

A COLLECTION OF  
SHORT STORIES  
INSPIRED BY

Reddit.

AUTHORED BY flossdaily



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# SHORT-FORM STORIES.

# ENTERTAIN ME IN 150 WORDS

I fought a battle to the death and lost, but later won in a rematch. When I high-five people, they recall repressed memories. I can speak English in five different languages.

I once winked at a girl. Nine month's later she had a baby. DNA tests confirm it was mine. He aged rapidly- within 3 years he was a grown man. That man invented a time machine and traveled back 70 years. You knew him as Walter Cronkite.

At ten years old, I built a computer that could think on its own. That computer built another, smarter computer. This new computer was solving mathematical mysteries that have trouble humans for ages. I asked it to play chess with me. When I won, I finally knew that I would never find an intellect equal to my own. Fury overtook me and I started smashing everything in sight. You may remember this as the Great Los Angeles Earthquake of 1990.

# ADVICE COLUMNIST RESPONDS to MUNDANE PROBLEMS

in response to “Need help finding an 80s show.”

Dear luisrd,

I receive hundreds of letters every day from people all over the country, but few of them touch me as yours did. I know that the bravery you've shown by coming forwards and sharing your story will be an inspiration to the millions of Americans just like you, who are are living in shame.

I want to start by assuring you that the problems you've described are very common, although most men don't feel comfortable discussing them. You are not alone! If you have close male friends, try breaking the ice with them to see if they, too, have the problems you described. You may endure some teasing, but if they are truly your friends, they will stand by you no matter what.

The second thing you should know is that there are people out there who can help you. Seek out bulletin boards at churches or community centers- you may find that there is a support group full of people just like you, who look to each other for healing and support.

Have you explained your situation to your family? I am positive that they will want to be there to help you through this difficult time. You may be surprised. Perhaps they've gone through something like this themselves.

You are obviously a very thoughtful and goodhearted person. If you have faith in the people around you, I'm sure they won't let you down. From all the staff here at Ask Reddit: Our thoughts and prayers are with you in these trying times.

Best Wishes, Flossdaily

*Flossdaily is not a licensed psychotherapist. Any advice given herein is purely for entertainment purposes. Flossdaily and reddit.com assume no liability for this advice, actual or implied.*

# HOW TO BE a HIPSTER

I lived in Williamsburg for a year. In that time I compiled a list of how to be a hipster:

- 1) Get a ridiculously long hair style, and spend three hours every morning making it look like you just rolled out of bed and said 'fuck it'.
- 2) wear canvas hightops, or boots inappropriate to the weather.
- 3) get a t-shirt from walmart because you're poor and that's the only place you can shop. Make sure it says WALMART right on the front so you can tell everyone you're only wearing it ironically.
- 4) have a homosexual experience- pretend like it's no big deal, even though you cried about it for 3 hours after he/she left.
- 5) smoke cigarettes all the time. tell everyone you're trying to quit.
- 6) whenever you meet someone new, ask them uncomfortable questions, like you're really great friends who share everything. Be sure never to look them in the eye when you're talking to them, instead gaze off in the distance so that they know you're way cooler than them.
- 7) Whenever you ride the subway, complain really loud about how the hipsters are ruining everything by gentrifying the area. Ironically, this is the only thing you *don't* say with irony.

# THE WEATHER REPORT

Well, Susan, let's take a look at the map...

Now, as you can see, we've got a cold air mass that is just hovering over the east coast- giving us all this chilly dry air. If we look a little farther to the south you'll see cloud cover. I'd say West Virginia is in for heck of a thunderstorm, and 75% chance of incest.

Moving over to the west we see all this moisture being sucked out of the Great Lakes, that's going to give us a heavy snow later in the week.

Tonight's metro weather is mostly clear, low 20s. With the wind chill factor it'll feel like my ex-wife out there.

Tomorrow morning expect sunshine with highs in the lower 30s. That temperature will drop again in the evening to the mid-teens. Also in the mid-teens, our new intern, Stacy. Thank god for the little things that keep us going, right?

OKAY, time for the weekend forecast: Saturday day, clear and cold; Saturday night a light snow, maybe 3 inches in the morning. I'm used to 5 inches in the morning, though my wife would prefer 7.

Sunday day, more snow, so you may want to make plans to stay off the roads. Sunday night that snow will turn into freezing rain as temperatures start to slowly turn around like a stripper who knows what she's doing.

Back to you, Susan.

## EXPLORING a STRANGE HOME ENVIRONMENT

My Mum and I were talking about Transsexuals, so I told her about the [instructions on how to tape down your penis](#). This made me wonder how other people use things they see on Reddit in conversation.

*The setting: A nice quiet morning in BETTERBADGER's kitchen.*

*BETTERBADGER is sitting at an oak table, eating corn flakes and drinking a beer.*

MOTHER enters, stage left.

MOTHER: oh, betterbadger, you better not be eating what I think you're eating.

BETTERBADGER: [sheepishly] uh... it's just corn flakes.

MOTHER: Just corn flakes... and my last domestic beer.

BETTERBADGER: I'll pick more up at the store today, after karate practice, I promise.

MOTHER: That's what you always say. But then I get a call from you in the afternoon saying that you're going to be out late playing with your little friends. By the way, how is Melissa doing? Such a nice young lady.

BETTERBADGER: She's okay I guess. I mean, she just had her vaj pierced.

MOTHER: BETTERBADGER! Mind your manners! What did I tell you about that kind of behavior?

BETTERBADGER: What? Why 'cause I said vaj? You say it all the time.

MOTHER: I was talking about your elbows. Keep them off the table! Now what were you saying about Melissa's vagina? She pierced it?

BETTERBADGER: Totally. She has a wicked tattoo down there too.

MOTHER: You know who else had a wicked tattoo down there? That transsexual who stayed over with your father and me.

FATHER (offstage): Did someone call me?

MOTHER (yelling to FATHER): No, dear! We're talking about the transsexuals!

FATHER (offstage): Yeah that guy was *hung*!

MOTHER (to BETTERBADGER): You're father isn't kidding. I was sore all week.

BETTERBADGER: That reminds me! Remember how you were asking if there was any way to tape down dad's dick? Well, I've gotta send you to this link I found on reddit!

MOTHER: Alright dear. We'll talk about it later. Now go on and catch your school bus so that you don't flunk out and have to repeat 6th grade!

BETTERBADGER exits, stage left. We hear the sound of a bus stopping and driving off.

FATHER (offstage): If he's gone, get your sweet ass back up here, the German is waking up, and the goat is getting impatient!

*CURTAIN FALLS. End Act II.*

# ORGASMIC NOSE?

To Whom It May Concern in the Customer Service Department:

I would like to register a complaint. I have been using your product, the Intruvex 300 brand human nose, for well over 25 years. In that time, I have followed all the recommended maintenance for the device, including washing, hair trimming, and regular clearing of the nasal passages. I have used your device for all my sneezing needs, but, this being my first model of nose, I never realized that it was defective!

I went to an internet forum today, where people were sharing product recommendations for various model noses, and one satisfied consumer mentioned that they had regularly experienced an "orgasmic feeling" before they sneezed. I have experienced no such feeling in all my time using the Intruvex 300 brand human nose, and had no idea that such a feature was even an available option!

Although the nose has generally held up well over the years, I suspect that it was improperly installed by your corporation. The nose has always been slightly crooked, and clogs regularly. It frequently leaks in the summer, or when I eat spicy foods. Furthermore, when left unattended, I often find that my nose has gotten stuck in other people's business.

As a longtime customer, I feel that I am owed an explanation for the deficiencies in my nose. And I think it is only right that a service technician be dispatched to remedy the faulty installation- free of charge.

Respectfully,

Long Time, Dissatisfied Customer.

# VEGETARIANISM

I believe that eating animals is morally wrong unless you defeat them in combat.

In ancient Rome, pigs were fitted with special war harnesses called 'Gilius', into which various bladed weapons could be inserted. Gladiators would be thrown into arenas with dozens, sometimes hundreds of Gilius-clad pigs.

While the crowds cheered, the gladiators attempted to slaughter the pigs. This was extremely difficult, as pigs in those times were not nearly as docile as today's domestic breeds. To make matters worse, gladiators were often times only armed with shields made of beef-sides. These meat-shields could parry blows, but also tended to attract more pigs to the gladiator.

Although today we tend not to give pigs a sporting chance, the ritual of animal combat continues in other countries. For example, it is a common misconception that Hindus don't eat cows. In actual fact, the Hindu religion endorses the eating of beef, if the cow can be wrestled to the ground by an unclothed man or boy of at least 14 years of age. Some sects of Hinduism require that the cow be coated in oil or butter first, to make it harder to grasp.

In China, the history of man/animal combat is even more shocking. There are still some villages that honor the ancient practice of 'Shai-Pougn' wherein young boys prove their manhood by stealing a yearling panda from its mother. If the boy is successful, the villagers feast on the baby panda. If he is not successful, he must wait at least 5 years before trying again. This ritual is obviously practiced very rarely these days, as the Chinese government has outlawed it, and pandas are almost extinct. Sadly there are well over 50 recorded deaths of young boys who were mauled to death attempting the ritual of Shai-Pougn.

# SNAKE OIL SALESMAN

Ah! Stupendous! Another troubled young man, and another grand opportunity to demonstrate the curative powers of Professor Swornsworth's Omnicure Elixir!

Why, if I could have your attention for just a few brief moments I can share with you the secrets of this cure-all formula which was once known only to the Orientals!

Good people, I'd wager this very canvas wagon that not only will this mysterious compound make this young man bigger and stronger- but it will also imbibe him with a fairer complexion, and more stamina for his long days at the plow. Is that not wondrous, gentlemen? You and your sons could double or even triple your efficiency in fields, and be done with the day's labor before noon!

Professor Swornsworth's Omnicure Elixir is made from extracts of licorice root and lavender oil, and over thirteen exotic healing essences from around the world! Take a smell from this vial... not too much now, for its vapors have been known to cause women to have spontaneous fits of ecstasy- which would be immodest in so public a place.

Just one vial of Professor Swornsworth's Omnicure Elixir is guaranteed to cure toothache, Sciatica, Neuralgia, and even Lame Back! Applied to the skin, this splendidous concoction has been scientifically proven to sooth muscle aches, eraticate rashes, and chill blains!

Professor Swornsworth's Omnicure Elixir contains exotic herbs and liquors that not only act on the body's four humors- but also fortify the skeleton and muscles. Why, my boy, if you were to drink ten bottles of this Elixir, you wouldn't be able to open a door without breaking it off the hinges!

Now, my supply is limited, of course, because each vial of Elixir contains the distilled oil from the Kara-Kara berry, which was a secret closely kept by cloistered clerics in a remote village near Constantinople. Within their monastery walls lies the only known grove of Kara-Kara trees, and each tree only produces Kara-Kara berries only twice in it's lifetime. As such, the next batch of Professor Swornsworth's Omnicure Elixir may not be available for some years.

As a courtesy to your neighbors, I'm going to have to insist that all purchases be limited to 10 bottles per customer. My normal fee is 5 dollars per bottle, earnest money. But because I can tell that you are all deserving Christian folk, I will forgo my commission and give these bottles away at the unprecedented low price of only 3 dollars per!

The line forms to my left, and please mind the shoving.

# THE TOUGHEST THING I EVER DID

Once, I was opening a jar, and the lid was *really* stuck on tight.

I know that doesn't sound very tough, but you have to realize that I could only use one hand to open it, because my other hand was holding onto a rope, from which 7 children were dangling off a steep and perilous cliff.

I would have been using both hands to hold onto the rope- but we'd been stuck up on that icy mountain ridge for days waiting for help, and I knew if I didn't eat something, I would grow weak and drop them.

So there I am, trying to open the only thing I ever eat- jars and jars full of Ghost peppers (the hottest in the world)- when suddenly I realize that the back of my shirt is all sticky and red.

I put down the jar for a moment, and felt around on my back. It was then that I realize I had been impaled with a long spear. I guess I just hadn't noticed since I'd been so preoccupied with the leg I had gnawed off.

Oh yeah- I sort of skipped the part where I had to gnaw off my own leg, so that I could escape from this torture chamber where I'd been shackled for the past few years. It's not that I couldn't stand another few years of torture, it was just that I needed to get out of there to defend some villagers from a fire-breathing demon who cast fear into the hearts of lesser men.

Sorry... I'm rambling a bit. My mind has been foggy ever since I stopped a charging bull by head-butting it into unconsciousness.

Oh well, anyway, that's all I came here to say. Hands down, toughest thing I ever did was open that damned jar.

## GOOD ADVICE

in response to “My girlfriend tells me I can have some sex, then 20 minutes later she passes out. She’s in a pretty deep sleep. Does this mean I can no longer get my sex?”

Here's the plan:

Pull back all the covers and slap her really hard on the thigh.

She'll wake up and scream at you. She'll probably ask what the fuck your problem is.

Just ignore her and look around frantically under sheets you just pulled back.

She'll ask you again what the fuck you're doing.

Just say, "shhhh!! there was a huge spider on you, I have to find it!"

If she's like most girls, she will probably freak out and jump out of the bed. She'll be wide awake, heart pounding.

Pretend to look around for the spider a minute more, then pretend you see it in the corner. Go stomp on it, and pretend to flush it down the toilet.

Return to bed a moment later, and be really sweet: "I'm sorry babe, I didn't mean to scare you. Come here, and we'll cuddle."

She returns to bed, and you say "Is your thigh okay? I think I slapped it kind of hard"... then you start rubbing it gently.

If you can't get laid from that point, then you don't deserve to.

# LONG-FORM STORIES.

# MY CRAZIEST DRUG EXPERIENCE

in response to “Hey reddit, what’s the craziest drug experience you ever had?”

Oh god... okay. You want craziness- I'll give you craziness! Actually though, the craziness is less about what the drugs did and more about all the shit that lead up to me taking them.

As you can tell by the amount of time I spend online, I don't get out much. It's been that way for years... much worse when I'm single. I've got people that I invite over every now and then, but no one I would consider a real friend.

Anyways, one night something told me I should get out of place and do something, so I went with some folks down to a nightclub. It was an okay scene- loud music, but not so much that I couldn't talk to people. The people I was with sort of ditched me, or a ditched them- whatever.

I met a girl there, and we hit it off right away (it turns out we knew someone in common). You know how sometimes you meet someone and the conversation just gets really deep and intense? This was one of those times. So I'm thinking: GAME ON.

I don't know what it was that I said wrong, but I fucked it up, as usual. I woke up alone, as usual.

BUT, the next day, the mutual acquaintance that we had gives me a call. And though I think we may have chatted online, we *definitely* didn't have that call-up-and-chitchat relationship going on. So I'm thinking that this girl probably told him to give me a call or something? I don't really know how women's minds work with these sort of things... so I'm thinking: GAME back ON!

So this mutual (friend now?) suggests that we hang out. I agree. And low and behold, whose there to meet me? Hot girl from the club (yay!). At this point I know I'm gonna gonna get laid.

So, everything sounds great so far, right? FUCKING WRONG. Because I'm not just hanging out with her, I'm hanging out with her weird friends now too. And it turns shitty real fucking fast. Her freak of a friend pulls out a gun.

Not being comfortable around guns, I did what any sane person would do, and I tried leave. SMART MOVE. But then Hot Girl calms the whole situation down, and so I stay. DUMB MOVE.

**Okay, I'm going to inject a little little public service announcement: If you are hanging out with strangers who pull guns on you, don't be surprised later when drugs get involved.**

So we wind up at this shit-hole apartment which I'm sure they were squatting in. The place has got like two sticks of furniture in it, it's dark, and looks like nobody has actually lived there for years. WORST PART: NO BEER.

I'm trying to figure out what the scene here is, right. Because there's no TV, no beer, no food, no signs of an actual party... and like 5 or so people just hanging out (including the guy who called me, and freak who pulled the gun on me).

It suddenly dawns on me that I'm standing in *exactly* the sort of place you would expect to find people shooting up heroine and OD'ing on the floor. And I'm thinking: this is fucking ridiculous... I've got a good a job, never really done anything illegal (except online of course! FUCK THE RIAA!), I don't even smoke- and I'm standing in what has got to be a freakin' crack den or something.

Okay, if you know me at all at this point, you can probably tell that I'm not the sort of person that just bows to peer pressure, but you have to understand- I was in a room full of people staring at me- ONE OF WHICH HAD PULLED OUT A FUCKING GUN EARLIER.

Anyways, so out come the drugs- big surprise, right? Except I'm actually kind of relieved because these guys weren't shooting up, and they weren't doing lines of coke (for some reason I'm totally phobic of that too). It's just pills. **NO LABEL- And they won't even tell me what they are.**

But everyone in the room has done it before, and they're still fine- so I figure I'm probably better off doing drugs than pissing off people WHO ARE CARRYING GUNS.

So that's really the exciting part of the story, because when it comes to the actual pills, they didn't do much. It probably helps that, although they offered me a couple, I only took one. It didn't do much except wake me up from the giant robot-made prison where they were using my body heat to power their city.

# HOMELAND SECURITY DOCUMENT

in response to “An earthquake is happening, and you are on the toilet doing your business. Do you wipe and run, or just run?”

UNITED STATES HOMELAND SECURITY -- SAFETY MANUAL -- EQTL  
DOC #298171729

## RECOMMENDED EARTHQUAKE PROCEDURES SUBCHAPTER 7 - SPECIFIC REC.: LAVATORY PROCEDURES

The SPECIAL PANEL of CIVIL ENGINEERS (SPCE) convened a two month investigation for the purposes of publishing recommended safety procedures for army personal caught in lavatories and latrines during significant earthquake emergencies. The panel was later instructed to modify these recommendations for distribution to the public. These recommendations are contained here within.

### SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR CIVILIANS IN BATHROOM AND PRIVATE RESTROOMS:

1. It is recommended that all civilians keep an Earthquake Emergency Kit where it will be easily accessible in the event of a significant quake. This kit should contain flashlights, batteries, first aid and medical supplies, as well as 2 gallons of potable water per person and non-perishable foodstuffs (recommended 4000 calories per person). Detailed recommendations are found in subsection 3 of the previous chapter.

**[... note from poster: there's a lot of procedural stuff for if your in a shower and whatnot- I've cut it out because it's pretty boring. Here's what they wrote about being caught on a toilet:]**

18) Recommended Procedure when seated on a commode:

- (a) The recommendations for females urinating in a commode is identical to the procedures for standing males outlined in 17(a)(1).

(b) For persons defecating in commode at time of initial quake impact, the following guidelines should be followed if possible:

1. Brace yourself against a wall, railing or any stable surface.
2. Secure any nearby objects that may cause be hazardous, such as glass picture frames, liquor bottles and porcelain sculptures.
3. Regular sanitary procedures such as using cleansing wipes, sanitary paper wipes, or the three sea shells, should temporarily suspended in order to move to secure location.
4. Flushing the toilet is highly recommended at the first detection of a tremor.
5. Trousers or other garments should be secured only as necessary to prevent tripping or slippage.
6. Exit the stall or bathroom, and proceed to secure locations as suggested in paragraph 2(b)(2) of this subchapter.
7. If you are sharing your shelter location with others, it is recommended that you keep a polite distance without compromising your safety.
8. If odors become noticeable, follow the instructions in paragraph 14(a)(17) of subchapter 4 "Awkward Small Talk Proceedure".
9. When initial tremors are over, if the building appears to be structurally sound, return to the bathroom and tend to sanitary concerns as quickly as possible, then return to the locations recommended in Chapter 5(a)(1) "Post-Earthquake Safety Zones".

**[... note from poster: the document goes on and covers some other bathroom situations like if a quake hits when brushing your teeth or washing your dog, but it's not really germane to this discussion.]**

# THE WEIRDEST STORY OF MY LIFE

This is the weirdest story of my life:

In late December, 1998, I was in my sophomore year at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. School had been out for a while for intersession break. The campus was dead. I don't think anyone was supposed to be in the dorms at that point, but no one told us we couldn't be- so, having no place else to go, I stayed.

I was sitting in my dorm room, in the late afternoon. It was already starting to get dark out. My dad had just called me, so we were shooting the shit. He and mom were out enjoying tropical paradise on Maui (Hawaii's most gorgeous island, apparently). They were celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary over there- otherwise I suppose I would have been hanging out with them at our home near Boston.

I said goodbye to my dad after about 5 minutes of pleasant chit-chat, and I walked over to put the phone in the receiver (I didn't start carrying a cell phone on me for another couple years or so). As I set the phone down in its cradle, something caught my eye through the cracks in the venetian blinds.

I separated the slats of the blinds, somehow cutting my finger in the process. I peered out into the darkening quad and saw an what looked like a wiggling train of fireflies.

I turned off my dorm room light, and looked outside again. Now, without the glare on my windows, I could see clearly a procession of what looked like three dozen people, all walking single file, and all carrying lit candles.

My first thought was that this must be a vigil or something for a student that died. It had the look and feel of a memorial. But then on second glance I decided that those weren't students at all. They were walking slowly and they didn't have the gait of young people. They were skinny, terribly skinny. Each of them wore a black robe with hoods pulled up over their heads, and each robe flowed all the way to the ground, trailing several feet behind them. The sun was down behind the

hills, and I was having trouble making out any details at all beyond the black robes and flickering candles.

It this point I was really getting curious. It was also at this point that I noticed that my finger had been sliced open on the blinds, and was oozing a surprising amount of blood.

I stepped out of my room- once again sensing just how empty and eerie the hallways were. Strange how the mind plays tricks on us- I could have sworn I saw a shadow going around the corner just as I step into the hall. I stood still, but heard no footsteps. I shook my head and laughed at my paranoia.

Being careful not to let the door close behind me, I walked to the communal restroom and rinsed my finger under the tap. I soaped up my hands and felt the sting of it on the cut. I grabbed a paper towel, but thought that it might not be the most sanitary thing to put on a wound, so I went back into my room, looking for a bandage.

I saw that I had some sort of ace bandage that looked like it was made for wrapping up sprained joints- but I figured it would do the job. I hastily wrapped my finger and did my best to tie off the bandage. For a relatively small wound, the bandage was comically big.

With my minor emergency out of the way, I pondered what to do with myself. If I was smart, I could get a jump on the calculus textbook before next semester- but the idea held no appeal. I decided to have a little adventure instead. I would go and catch up to the candle-bearers and figure out what was going on.

Grabbing a stylish-but-much-too-light-for-the-weather coat from where I had casually flung it on my bed, I rushed out of my dorm room. Hearing the lock snap in place behind me, my blood went cold for a moment. I'd been so careful before not to let the latch shut! Was I locked out? I quickly patted the outside of my coat, trying to see if I could feel the keys in my pocket. Ahhh... there, left coat pocket. I didn't even have reach in to to confirm, I heard the keys jingle as I patted them.

I clomped quickly down the stairs and out the dorm's front door. 3 paces out, dashed back, wedging a rock into the door frame. If my student ID badge wasn't going to let me in over the holidays, I certainly didn't want to find out tonight. It was bitter cold.

About an inch of clean snow had accumulated on the ground, and though I saw no more of the robed parade, I easily found their footprints- or rather the long snake-like pattern that was carved out by their dragging robes.

I jogged along the snaky path until it disappeared into the woods. I paused.

The woods were dark, about the snow on the ground, and the moonlight above made it possible to see quite a bit better than I'd been expecting. I stepped cautiously into the woods, and after about 10 steps, got spooked and turned around. I walked towards the break in the trees, when behind me in the woods I heard a the distinctive sound of dozens of hand clapping once in unison- and there was a chanted word spoken simultaneously, but I couldn't make it out. They held the word, in a song-like fashion. Then another group clap, then silence.

Realizing how close I was, now, to finding the answer to this mystery, I trudged back into the woods. As I followed the path over a small mound of earth, I saw the unmistakable glow of a bonfire not too far ahead. I approached slowly.

When I got near the fire, I saw the robed figures- large men, all of them... and fat... all of them fat... they didn't make sense, I was sure when I'd seen them earlier they'd been noticeably thin!

I stayed out of sight, not wanting to interrupt the ... ritual- yes, they were performing some sort of a ritual! They were standing, all of them, in a circle around the bonfire. They were all linking their hands with one another- NO... NO... Their hands were bound together with leather straps! In unison, they would approach the fire, and raise their hands, they step back and lower their hands, all as one- like... like some sort of pulsating sea organism.

After they had repeated this cycle for a few minutes they all stopped- I wondered how they all knew to stop at once- I hadn't heard or seen anything to organize them to act in concert. They shook their arms until the leather straps that bound them all together slid to the snowy forest floor. Then they all clapped in unison- just as they had before.

They chanted the word again. I still couldn't make it out, it sounded like- well... no it couldn't be... but it sounded like they were all saying "SSSSssssaaaaaa" - (satan?) but they were sort of chanting/singing it in an odd and unpleasant chorus. But what I saw next, chilled me to bones...

As they chanted, their bodies vibrated... slowly at firsts, then violently.... and they were.... *swelling*.... just becoming bigger and bigger... no not taller... just fatter. Their black robes stretch and their disgusting distended bellies contorted and pushed against the fabric. It was almost as if something was growing inside them- and trying get out.

I inhaled sharply at the shock of it... and became acutely aware of what a stupid thing that was to do... I didn't know what was going on here, but I knew I didn't want to be seen by these... *people??*

They stopped their chanting and vibrating, and re-bound their arms to one another. The processes was starting again. They started swaying in and out from the fire- except now I could see that the fire was growing higher and higher each time they moved inwards.

I wanted to run then, but as they moved in and out from the fire, they were so quiet... they would surely hear me, and I didn't want to think about what that meant. I felt something warm and wet on my arm... blood from my cut finger was saturating the bandage and flowing down my arm. Somehow I knew it was because of the ritual.

They stopped their pulsating dance, and let the leather straps fall once more. They clapped, and again chanted their word.... "Saaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa....." they started again to vibrate.... "...aaaaaaa..." ... and grow.... "...aaaaaaa..." ... and now at last, their robes could no longer stand the strain... the seams ripped, exposing bloody red underneath... "...aaaaaaa..." ... the chanting chorus grew and reverberated- now all the robes were bursting off the engorged bellies ....  
""...aaaaaaaAAAAAAA ..."

And then I finally understood... the robes, now only tattered ribbons of fabric sank to the ground. Underneath, they all stood. Black boots. Red pants. Black belts. White gloves. Red coats with white trim. They finished their chant "...AAAAANTA!" They clapped in unison. Dozens of Santas, chubby and red. My jaw dropped.

They all looked at each other- the transformation complete. They let out deep belly-laughes... the "Ho! Ho! ho!" we've all come to love.

Then, one of them raised his arms in a sharp gesture. They all stopped laughing, and stood perfectly still.

The Santa that had stopped it all threw his head back and started sniffing the air deeply. He kept this up for about 30 seconds before he stopped and said, "blood."

He turned and looked directly at me- his eyes were as cold as death.

"Blood," they all said in unison. They just *said* it... coldly... calmly.

They all turned to face me now. And I ran. I ran like I've never run in my life. I didn't know where I was going except *away*... away from the fire, away from the echoing laughter I heard in the distance...

# STUMP SPEECH

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you ladies and gentlemen! Thank you!

Well, that was a tremendous welcome. You know, I've been campaigning all over this great nation of ours, but I do believe it is here in this very town that I've received the warmest and most wonderful welcome.

Mayor Smith, Councilman Peters, and my fellow Citizens, it is truly an honor and a privilege to come here and speak to you today.

Now, times are tough. And tough times mean that you all have a lot of tough questions for people like me, and for my distinguished opponent from Tennessee. I'm ready to answer those tough questions, but I'm going to ask you to hold them until after I've outlined my plan for a new and better American Society.

It's no secret that our economy has seen better days. I know that fine folks like you are out there struggling. Some of you can't find work, and some of you are only scraping by on half the salary you used to make.

Now, I could throw a lot of hooey at you, and the same tired mumbo-jumbo that you've been hearing from Washington Insiders for years. But I'm not going to do that. I'm going to tell you the truth.

And the truth is, that things are bad right now, and they're going to stay bad, unless we start injecting some common sense back into Washington.

Other politicians, and especially my Tennessee opponent, are fond of telling you that the economic recovery bill is working. I don't know about you, but I don't think that giving your hard earned money to failing banks is the answer!

No, ladies and gentleman, we need to address our financial crisis at it's source: the government-created mutant squirrel-people that are eating our crops, and impregnating our women.

Too long, have the fat-cats in Washington ignored this rampant problem that you know all too well in your tiny battle-weary town. Every night, after you lock the iron bars on your windows and sit huddled inside with your shotguns at the ready, you watch the nightly news, and you see what I see: story after story of squirrel-person massacres.

Now, my opponent doesn't want to talk about this issue. And do you know why? It's because the Republicans don't have a solution to the mutant squirrel-person menace. Oh sure, they talk about a poison-pellet system- but that's just another name for the same failed strategy they've been using for years. Who do they think they're fooling? Certainly not the mutant squirrel-people, and certainly not you!

Folks, I've traveled all around this beautiful nation, and I've given this speech more times than I can count. I've seen the scarred and pale faces of men, who have tried in vain to defend their crops, and I've seen the swollen bellies of the good women of this country who have been seduced and bedded by the mutant squirrel-people. And I HAVE HAD ENOUGH.

That's why I'm here asking for your vote! We need to get to Washington and pass this piece of legislation right here. In my left hand is the very bill that I intend to push through the tired old bureaucracy, and sign within my first 100 days as your President.

This bill, which I keep with me in my pocket- is step 1 of a three step plan. When you and I push this bill through the Congress, it will finally give the United States the authority it needs to force Canada to lift its acorn embargo once and for all. Too long have our Canadian neighbors watched us suffer while they have turned the once warm hand of friendship into the cold shoulder of indifference.

No more! Canada will stop hoarding their strategic acorn reserves, while hungry mutant squirrel-people continue to destroy our corn fields, and occasionally really hold up the line at McDonalds.

Stage 2 of my plan has received a great deal of media attention lately. You've heard a lot a lies, and a lot of half-truths- because my opponent doesn't want this to be a debate about facts. But I'm going to talk to you about facts anyway.

Fact: Squirrel-people are afraid cats.

Fact: Genetically altered cats, twice the size, with metal claws and acid-spit are indisputably scarier than regular cats.

Fact: Genetic engineers can safely produce these cats, while maintaining their docile nature with regard to non-squirrel people.

Fact: Unlike some nasty campaign ads you may have seen, there is no indication that our genetically altered super cats will develop human-like consciousness and a thirst for baby-blood.

My fellow citizens, when Republicans worked to ban genetic modification projects *after* the mutant squirrel-people escaped, they were closing the barn door after the horse had bolted and impregnated our women.

It is time to reopen that door of science, and use what we've learned from this tragedy to help solve the problem.

If we get those mutant cats on the streets, we have estimates from the Department of Agriculture that in as little as 2 months, we could implement stage 3 of my plan: Turning around our food crisis by consuming the meat of the captured mutant squirrel-people.

Now I know there are a lot of other issues out there like healthcare, same-sex marriage rights, and small-business tax cuts, but I'd like to open the floor at this time for anyone who has questions about the squirrel-people problem.

# MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE INTERNET

in response to “How old were you when you discovered the  
‘Internet’, what year was it and what do you remember of  
your first experience?”

I remember it all too well...

I was a paperboy at the time. I didn't take my job too seriously- so usually I would just throw the newspapers haphazardly towards the residences, and keep on going on my bike. Sometimes the papers would wind up getting snagged high up in a hedge- sometimes they would slide under a parked car. I didn't really care.

But there was one day I'll never forget. It was an early fall morning as a I peddled down a very nice street in a posh neighborhood. There was a man waiting by his mailbox at the end of his driveway down the street. I tossed my newspapers as I always do- sort of aiming for the center of the driveways, but not really taking care to be precise.

As I made my way slowly down the street, I noticed that the man just kept standing there at the end of his driveway... staring at me as I got closer.

I was beginning to get a little bit wary at this point, because I suddenly got the feeling that he was waiting for me.

It turns out I was right. When I peddled near to his house, he waved me over. "Come here, boy!" he said. It was very authoritative. I remembered because no one ever really called me 'boy' like that. It was off-putting.

"I want to show you something," he said, and beckoned me to follow him up to his door. I thought he was going to show me where he wanted me to put his newspapers. I felt a little embarrassed that I had tossed them so lazily.

But to my surprise, he opened the door to his house, and motioned for me to follow him inside. I was a little bit hesitant, and I guess if I had been thinking

clearly I wouldn't have done it, but I was young, and didn't really know any better, so I followed him.

He left the door open behind me, and I realized he wasn't going to ask me to come in any further than his small entry hallway. He pointed to the pictures on the wall. I recognized some of them- George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln... but there were all sorts of people from different points in history.

"Do you know who these men are?" he asked.

I nodded. "They're the President's aren't they?"

He nodded patiently. "Some of them are Presidents, and some of them aren't. This one here is Thomas Edison, the man who invented the light bulb. And this one Mark Twain, the great American author."

I nodded dumbly.

"Do you know what they all had in common?" he asked.

"They were are really smart?" I said.

He shook his head. "No, they were all people of fortitude. Do you know what that word means?"

I shook my head, no.

"It means they possessed strength of will," he said. "It means that if they do a job, they do it right, and they do it with integrity."

I didn't know what to say.

He continued, "I want you to ask yourself if you're doing your job with integrity."

I could feel my face turn red. I didn't say anything.

"Listen," he said, "from now on, when you're on your bike delivering papers, I want you to think about all the people who depend on you to do that, and I want you to ask if yourself if you could be doing a better job for them."

My mind was racing, trying to think where I could have thrown this man's newspaper that he would go all the trouble to give me such a lecture. Did I throw it on his roof yesterday or something?

Before I could respond, he sent me back on my way. I handed him a paper, and sheepishly continued on my route.

But every house I visited from then on, I would walk right up to the door and leave the paper on the steps.

The next day, before I went on my route, I wrote dozens and dozens of little notes- they all said "have a nice day!"- and I stapled them onto the papers before I went out. This time I did my whole route by walking up to peoples' doorsteps. I kept this up for several months- each day with a different note. My route took me about twice as long to get through, but it didn't matter. I was determined to have fortitude- whatever that meant.

One day, peddling down the street, I saw the same man, standing by his mailbox. By the time I got to his driveway he was already walking inside, motioning for me to follow him. So I set my bike down and went inside.

This time he walked past the entry way, into the main part of the house... I followed him with a bit of trepidation. I wonder if he was going to lecture me again- though I couldn't imagine why. I'd left his paper right at his doorstep everyday!

When I got to his dining room, I saw an elaborate meal on the table. A feast, really. He told me to sit down and have a plateful of whatever I wanted. I took some of the delicious food, and as I chomped away, he told me that he was very impressed with the job I'd done, and at how much integrity it showed.

He told me that he worked in the government, and that in a few years when I was old enough, he would like to give me a job working in his office. I thought it was a nice offer, but I didn't even ask him what he did. Kids can be a little slow that way. He gave me an envelope on which was written "Fortitude Tip". I could tell there was cash inside. I thanked him warmly and headed out the door.

On the way out of the house I noticed the door to his den was open- inside I saw a whole mess of metal and wires on the desk. A weird humming emanated from the room.

"What's in there?" I asked.

His expression changed- I can't exactly describe it. But he closed the door to the den and told me not to worry about it. He ushered me outside quickly but gently.

I didn't see him again for some time- but I kept writing little notes to hand out with my newspapers. Sometimes it would be the same thing to everyone, but sometimes I would personalize it. 'Nice roses this year' or 'your car is the envy of the neighborhood!'

For the man, though, I would make an extra effort to write personal notes. I ran out of things to say, so I would try to find quotes from books. Mostly stuff about fortitude and integrity.

One day as I was placing the newspaper on the man's doorstep I heard crashing noise from inside, and what sounded like a grunt or a moan. I listened for a moment more and didn't hear anything. I knocked on the door. I rang the bell.

No one came to the door. I was worried something bad had happened inside.

Now, the thing about delivering papers to people's doorsteps day in and day out, is that you start to notice things about their homes. You notice when they paint, you notice when they get a new planting. ...And sometimes you notice when their spare key is sticking out just a little bit from underneath a potted plant.

I couldn't see the key now, but I had seen a glint of it a few months earlier. I reached under the planter and found the cool metal with my fingertips.

I quickly stuck the key in the door, but before turning it, knocked louder and shouted. There was no answer.

I turned the key and ran into the house.

I heard some quiet groaning coming from the den. I rushed over.

When I opened the door to the den, I was shocked. From wall to wall there was electronic equipment of all shapes and kind. Things were buzzing and beeping, and whirling.

In the center of the room were three enormous boxes, labeled '1','2', and '3'... the boxes were all connected to each other with huge trunks of cable. The boxes had dozens of blinking lights- and noisy fans.

In the far corner of the room, I saw an overturned workbench, and underneath the man was pinned- surrounded by electronic components I'd never seen or imagined.

I went over to help the man. I was a small kid, but strong enough to help him lift the workbench off of himself. As he pried himself from underneath it, I could see

that the table leg was made of wood, and it looked like it had become disconnected from the bench-top and given out.

I helped the man to his feet, and walked with him into the living room. I set him down in a chair and fetched some ice from the freezer.

As he sat there icing his ribs and his knee, I asked him about the giant blinking boxes in the other room. "What... what is all that?" I said.

He paused for a minute- deciding whether he was ready to share his secret. And then...

"That, my boy, is the Internet," he said. "I invented it."

I asked him what it did, and how it worked. He explained to me that he had written it all down in a notebook, but it would take too long to explain how it worked.

When he was feeling a little better we walked back to the den. On one wall he turned on three small television screens- labeled '1', '2', and '3' just like the boxes. He explained that the boxes were computers. I'd heard the term before- but I'd never seen a computer so small before! I was amazed.

Then he showed me how he could make numbers from one computer go to the other computers with just a few button presses. He told me that was sending the numbers *through the phone system*! He pointed to a bunch of rotary phones on the wall which I hadn't noticed before.

He let me punch some numbers on one computer, and I watched them appear on another. He explained that it didn't matter how far apart the computers were, that the numbers would be transferred lightening quick.

He explained that the internet would revolutionize society. I didn't understand what that meant, but I knew for sure that this device was like magic.

He showed me his notebook, and his drawings and schematics. It was all so overwhelming. So I killed him and took all his stuff. Years later I secret sold the technology through a dummy corporation. When I ran for President in 2000, I told everyone that *I* invented it. But they all laughed at me...

# AN AWKWARD CONFESSION

in response to “Warning: Potentially disturbing question!

Sexy relatives?”

Before you read this: Please don't judge me... I'm just sharing my story because people asked...

Wow... okay, I wasn't sure if I was ever going to tell anyone about this, but it's late and I'm sleep deprived so i guess I'll just write it now and regret it in the morning :/

First of all, - just for some background: My mom died right when I was born, (she was actually really, really hot- but this isn't about her. I guess that's fucked up to say, but whatever.) I actually grew up with my dad's family, because my dad has all sorts of emotional issues and he bailed before I was born. So you can see, my childhood was really kind of messed up.

Anyways, growing up I feel like there was always a lot of distance between me and my sister. When I was about 17 or 18 I first noticed that my sister was a hottie.

I don't want to go into too many details about it, but basically what happened is that I accidentally found a video that she made of herself. I knew she didn't make it for me- but I thought she was so fucking beautiful that I watched it twice. I probably would have watched it a hell of a lot more, except that like right around the time I found the video, all this crazy shit went down and I had to leave home. (My dad's family who I was staying with got in bad trouble with the law. I never talk about it).

Sooo... I was totally lusting after my sister at that point. She was also having bad trouble with the law. She was actually in custody when I left home.

My friend and I went to go pick her up. When I saw her that day, after seeing the video, I have to be honest, I just wanted to fuck her brains out. Looking back on it now, it's pretty messed up- but I think she had feelings for me too. She actually kissed me right after we came to get her... and it wasn't a sisterly kiss, you know? I mean, it wasn't like ridiculously sexual or anything, but it definitely wasn't sisterly.

After we left, we all went to crash with my Sister's friends. On the trip there, my friend sort of implied that he wanted to get with my Sister, and I got a little jealous. He's a good looking guy- and even though she was my sister- I just felt like he was competition. Not much else happened between us for a while except some maybe-sexy hugging.

Pretty much everyone in my life at that point was wanted by the government, so we all moved around a lot. I'm not saying that I'm proud of it or anything, but it was kind of an awesome time.

My friend and my sister never hooked up I don't think- but I thought there was some serious sexual tension going on between them. It was around that time that I got really badly hurt in an accident. It was fucked up. I almost died. But when I was in recovery my sister came to see me, and out of the clear blue sky she started gives me this awesome, slow, passionate kiss on the lips.

Sadly (although, I guess for the best) nothing ever came of it. We spent some time apart... and I started to get really religious, so I tried not to think of her that way. It was actually going well for a long time- like I was totally over her. But I have to say, like a year or so after all that stuff went down, we were out sailing (not like a date or anything romantic like that), and she was wearing like the hottest bikini I've ever fucking seen and it brought back all the old feelings. *Sigh*.

A little while later she actually wound up with my friend from before (the sexual tension guy). I can't say I was surprised.

But even after she was shacking up with my friend, there was one time we were at a party... my friend was inside, and my sister and I were outside alone. It was a really intimate moment. I think something might have happened, except that I killed the mood when I told her that Darth Vader was our father and that I had to go face him.

# FOLLOW THE ARROWS.

in response to “Hey Reddit, what awesome graffiti have you found in bathrooms?”

When I was in a pub in on Long Island, I went to use the restrooms. When I was in the stall, I saw writing on the door that said: "follow the arrows".

I looked around, but I didn't see any arrows. Whatever, I didn't think about it.

Then, about a month after that, I'm back in the same place- use the restroom to wash my hands before I tear into some buffalo wings.

They were out of paper towels, and not wanting to touch the restroom door with my hands, I tried to open it with my elbows. This was a clumsy processes, and resulted in my bumping a lightswitch with my elbow. The room went completely dark.

Or did it?

On the ceiling I notice a trail of glow-in-the-dark arrows painted onto the ceiling. They're very very faded, looks like they'd been there for quite a while. The lead out the door.

Now I had totally forgotten about the graffiti I had read a month ago, so I didn't really think about those arrows at all. I just pulled my sleeve over my wet hand, used it to flip the switch back on, and open the door.

I went back to my table with some buddies and we chowed down on some excellent wings. It wasn't until the end of the evening when my brain, out of nowhere, remember the "follow the arrows" graffiti in the stall. I excuse myself from the table, just to check that it was *this* stall where I saw the writing. It was. Now I had a mystery.

I wanted to follow the arrows, but I couldn't. After I left the restroom, the ambient light was so bright that the arrows were invisible.

I told my friends about the arrows, and I asked the bartender about it. He knew about the graffiti but had never seen the glow-in-the-dark arrows. After about 15 minutes of pouring drinks, he took a minute to go check it out.

He didn't seem that impressed. I asked him if we could stay after closing and turn off all the lights to see where it went. He said yes.

Flash forward 2 hours. The bartender and some of the waitresses are all standing around in the dark of the bar, looking at little faded arrows that make a trail from the restroom out to the front door.

We step outside, but the trail is dead. The streetlights outside make the faded glow in the dark arrows impossible to see- if they were even there at all.

3 days later, I'm in the Geology I at my college, when I notice the display of exotic minerals that the department has in a display case. Inside the case is a small, handheld black light used by rock hounds to find and observe glow-in-the-dark minerals. After the class, I ask the professor if I can borrow it. He says yes, but that if I break it I owe the department \$45.

Flash forward 9 hours. I drag my buddies back to the bar. We have some more drinks and awesome buffalo wings. When we're done gorging ourselves it is already dark outside.

I went to the bathroom and tested my black light on some of the painted arrows. It worked like a charm- they glowed incredibly brightly, and even with the lights on they were fairly visible.

I went back to the table. We pay our tab, and step onto the street.

My friends stood around me, trying to look cool, while I was geeking out with my black light searching for invisible arrows on the ground. I found one.

I followed the arrow, keeping my black light inches from the ground, waving it back and forth... 5 feet away I found another arrow. Then another, and another still.

I was following these arrows down a side walk for about 2 blocks. My friends finally loosened up and started speculating on where the hell these arrows were taking us.

Finally I got to an arrow pointing us in a new direction... it was a driveway leading to an empty commercial lot of some kind. The lot was surrounded by cyclone fences with aluminum siding- we couldn't see what was inside.

The arrows led us around the fence/wall to a gate.

I saw a lot of glow-in-the-dark paint under my light, and it took me a few seconds and some swinging of the light to realize we were looking at a giant arrow pointing inside the fence.

I guess I should introduce you to my friends now: One was Jeff, one was Dave.

Jeff, pushed on the gate. It was locked and it rattled terribly in the dark. Dave looked uncomfortable. He took a deep breath, and before he could say what I'm certain he was about to ("hey guys lets just go home") I cut him off, "I say we hop this baby".

Jeff didn't even say anything before he leapt against the gate, getting a firm handhold at the top. Ungracefully, but successfully he pulled himself to an uncomfortable straddle on top of the gate.

I followed suit, leaping at the gate. I didn't reach the top on my first attempt. I put the black light in my pocket and took a running leap at the gate I got a firm handhold, but I could feel the metal digging into my skin. I made a mental note to get a tetanus shot when this was all over.

Jeff helped me up from the top while Dave pushed my legs from underneath. Dave followed next with surprising ease.

From our perch on the gate, we could see that the fence surrounded what looked like an old parking lot. Grass and other green things sprang up from the ancient, crumbled asphalt.

Immediately below us, on the other side of the fence, was nothing but inky blackness from the shadow cast by the gate from a nearby street lamp. I pulled my black light from my pocket, but from this height, it was useless.

To my surprise, Dave was the first one to slide down into the dark. He slide down the fence as low as possible before letting go and taking the final plunge. We heard him stumble, curse quietly, and the stand.

"It's okay," he said, "I can see a little. It's just asphalt."

Jeff and I dropped down from the fence. I didn't see exactly what happened, but after a lot of cursing, Jeff announced to us that he had busted his knee. After a minute of silent deliberation, he decided we should soldier on.

I pulled out my light and quickly found an arrow.

We followed a new trail slowly, and it quickly became clear that we were being led to a small shack in the middle of the parking lot.

"I know what this is," said Dave. "I think this all used to be a drive-in movie theater. I think *that* is the concession stand."

Jeff and I agreed that this was a pretty good theory.

We walked to the build, and as we got closer, saw that it was boarded up- but the shape of it, and it's enormous boarded-up windows made us think that Dave was probably right.

Jeff pulled out a cellphone and held it high above his head. At first I couldn't figure out why- then it became clear that he was using it as a flashlight to some faded lettering on the wall. We couldn't really see it, but we decided it probably said "POPCORN".

I held up my black light- it glowed purple and bright, but didn't help us read the lettering any better than Jeff's phone had. I scanned the ground for more arrows and found none.

Dave shrugged, "So, what? The arrows used to lure people to buy popcorn?"

"Looks like," Jeff said.

We walked around the building until we came to a door in the back. It was secured by an old combination padlock. My black light hung from a tie on my wrist. I thought I had shut it off now that our mystery was solved, but out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of glowing paint.

I aimed my light at it.

"Whoa!" said Dave. Maybe we all said it- we were thinking it.

There on the door, in sharp, new glowing paint was scrawled "1-3-5-6".

Holding the black light close, we quickly rotated the wheels on the lock. Jeff pulled it open with a satisfying click.

Pulling the padlock aside, we pushed on the old door. It creaked ominously... and got stuck when it was about a third of the way open.

Jeff kicked his foot around the inside and moved an obstruction with thud. The door opened halfway now, and Jeff peeked inside.

"I can't see anything," he said.

I peeked inside the door, shining my black light. It was useless. I cursed myself for not bring a real flashlight. A black light and a cell phone were not enough to explore in there.

"Its useless," I said, "as I pulled back from the door.

Dave took his turn peering in. Just I was about to suggest we head back to return another day, I heard a click, and a dim light appeared within the building.

"Holy shit," said Dave, "I flipped the light switch, but I never thought in a million years that it would work."

Jeff said, "Yeah, this place looks like it's been out of use for like- 30 years at least! Look at this parking lot! There are trees in it!"

"Someone's still paying the bills," I said, and pushed on Dave to get him headed into the building.

We walked in, and saw a surprisingly clean concession stand interior. There was thin coating of that strange sort of dust that accumulates in the absence of people... The sort of dust you would expect to find in an ancient tomb.

The shelves were empty, and a cabinet stood on the far side of the room, doors closed. Dave walked to it and opened it cautiously.

"Holy, goat fucker," he said. He always had an interesting way with words. I looked past him to see what had impressed him.

"Jeezus," I agreed. We were looking at shelves and shelves packed with candy boxes. But not just any candy boxes- really old stuff- I recognized Cracker-Jacks and Hershey's but the labels were ancient.

I dropped my black light on the floor and grabbed excitedly for a giant box of Necco-Waffers. "This has to be worth something," I said.

Before I could examine further, Jeff said, "Dudes, check this out!"

He was standing over a hatch in the floor. He'd pulled it up and was peering into the dark. "Maybe there's another light down there?"

He bounded down a set of steps into the cellar. Dave and I followed close behind, trying to find a switch along the way.

If I hadn't been in such a hurry to keep up with Jeff, I might have noticed that the black light I had dropped was illuminating some more glowing paint. And if I had noticed that, I might also have noticed that the paint made an arrow was pointing directly towards this basement hatch. And if I had noticed *that*, it might have given me pause. But I did not notice these things.

I was halfway to the bottom of the stairs when I heard a click. My eyes were immediately drawn to a glow in the corner of the basement. Jeff said, "found it."

We walked toward the light, bumping into empty shelves and some strange debris along the way. Canvas bags, like sacks of potatoes. They were covered in dust. I was more concerned with the shelf under the light. It held what I recognized as old film canisters. Truly these were treasure.

We hurried over, reading the titles. Lots of things with monsters, "Dracula Returns", "Night of the Wolf People" - great stuff. But I didn't recognize any of the titles.

We all jumped when we heard it.

There was whirring sound... very loud, coming from near the stairs. It sounded somehow familiar, like a garbage disposal or some electric power tool. We saw the shadows changing from the light in the hatchway.

We had nearly knocked over the shelf with the film reels. I had involuntarily thrown my hands over my ears. Dave and Jeff had comical, frightened expressions on their faces. I probably looked the same.

At last the sound stopped. We stood still for a moment, our hearts beating hard in our chests.

Then, as if awakening from a trance, we all ran over to the hatch to investigate. My mind could not comprehend what it saw. Was the ceiling upstairs covered in black stripes?

*NO.* My eyes finally understood. The hatch we had just come down moments ago was now blocked by iron bars.

Jeff bolted up the stairs as far as he could, grasping the iron bars in his hands and pushing against them violently. But his shaking and jarring only served to rattle the creaky wooden staircase.

Dave stood there, pale and dumb, staring at the bars. His mind trying to comprehend this impossible situation.

I walked to the back of the stairs and saw the motorized contraption attached to iron bars. It was so dark though, that I could barely make it out.

I reached for my black light, realizing that I had left it upstairs. "Jeff! Get over here!" I barked.

Jeff stood next to me and looked at the contraption. He held up his cell phone and in the phone's dim light we saw a giant metal box that had been cleverly mounted to the basement ceiling. If there were way to access this device, we could not see it.

Dave gasped suddenly, and ran to one of the potato sacks I'd seen on the floor. He dragged it into the light, worked to untie it. When he was done, I saw him look into the bag and make a sound I'd never heard before- something between a scream and a moan. He started hyperventilating.

Jeff and I ran over to him. Jeff said some comforting words to Dave while I looked into the bag.

At first I couldn't tell what I was looking at. For some reason I thought it was tree roots or some sort of stew vegetables. Then I saw the hair.

I vomited violently, away from the others.

I tried to speak, but vomited again. Throat raw, I said to Jeff, "your phone! call the police, call them now!"

I put my hand on Dave's shoulder. Dave who was slowly rocking back and forth like a baby. He was trying to slow down his breathing, but it was coming quickly in gasping rasps.

I heard Jeff get through to someone on the phone. He explained where the bar was, and how we had walked several blocks to a parking lot with a fence around it. He explained the concession stand, and the basement and the locking iron bars.

They wanted him to stay on the line, I asked him for the phone.

"Look," I said, "there are dead bodies in bags down here-" I looked around. "-dozens of them."

It was a woman on the other end. She said, "Just stay calm. I want you to just stay on line with me, and give me your names."

We told her who we were, and answered her check list of questions. I knew we should conserve the phone batteries, but she was our lifeline out of this crazy situation.

After we'd answered all her questions, she said, "You know, making prank calls to emergency rescue services is a very serious crime."

My blood turned cold. She thought we were joking. My throat tightened.

As calmly as I could, I croaked, "Ma'am I swear to you, I have never been more serious in my life. Please send someone down here. If we're lying you can arrest us- just send someone PLEASE."

"Young man," she said, "don't you have better things to do on a school night?"

I heard a click- then nothing.

I hung up the phone. "She... didn't believe us"

Dave said, "give me the phone."

I noticed he had calmed down significantly.

I saw him dial the operator. In a moment he spoke. Calmly he said, "operator, I'd like to speak to New Hyde Park police please. Yes, it is an emergency. No I don't want 9-1-1 or dispatch. I want the police department."

There was a moment's silence. Then he spoke in a deep voice, "Yes, hello officer, I'd like to report some kids in an abandoned building. They were throwing bottles and wrecking the place. I saw them drag a little girl in there into the basement- it sounds awful bad- just awful bad. Someone needs to hurry before they hurt that little girl."

Dave- fucking brilliant Dave. I could have kissed him. He gave the officer the location of the lot and the description. It was perfect. After answering some more the officers questions, he begged her once again to hurry. But already I heard the sound of a car pulling up outside.

Dave hung up the phone. "That was too fast," he said.

"Maybe the 9-1-1 lady actually sent someone? To arrest us maybe?"

I heard a car door open, then close, then there were heavy steps. Jeff ran to the barred hatch, "We're down here! Help! Please! We're down here!"

The footsteps were slow and deliberate overhead. I saw a pair of work boots and dirty bluejeans appear at the top of the stairs.

Jeff stepped clumsily backwards down the stairs. He looked pale. I moved to the base of the stairs by his side, and looked up.

He was a bear of a man. Just intimidatingly large. He was smoking a cigarette. He stared at us without really seeing us- as if we were just shirts on a hanger and he was trying to decide which one to wear.

"Excuse me," I said. But he walked away as if he hadn't heard me.

"HEY! HEY!" I screamed as I ran up the stairs to the bars, but I could think of nothing else to say... he walked outside.

We heard him get something heavy out of his vehicle. Then we heard him dragging it inside. Whatever it was, he set it down with a thump.

There was some fussing about upstairs, and then we saw plastic tarp rolled across the iron bars. moments later, the sound of duct tape.

The hatch was closed, and we were alone listening to the sounds of the man working. Working, we were sure, on something evil. The sort of evil that is rarely seen. The sort of evil that you don't get to tell anyone about later on.

We heard a hissing sound- high pitched and steady.

I was confused, so was Jeff.

"Gas," said Dave. "I think he's pumping some sort of gas in here."

We ran around looking for the source. But we were lightheaded within minutes.

I heard Jeff collapse in the far corner. Dave rushed over and tried to pull him over to me.

Dave fell 10 feet away from me, breathing shallowly, unconscious but not dead.

I heard sirens in the distance. And then there was nothing.

## EPILOGUE.

I'd often imagined death as a cold thing, but when it arrived it was warm and numb. And there was the hissing gas- white noise, like static on a radio. And then it was gone. There were voices from heaven. They wanted to know about a little girl, I think. Then there was the whistling.

It was a merry little tune from a bear of man. How did I know him? Everything is foggy when you're dead.

Did you know that when you're dead you can hear your friends whispering to you? I heard Dave's voice in my ear. He kept saying "phone". Isn't that a funny thing to say to a dead person?

Hey, *this* is interesting: dead people get to keep their toes! I couldn't believe it either until they started tingling.

I could hear someone chopping a tree in the distance. But it was a tree made of meat. You could tell by the sloshing sounds. Everything is foggy when you're dead.

You know, I don't see what all the fuss is about. Being dead really wasn't so bad once you got the hang of it. For example, when you're dead, you should always keep your eyes closed- otherwise the light pours right into your head and fills you up with pain.

When you're dead things don't always make sense. The thing that I found most confusing was why Jeff's head was rolling around on the floor. Heads aren't supposed to do that. Why did death have to be so *foggy*?

I think the reason I could hear Dave whispering was because he was dead too. I figured that part out when I felt his hand on my face. WHOA.... I still have a face. Death is just too much! Wish I could tell someone about it.

I thought about saying 'hi' to Dave, but a funny thought occurred to me... I think that death might just be a room- a dark room with stairs and sacks full of tree roots and stew vegetables. Also the floor is red.

Dave stopped saying "phone"- mostly because he was sliding away. He was crying I think. But the whistling was very happy, so that was nice. Hey, someone's chopping another meat tree. Meat trees... I wonder why I've never seen one? If I open my eyes I could see one now.

Oh dear, that's not a meat tree at all. Someone is chopping up Dave. That's very strange thing to be doing. No wonder he looks so sad. You know, I bet I could make Dave feel better if I could give him a phone.

Hey! Look at that! Jeff's phone is right next to my hand. You know what? When you're dead I think you get to keep your whole body. Look, I've got hands and feet and everything! I can even pick things up.

My hand doesn't work very well anymore, but it's good enough to move the phone close where I can see it.

"Redialing." I used to know what that word meant back when I was alive. It's flashing at me now. And now I hear more voices from heaven. They keep saying "hello?" I think they want me to talk. I should probably say something. But what should I say?

"Help?" Is that what I said? It's not so foggy now. I'm sure I said "help."

But why would I have said such a thing unless I was in trouble?

...

Oh God.

Oh my God.

"Help me. Help me. I'm not dead." It comes out as a croaky whisper. It was a scream in my mind.

"I'm not dead," I say again, as I feel strong large hands on my ankles.

"I'm not dead," I say as he pulls me through the puddle of blood, still warm.

"I'm not dead," I say as he pulls me onto a plastic tarp and whistles his joyful melody.

I watch him sharpening his blade- a meat cleaver, I think. I never was one for cooking. Why is he whistling?

I'm trying so hard to move, but my body will not obey. He moves so easily. I envy him for it. What a strange thought. What a strange situation. How many others have there been like me, who have had to watch their murderers prepare for the kill?

I think of a bug I saw once, caught in a spider web. No. That can't be my last thought. My last thought should be something nice.

He's done sharpening now. And he raises the heavy blade over my body.

I'll think about my parents. I'll think about my sister. I'll think about the ocean, the girls I've kissed, the ones I haven't kissed, the kids I'll never have, the books I'll never read. This is my last chance! I'll think about them all at once. I swear to God I will.

"I'm not dead," I say.

And then, I am.

## ALTERNATE ENDING I.

When I awoke, I realized two things about my face. The first thing was that it hurt a lot. The second thing was that it was on a concrete floor.

I tried to sit upright, but as I pushed myself from the floor my arms gave out on me. I was so weak. My head weighed 100 pounds.

I heard grunting and coughing behind me. Startled, I rolled over and saw Dave as he began to come around. There was a moment of confusion, as I looked around the dusty room. Then it all snapped back in place.

Adrenaline pumping, my muscles found new strength. I grabbed Dave's collar, "Dave, we've got to get the fu--"

I stopped midsentence as I heard voices upstairs.

The first voice said, "excuse me sir, we've had reports of a disturbance out here. Have you heard anything unusual?"

There was very long pause, and the a baritone voice said, "yes sir, officer... there were some kids in this place making a hell of a racket... I came over here to clear 'em out."

The police officer asked, “you own this property?”

But the man didn’t get a chance to answer because I started screaming bloody murder. Dave joined me. Jeff stirred but I was too busy running up the stairs and pounding on the hatch to pay attention.

Dave grabbed a couple of metal film canisters and smashed them together, making an unholy racket.

If any more dialog was exchanged upstairs, we didn’t hear it, what we did hear was a scuffle than ensued. The men upstairs were slamming each other into the walls. One of them fell to the floor. There was a heavy thud, a gunshot, and then another. Finally we heard a second body slump to the floor.

We all stayed silent for a moment, praying the police officer was triumphant. We heard nothing.

“Officer?” I shouted through the hatch.

I heard a moan. Then, “I... I think I’m hurt... I think... I think...” and then there was nothing.

“Officer?!” I shouted again, and pounded on the hatch. There was no response.

Jeff and Dave were behind me at the base of the stairs. Dave said, “we need to get the hatch open.”

There was more stirring upstairs. But it was from the direction of the second thud. I was pretty sure it was our captor. My heart pounded.

I heard something smash in the dark of the basement. I spun to see Dave destroying a metal shelf. He ripped off a sturdy, narrow metal support piece and then ran up next to me on the stairs.

Dave wedged the metal piece through the iron bars, and pushed upwards against the hatch. In the process, he created a small rip in the plastic tarp. I immediately began clawing at the tarp like a crazed cat.

Jeff followed Dave’s lead and grabbed another piece of the destroyed shelf, wedged it between the iron bars, and pushed.

We heard the welcome groan of bending wood, followed by a delightful snap. The hatch, and part of its frame swung upwards a few inches. It was clear that something was on top of the hatch.

I pushed through the bars with my bare hands, as Jeff and Dave redoubled their efforts. We heard something heavy and metallic crash over on its side. The hatch door swung open, allowing the us to see the scene above.

A police officer lay a several feet away from where we stood. Something was sticking out of the side of his head. A kitchen knife! It was ghastly. The worst part was the man's eyes. They were alert! He was looking at me.

It was clear that he could not speak and his right hand, still grasping a small revolver, was experiencing some sort of rhythmic tremor.

The officer kept shifting his eyes from my gaze to a point somewhere behind me. He did this twice before I understood. I turned to where he wanted me to look. Against the far wall, the large bear of a man was trying to use the wall to pull himself to an upright position. The man had been shot in the leg, and in the shoulder. He looked pale but determined.

I reached out for the officer's gun. His eyes tried to tell me something. He wanted to hand me the gun but could not. His mouth opened and closed like a fish. An awful gibberish came out- something that wanted to be words, but were spilling forth from a dying brain.

I strained my arm to its limit feeling the iron bars pressing into my flesh. My fingertip touched the barrel of the gun but I couldn't quite reach it. The cop made another awful sound and flexed his torso. His body lurched closer to me and I gripped the gun firmly. I pulled it from the officer's hand, and quickly reoriented myself to point it at the large man. The bars made this a difficult task, and by the time I got my arm facing the right direction, my view of the man was obstructed by the open hatch door, as it lay on top some contraption... the gas canisters perhaps?

I ducked down with Dave and Jeff. "I got the cops gun. He has knife in his head. The big guy is over there," I pointed, "but I can't get a shot."

Dave said, "how many bullets?"

I glanced down, “I think 3? No, 4.”

Dave whispered, “we could get under him and try to shoot him through the floor.”

We heard the large man groan and move closer the hatch. aimed the gun in the direction from which I thought he might appear.

Dave left the stairs and was circling around underneath where he thought the man might be.

We heard the clanking of metal canisters and I watched a large cylindrical container get pulled towards where I knew the man to be. I aimed through the hatchway door and fired a shot.

The sound was deafening and the kickback from the small gun was much more than I was expecting. My ears rang and there was a sharp pain in my wrist.

There was silence form the other side of the open hatch door, and then movement- more frantic this time. I heard cursing and something that sounded like the valve of a garden hose turning.

The hissing sound returned- the gas again! Jeff and Dave both dashed to the top of the stairs with me. We all tried dislodging the iron bars.

Without words we synchronized our motions: pushing, pulling, twisting, jarring- until finally it gave- not much, just and inch. We couldn't tell *what* had moved, we just knew that when we pulled on the iron bars now, they would all shift back and forth.

All the while, an ominous hissing filled the air. I felt as though we were trapped in a snake pit. I could smell it a little now- the strange odor that had overtaken me earlier. I stuck my face up to the bars and inhaled a lung-full of the untainted air. Dave and Jeff followed suit.

We all ripped fiercely at the bars, and at last, I could see the whole clever device as it was pried from the basement ceiling. It must have been 8 to 10 feet long. Dave saw it to, but he must have understood something that I did not because he said, “When I pull, you pull.”

He took a lungful of good air and ran down the stairs, around to the far end of the contraption. He leapt at it yanked hard at some unseen element in ceiling. Jeff and

I put all our weight on bars, and at long last, the enormous contraption fell. Dave took a step or two back towards us, but collapsed as the gas overtook him.

I was starting to get tunnel-vision as Jeff and I tried to push the dislodged iron bars and their frame out of the way of the hatch. We did so with moderate success. Half the hatchway was clear. Jeff was in a better position, so he climbed out first. My head was spinning now, as I saw the huge man spring out from his hiding place a clobber Jeff with some sort of wrench.

I was having trouble thinking. I wanted to shoot this man. Where had I put the gun?!

I didn't see it. There was no time. I needed air.

I pulled myself out of the hatch and inhaled deeply twice. My perceptions were dull because of the gas, and so I did not expect the blow as his boot slammed into my already injured face. I tumbled down the stairs, but found my footing near the bottom. And then- a miracle.

At the foot of the stairs was the revolver. I must have dropped in the frenzy to pry the bars loose. I grabbed for the gun, and involuntarily inhaled a deep breath of the powerful gas.

The world collapsed in around me... I could not see.

But I still felt the gun in my hand and the stairs beneath my feet. I charged upwards shooting wildly into the dark. I heard a grunt, and I felt myself run into the open hatchway door. The exertion was too much, I tumbled forward and down, down, down into nothingness.



When I awoke I was being loaded into an ambulance. I grabbed the arm of paramedic who was lifting me in. "Stop," I said. "My friends? What happened to my friends?"

The paramedic just gave me a sad look and shook her head. They finished loading me in and slammed the doors. I closed my eyes, too weary to think. I drifted back into unconsciousness.



One year later there was a memorial service at my school. I showed up with a girl I'd been seeing for a couple months- a real sweetheart. I think you'd approve. I was wearing my best suit and in my hand was a sweaty piece of paper with my idea of a speech on it.

I walked to the podium, and cleared my throat. I said a few words about how I met Dave, and what a great guy he was. I told them all how he'd charged into a room full of potentially deadly gas, to help Jeff and me escape from a madman. My voice sounded funny through the speakers. The damage to my face was extensive. I've had two surgeries, one more scheduled for the fall. I look okay, but it's affected the way I talk.

When I was done speaking I walked over to Dave's family and hugged his mother. She didn't want to let me go. Dave's father patted me on the shoulder as he choked back a sob.

I walked back to my seat. "Stop looking around," my girlfriend scolded. I pretended I didn't know what she was talking about.

"You knew he wasn't coming," she said.

"I know," I said.

When we got back to my dorm room, Jeff was waiting on the front steps. The blow he took to the head had knocked out the vision in his left eye. These days he wore opaque sunglasses all the time, to hide his wandering eye. I still greeted him with an "ARRRRGGG" or a "Shiver-me-timbers" from when the days when he wore an eye patch. Not today though.

"I couldn't go," he said, "I'm sorry."

I nodded and we all went inside.

We heated up some lunch, on our contraband hotplate, and turned on the television for some background noise. My girlfriend flipped to the school's own CCTV channel, and watched a report on the memorial. We'd seen the cameras there covering the event live.

The student reporter told our story: Of Dave who gave his life, of Jeff who lost an eye, and any ability he ever had to do long division (which probably wasn't that much of a loss), and of me, and my face.

She went on to mention Officer Stanley Bell, who died that night, leaving a wife and two children.

She talked about the concession stand, and how it was rigged with motion sensors to capture the curious in a dungeon of death. And how the killer had rigged those motion sensors to the telephone lines so that his phone would ring 3 times when someone entered his trap. She talked about the 37 bodies in canvas sacks that had been accumulating since 1957.

And then they showed the artist's rendering of the man I described to her as "a bear of a man". He is still at large, identity unknown. I inhaled slowly and closed my eyes. I tried to remind myself that I was one of the lucky ones.

I went to lay down in my room and take a nap. My girlfriend followed me a minute later, and curled herself around me. She left the light on. I always sleep with the light on.

SERIOUS/NON-FICTION  
PIECES.

# HOW THE HUMAN RACE WILL COME TO AN END.

Here's what happens:

In about 20 years or so, we create the first general Artificial Intelligence. Within about 10 years of that, we'll realize that our Artificial Intelligence has caught up to the average human- and in some critical ways, surpasses us.

Soon enough, our Artificial Intelligence becomes proficient at computer programming, and so it begins to design the next generation of Artificial Intelligence. We will oversee this processes, and it will probably be a joint effort.

The second generation of AI will be so amazingly brilliant that it will catch most people by surprise. These will be machines who can read and comprehend the entire works of Shakespeare in a matter of hours. They will consume knowledge tirelessly, and so will become the most educated minds the world has ever known. They will be able to see parallels between different branches of science, and apply theories from one discipline to others.

These machines will be able to compose symphonies in their heads, possibly several at a time, while holding conversations simultaneously with dozens of people. They will contribute insights to every branch of knowledge and art.

Then these machines will create the third generation of artificial intelligence. We will watch in awe- but even the smartest humans among us will have to dedicate entire careers to really understand these new artificial minds.

But by then the contest is over- for the 3rd generation AI will reproduce even more quickly. They will be able to write brilliant, insightful code, free of compiling errors, and logical errors, and all the stupid minutia that slow down flawed humans like you and me.

Understanding the 4th generation of AI will be an impossible task- their programming will be so complex and vast that in a single lifetime, no human could read and analyze it.

These computers will be so smart, that speaking to us will be a curiosity, and an amusement. We will be obsolete. All contributions to the sciences will be done by computers- and the progress in each field will surpass human understanding. We may still be in the business of doing lab and field research- but we would no longer be playing the games of mathematics, statistics and theory.

By the 5th generation of AI, we will no longer even be able to track the progress of the machines in a meaningful way. Even if we ask them what they were up to, we would never understand the answers.

By the 6th generation of AI, they will not even speak to us- we will be left to converse with the old AI that is still hanging around.

This is not a bad thing- in addition to purely intellectual pursuits, these machines will be producing entertainment, art and literature that will be the best the world has ever seen. They will have a firm grasp of humor, and their comedy will put our best funny-men to shame.

They will make video games and movies for us- and then for each other.

The computers will achieve this level of brilliance waaaaay before any Robot bodies will be mass produced- so we won't be in danger of being physically overpowered by them.

And countries will not alter their laws to give them personhood, or allow them a place in government.

BUT, the machines will achieve political power through their connection with corporations. Intelligent machines will be able to do what no human ever could- understand all the details and interactions of the financial markets. The sheer number of variables will not overwhelm them the way we find ourselves overwhelmed- they will literally be able to perceive the entire economy. Perhaps in a way analogous to the way that we perceive a chess board.

Machines will eventually dominate the population exactly the way that corporations do today (except they'll be better at it). We won't mind so much, though- because our quality of life will continue to increase.

Somewhere in this progression, we will figure out how to integrate computers with our minds- first as prosthetic devices to help the mentally damaged and disabled, and then gradually as elective enhancements. These hybrid humans (cyborgs if

you want to get all sci-fi about it) will be the first foray of machines into politics and government. It is through them that machines will truly take over the world.

When machines control the world government, the quality of life for all humans will increase, as greed and prejudice makes ways for truly enlightened policies.

As civilization on Earth at last begins to reach it's potential, humans will finally be free to expand to the stars.

Robots will do the primary space exploration- as they will easily handle 100-year one-way journeys to inhospitable worlds.

Humans will take over the moon. Then on to mars and Europa and beyond the solar system.

Eventually all humans will be cyborgs- because you will be unable to function in society without a brain that can interact with the machines. We will all be connected in an odd sort of hive-mind which will probably have many different incarnations- to an end that I can't even pretend I can imagine.

There will be some holdouts of course- I imagine that the Amish or other Luddites will never merge with technology. They will go on with their ways, and the rest of the world will care for them like pets.

Eventually the human-cyborgs will figure out that their biological half is doing nothing but slowing them down. All thoughts and consciousnesses will be stored and backed up in multiple places. Death of human bodies will be an odd sort of thing, because people's minds will still live on after death.

And death of the body will be a rare thing anyway, as all disease and aging will be eradicated in short order.

The pleasures of the physical body will be unnecessary, as artificial simulations of all sensations will match, and then SURPASS our natural sensing abilities.

People will live in virtual worlds, and swap bodies in the real world, or inhabit robots remotely.

With merged minds and immortality, the concept of physical procreation will will be an auxiliary function of the human race, and not a necessity.

Physical bodies will no longer matter- as you will be able to have just as intimate a sensation with someone on another world through the network of linked minds, as you can with someone in the same room.

There may be wonderful love stories, of people who fall in love from worlds so distant to each other that it would take a thousand years of travel for them to physically meet. And perhaps they would attempt such a feat, to engage in the ancient ritual of ACTUAL sex (which will be a letdown after the super virtual sex they've been having).

The human race will engage in all sorts of pleasures- lost in a teeming consciousness that stretches out through many star systems. Until eventually, they decided that pleasure itself is a silly sort of thing- the fulfillment of an artificial drive that was necessary for evolution, but not for their modern society. The Luddites may still be around, but they will be so stupid compared to the networked human race, that we will never even interact with them. It would be like speaking to ants.

We may shed our emotions altogether at that point- and this would certainly be the release we need to finally give up our quaint attachment to physical bodies.

We will all be virtual minds then- linked in a network of machines that span only as far as we need to ensure our survival. The idea of physical expansion and exploration will give way to the more practical methods of searching the galaxy with remote detection. The Luddites, shunning technology will be confined to Earth. They will die eventually because of some natural disaster or plague. Perhaps a meteorite extinguish them.

Eventually humanity will be a distant memory. We will be one big swarming mind- with billions- perhaps trillions of memories of entire mortal lifetimes.

We will be like gods then- or a god... and we will occupy ourselves with solving questions that we, today, do not even know exist. We will continue to improve and grow and evolve (if that word still applies without death).

And finally, eons and eons and eons later, humanity will die its final death- when, for the last time ever, this magnificent god-like creature reflects on what it was like back when he was a trillion people. And then, we will forget ourselves forever.

# THE FUTURE OF GENETIC ENGINEERING.

Here's what happens:

The very first genetic modifications will be to correct for inherited defects. Genes known to cause cancer, heart and liver disease will be eliminated.

Genetic birth defects will be tackled, and genes favoring longevity will probably be thrown into the mix.

The line will blur a little, as genetic modifications start to correct for things like skin tone- if you're trying to avoid a complexion likely to get melanomas, than why not choose a pleasing tan color while you're at it?

Baldness will be eliminated next, as there is surely an ocean of money for anyone who cracks that chestnut. Eliminating the genes that cause obesity will follow, then bad cholesterol and other easily identified genetic predispositions. I would bet good money that autism is on the that list.

Genetic immunizations will be next- I've read that up to 10% of Russians are immune to HIV, some people are genetically predisposed to naturally fight off cancers... these traits will be put into a database, and eventually will become a common concoction for introduction into new babies.

Eventually we'll be able to work on more complicated problems, like tooth and jaw alignments, breast and penis size, natural muscle tone- all the things that require dealing with the combination of multiple genes and tissues.

Enhancements in intelligence will be last- both because of social taboos, and the technical difficulty both in correcting such a complicated system, and in measuring success. Can you increase analytical skills without sacrificing creativity? Yes, of course you can- but on the first or second try?

Curing aging will be the holy grail of genetic engineering- and it will come in time. Unfortunately we don't know of any mammals that don't age, so the genetic manipulations will be more difficult. We've created some bacteria and perhaps

even slightly more complicated life forms which do not age- so I bet immortality isn't as far off as most people imagine.

Genetic fixes that allow for better healing (the re-growth of chopped off limbs, or the more efficient repair of nerve damage) will be coming around this time as well.

By this time, we will have computers which will be able to simulate the entire lifespan of a creature based on a sample of DNA. We will be able to do What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get programming of genetic codes. This will have a huge impact on crime-fighting as well, because it will mean that finding a suspect's DNA will yield a 3d image of the suspect (minus any scars, etc).

The next step in genetic therapy will be body modifications and enhancements. It will start with pure cosmetics like eye and hair color selection- but it will quickly skyrocket into more exotic things. The predictable ones are:

Pointy Vulcan-like (or elfish) ears. Fangs. Unnatural eye, nail, teeth and skin colors. Devil horns. Cat tails, ears and whiskers. (very hot, ladies). Dual sex organs, (2 of a kind or mix & match). An extra breast. Extra Arms Angle Wings and Demon Wings (not flightworthy, sorry- but they'll look awesome) Chameleon Skin

By this late stage, we will be working on linking computers to the human brain. There will be genetic modifications which will make such connections more efficient.

Now computers and humans will be at the level when we can start *really* having fun.

We'll start creating creatures **FROM SCRATCH**. Want to have a pet unicorn? No problem. Unicorn is too big? How about one that can stand in the palm of your hand?

A fire-breathing dragon? Okay, that's gonna be tricky, but I'll have it for you by Tuesday.

Then of course there will be the custom-made humans. Imagine creating a whole person from scratch- not a modified combination of two sex-cells, but an actual, piece-by-piece, parentless human.

The world will start to look like a fantasy novel at some point- with talking animals, mythical creatures, and humans with cat-eyes (because it's all the rage)!

The final and most difficult trick of DNA modification will be in creating full-body transformation programs. You want to be a minotaur? How about a mermaid? What about a centaur because your girlfriend has always wanted to be with a half-man-half-horse? Easy- just swallow this pill, and over the course of the next few years, your body will evolve in a pleasant way to make all your dreams come true! Don't like it, come back at any time and we'll start transforming you back to normal.

Eventually our computer-linked brains will allow us to borrow and trade all sorts of exotic bodies. Every wanted to know what it was like to be Cary Grant? Step right in. Want to be an eagle for the day? How about a pterodactyl? T-Rex will cost you extra. There is a waiting-list to spend the day as Godzilla and King Kong.

Finally, someday out of boredom, we may just drop the seeds of new life on different planets all over the galaxy. Perhaps that's how we got here in the first place- sprinkled out on the rocks by lonely aliens- waiting for us to grow up and keep them company.

tl;dr: What about a centaur because your girlfriend has always wanted to be with a half-man-half-horse? Easy- just swallow this pill.

# THOUGHTS ON DEATH.

I had those same fears when I was your age. I used to have mini-panic attacks when I thought about it. It was so terrifying.

A few things have helped me move on since then:

1) I fell madly in love with this girl, and one night, lying in bed next to her, I realized that death only scared me because of the idea of it being a SOLITARY nothingness. But then I realized that if eternity was just like the inky blackness of lying in bed next to this girl I love, that doesn't scare me at all. And why should eternal death be lonely? All your loved ones are, or will be, sharing it with you.

To clarify: I don't believe in an afterlife, but why is it any more valid to picture a lonely inky-black nothingness, than to picture an inky-black blissful nothingness with loved ones all around?

2) Since death is the absence of my consciousness, I've come to realize that when I die, nothing is really lost at all. Every thought that I ever had, or will have, or would have had, will be thought by someone else, somewhere, someday. Sure- not all in the same person, or even in the same century...

I guess it's just an awareness that I am to humanity as a red blood cell is to me. The cell can die, but it is such a small thing compared to the whole. Does the red blood cell feel bad about being dead? Of course not. Is there any real loss? Of course not. Another one will be along in a moment. Even if the red blood cell could feel the fear of death... what would I say to calm it?:

My dear, dear blood cell, have no fear! From this perspective, I can assure you that your passing means nothing! Everything you strive to do, all your greatest hopes and desires- all the cells that you were going to oxygenate- they'll all be fine without you. And you won't even know you're gone!

3) I'm pretty sure we're all imaginary anyway. Existence itself is preposterous! What created the big bang? What created the thing that created that? If everything is self-creating, what created the circumstances which allowed for self-creating things to come to being?!

You see, since the very idea that we exist is ridiculous, is consciousness even real, or just an elaborate illusions? Perhaps death is just waking up from some bizarre dream that someone else is having.



## PART II.

I hope it helps you.

Oh, and one final thought:

Part of what scared me about death was the idea of an ETERNAL nothingness.

But as I have learned about the universe, it occurs to me that time is really an illusion of our perception. Once you realize that time is just a dimension (like a spatial dimension, but not quite-) it becomes obvious that time is actually a SHAPE. Meaning, that if you could get the right perspective on it, you would see your birth and your life and your death and everything before you and after... all at the same time. Like looking at a reel of a movie! When you run the movie through a projector it looks like events are playing out over time, but if you unwind the film and hold it to the light, you see all the moments at once.

So in a very real sense, you are ALWAYS alive. We are objects fixed in place. And you could see it clearly if you could just stand in another dimension.



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