maaaaa."

I hear the cardio—monitor beeping, I feel it in my chest, "Beep—Beep, Beep—Beep," together, my heart and his. The last ComaCumer rips away from Bog Pie and flies high above me like a leaf in the wind. I dive and the world is tipped on its side. Airborne, I glance behind me, Bog Pie is a pair of branches tumbling in the darkness, shattering in Black Burned Wood. Behind him the broken children wave and blow away like rags in the wind.

A four-year old is falling in the darkness. "Maaaaa..." it cries, "Maaaaa..."

I lunge for it and feel it squirming in my hands, a ghostly slug with a bandage wrapped around one end.

"Is this it? Is this all there is?"

Appendages begin to sprout, arms and hands, fingers and legs and finally a head. Then eyes appear, brown and shining, a nose blossoms, pug and turned up, followed by a mouth with its small teeth and big smile. Suddenly it screams,

"Hi, I'm Magic Dee."

"I got you...I got you!"

*The Video screen flashes, **(triumphant music)**.*

"Congratulations! You've won! You may enter your initials in the Hall of Fame." I do, G. I. G.

I felt a hand touch my shoulder.

"John?"

"I got you!"

"John?"

"I got you!"

"John?"

A woman was standing there, her face taut with exhaustion but clear as if all her past had been burned away...

"He's come out of coma."

...but I couldn't recognize her.

"Jen—Ann?"

"He's going to be alright."

"Alright?"

"Alright."

The words wrapped themselves around me,
"Alright...Alright..."

We left the hospital for the first time in seventy—two hours. I felt woozy as if I was slightly levitating.

"Let's have breakfast," Jen-Ann said, "my treat."

She smiled at me, eyes shining. I put my arm around her and felt a flush of affection and at the same time I got a hard-on and I figured, hey, maybe that's what they mean by "love." We walked to Denny's.

We were on the roof, Doug, Russell, and me. It was Autumn. We were looking at the sun. It was setting.

"The sun isn't really setting," Doug said, "it's the earth that's turning."

The sun was just on the edge of the horizon, almost splitting the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge. Doug said, "Try this. Stick your arms out and imagine you're rolling backwards away from the sun into the night."

I stuck my arms out and tried to imagine what Doug said. But I could only see the sun moving, now almost touching the bridge.

"I got it! I got it!" Russ shouted.

"Me too," Doug drawled.

I was beginning to feel left out when suddenly my peripheral vision opened up. The sky behind me was going dark. I realized what I was, a tiny point on this massive thing moving into the darkness, a darkness created by the shadow of the earth itself. The sun wasn't moving, "we" were moving, we were being moved, we were riding on this rolling ball, and we weren't going slowly, it was just that the ball was very big, bigger than I ever imagined.

"Wow!" I uttered.

There we were, the three of us on the roof, our arms outstretched, tilting into the darkness, watching it together. I realized what Stonehenge was really about; everyone getting together, aiming their eyes at the sun, encircled by proportion—setting stone and feeling the great planet move and in turn sensing their own size and significance, doing it together, at the same time, the earth wearing us on its twirling back.