

THE INNER SWINE



VOLUME 8, ISSUE 1 MARCH 2002

\$2 (a frickin bargain)

IN THIS ISSUE:

Servile begging
for cash

Class warfare
for the lazy
and shiftless

The usual
other stuff



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"I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest
man alive."

VITA 2K2

Henry Miller

THE INNER SWINE

CONCEPT BY

Jeff Somers



Robert Gala



Ken West



Jeof Vita



COVER ART BY Jeof Vita

EDITOR: Jeffrey Somers

PUBLISHER: Cassie Carey

WEBMASTERS: Jeof Vita, Ken West, my own bad self
ADVICE & FREE DRINKS: Actively seeking wedding invites for the open bar opportunities

PROOFREEDER: Karen Accavallo

STAFF DISSIDENT: Rob Gala

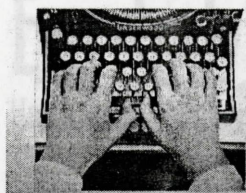
OVERALL OFFICIAL COOL CHICK: Lauren Boland

LEGAL COUNSEL: Danette Knopp



OFFICIAL SHOES: Converse Chuck Taylors, which are largely misunderstood.

FRIENDS OF THE SWINE: Danette Knopp, whom I love very much, and who never fails to support and encourage me in all my endeavors, although she does not understand Converse Chucks; Jeof Vita, who still designs all of our covers despite having better-paying choices to lavish his talent on, and who understands Converse Chucks in theory, although not in practice; Rob Gala, who doesn't get the recognition he deserves and who never hesitates to tell me so, but who stays in touch anyway, and whose comprehension of Converse Chucks remains uninvestigated; Misty S. Quinn, esq., who has been a true friend for too long to remember, almost, and who seems sympathetic with Converse Chucks, although this may be just to my face; Ken West, who still finds time to find songs for me that I am too incompetent to find for myself, and who understands Converse Chucks, but chooses to abstain from them; Lauren Strutzel, the TIS Overall Cool Chick, who I don't talk to enough anymore, and who would love Converse Chucks if only they were forced upon her; Vickie Thaw and Arthur Nascarella, for their help and continued support, though I don't know their feelings about Converse Chucks; David Gypsy Breier, for forcing my zine upon her boyfriend, who probably digs Converse Chucks if he digs this zine; Karen Accavallo, who has generated more subscribers than anyone else, despite her habit of constantly abusing me, but who also fails to comprehend Converse Chucks.



WHAT THE FUCK'S BEEN GOIN' ON?

HAPPY FUCKING NEW YEAR: I spent New Years Eve in Vermont with Legal Counsel Danette Knopp. It was frickin' cold up there, people, but we enjoyed ourselves. Plus, I felt

pretty sure that if Osama-built nukes went off in major population centers, we'd be safe in the middle of nowhere. Save my ass, baby.

RIDING MY OWN MELT: Well, the physical decay has begun in earnest. At this pace I will be dead in mere weeks, so you should start storing these babies in plastic in a dry place in anticipation of the inevitable spike in value when my death shocks a weary world. Having been congested continually for 2+ years, I finally got off my ass and went to an ENT, fully expecting to be informed that a Lincoln Log™ I shoved up my nose at the age of 5 had come back to haunt me. Imagine my surprise when, after a ten-minute examination, I was informed that I most probably have allergies, and was then handed a script for, of all things, *Allegra*. Allegra being one of those creepy new pharmaceuticals whose commercials on television make me twitch with horror and revulsion. On the one hand, I was intrigued that the mystery of Jeff's Constantly Runny Nose might have been solved; on the other I am freaked out that I'm being tempted into popping pills for the rest of my life. The plan I settled on was to take the damn Allegra and see if it helps; if it does, I know I'm allergic to something and I will simply suck back the snot and survive, much as ancient man did in the 1970s. If it doesn't do anything for me, I'll go back to the ENT and burn his office down.

In other news, we finally got *The Freaks are Winning* printed and it's now available: 256 pages of old TIS material! YAHOO! Go to the ad on page 5 and send me ten bucks, would it kill you?

So now we have two books that no one in their right mind would buy. We had no choice but to launch a World Tour to promote and sell these books. Sadly, we can't afford a World Tour, and my crippling stage fright wouldn't allow it anyway, so we settled for *The Inner Swine's BIG-ASSED FAMOUS BOOK TOUR '02* instead. The BAF tour will hit New York, Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington D.C. bookstores, where I will read from one or both of my books, sign anything you ask me to, and generally make an ass out of myself. Who could resist? Check out the information and appearance schedule on the web site (<http://www.innerswine.com/freaks>). If you own a bookstore and want me to come to your town and make an ass of myself, drop me a line, bubba.

This means that the blessedly travel-free period of the past few months is going to end soon. Why people enjoy travel so much escapes Your Humble Editor, who views travel in any form as torture, usually torture experienced with lots of moronic strangers who seek to alleviate *their* torture by increasing *yours*. Happily, I think I'll be able to do this whole tour-thingy in the car, which is infinitely better. At least you can stop the fucking car, and *get out*.

That's it, not much happenin' here at the ranch. Enjoy the issue, and: courage.

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powerful, like a gorilla, but soft and yielding like a nerf ball
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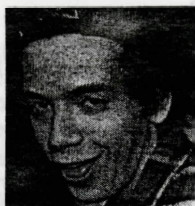


The Inner Swine Volume 8, Issue 1 (ISSN: 1527-7704). Magazine published March, June, September, and December by Oinking Sow, Inc. © 2002 by Jeff Somers. (There is no company, really) Individual subscription rates: \$5.00 (cheap!) per year in U.S.; \$6.00 (cheap!) per year foreign including Canada. Single Copy \$2.00 (cheap!) but stop teasing me, you're never going to order a subscription, *you heartless bastards*. Free trades are absolutely entertained, send me something, and I will mail you treats. Checks payable to Jeff Somers, Editor. Address submissions and correspondence to Jeff Somers, The Inner Swine, POB 3024, Hoboken, NJ 07030, mreditor@innerswine.com. But let's face it, when was the last time we published anything not written by me or one of my cronies? Other people's pimply writing gives me hives. Still, all submissions or requests for guidelines (there are no guidelines, though) must be accompanied by S.A.S.E. The first 50 persons who send me cash in the mail will get a congratulatory phone call from Misty Quinn (Left), during which she will taunt the winner mercilessly until he or she hangs up in tears, as she does to Your Humble Editor whenever he calls begging for free drinks, referring to him as "Little Man".

Everybody's talkin' at me...

Here's what they're saying about ME*:

The new issue of *Xerography Debt** (PO Box 963, Havre de Grace, MD 21078; www.lookinginc.com/xeroxdebt/) has a few mentions of us in it: *"Many is the time I've heard of a zine called THE INNER SWINE, and now I can say I've read it, too. And not just any issue, but the special theme on depression. It was actually not depressing at all to read; one might go so far as to say, it was rather a hoot. Without question, Jeff and his cronies (who say they accept submissions, but do most of the writing anyway) write with a twinkle in the eye. How can you really, truly be depressed when you're titling stuff, 'You Wouldn't Know Crazy if Charles Manson was Eating Fruit Loops on Your Front Porch,' that's what I want to know. Plus, The Inner Swine Suicide Enabling System—which is a hilarious read, but you wouldn't have thought of it unless you had an inner swine in the first place. (Fred Argoff)" and "Ya know, it is sort of irritating how Jeff manages to fill 60 pages every other month, do it well, and make it appear so effortless. Christ, if he didn't drink so much he'd probably escalate to 150 pages a month...then again if he didn't drink so much, there probably wouldn't be the same fuel to his fire. Anyhow, each issue is packed full of his commentary on life, really good fiction (which makes it easy to see why he has also recently published a book), and more to round out the bulging issues. Very worth your time. (Davida Gypsy Breier)"*



Send me a letter with my name in it and I guarantee publication.

Always nice to get reviewed, and *Xerography Debt* is a real nice review zine, I must say. Send Davida \$2 and read our reviews...and the reviews of others, I guess.

Tom Mrozewski emailed me: *"Dear Sir, As a philosophy student, I'm amused by your quoting Mr. Russel all the time, but I wonder, do you realize exactly how out-of-context these quotations are? I'm not trying to be a prick, I'm just curious as to the extent of your grasp of epistemology. Cheerio."*

I realize nothing. Epistemology I understand to be a consideration of the value of human knowledge. Beyond that, I'm as deep as a mirror. I invited Mr. Mrozewski to write something for us to smarten up this rag, but so far, nothin'.

Eric Lyden of *Fish with Legs* (\$1/trade to: Eric Lyden, 224 Moraine St., Brockton, MA 02301-3664) sent me this mournful little note: *"Got the new IS yesterday. I noticed I didn't make the letter column because I forgot to give you any significant feedback, huh? Whoops... my bad there. I won't let it happen again."* Aw, well, we felt sorry for the little bastard, so here's his letter. BTW, FWL is actually one of about five zines I can read without feeling the urge to shout obscenities at myself in the mirror. Whether that's good or bad I leave to you.

*A recent C&D letter - doesn't everyone in Zineland love lawyers!!- from the fine, humorless folks at Xerox Inc. threatened Davida over the old name of her zine (*Xerox Debt*).

A real nice lady named **Wendy Darling** sent me this wonderful SPAM, which I treasure, because it shows that I am BIG TIME at long last: "*Dear Inner Swine, The, Hello. My name is Wendy Darling. I am a Special Market Account Manager for Jenkin's Group, Inc., an independent publishing services firm located in Traverse City, Michigan. Over the past few years, I have been working with book buyers in various special markets including network marketing book clubs, corporate venues, and pharmaceutical companies, and have worked with many talented publishers in that time. I look forward to developing many more relationships in the years to come. Since the inception of our special markets program we have sold more than 2,000,000 books. I am proud to be able to showcase the books that are being created by publishers such as yourselves to the many buyers we consistently work with. If you have a book that you would categorize under business/motivation, aging, children's, home and garden, cooking, or sports and recreation, I'd like to speak with you. The buyers we work with are looking for books predominately in these areas. Please feel free to give me a call at 800-706-4636 or you may email me at sms@bookpublishing.com. I would be very happy to assist you in this aspect of your publishing process. If you are ever in the Traverse City area, please look me up if it is just to say hello or to discuss a book project you are involved in. And lastly, we at Jenkin's Group wish you and your families a very joyous holiday season.*" I encourage anyone in the Traverse City area to say hi to Wendy, because we're now too BIG TIME to bother. Fookin' SPAM.

TIS nemesis and expatriate **Rob Gala** sent us this shot 'o love: "*You dirty historical revisionist. I have a MAJOR FUCKING BONE to pick with you, Mr. Editor...My bone is that the only thing I ever did for the Swine was bring the name to the table and the way that you described it in the last issue was that we all came up with it when in fact I came up with it and you ball-scratching monkeys simply agreed. That's the whole skeleton. Choke on it like a president with a pretzel, you oversized geek...Look, I just don't want to be marginalized from the Swine by anything other than the fact that you refuse to print the stuff I send you. Bastard!*"

I'd like to state for the record that Robert A. Gala did indeed on a warm Spring day in 1993 offer up to we ball-scratching monkeys the name and general theme for what would become *The Inner Swine*. The rest of us just hooted and banged on the table in a pathetic effort to communicate on Rob's level. A short while later Rob fled to Washington, and then to Seattle, where he remains waiting for me to let down my guard, so he can kill me. I'll also point out that Rob has always gotten credit for this, and that he appears, along with Ken West and Jeof Vita, on the inside cover of every issue, credited with "Concept by". But I can see where he would be confused.

DB Pedlar of *Skunk's Life* (25727 Cherry Hill Rd., Cambridge Springs, PA 16403; dbpedlar@toolcity.net) sent me two issues of his fine zine along with a nice note: "*Thanks for the new Swine, a grand job as usual.*". On the back cover of #20 he also plugs my novel *Lifers*, which was mighty nice of him. The second issue of SL is a special issue, a collection of letters - a neat idea, if you ask me, and well worth a few bucks. Send DB some money, and

tell 'im I sent you.

TOO LEGIT TO QUIT: A nice woman from the Salt Lake City Public Library sent me a letter: "*Enclosed please find \$2.00 cash to cover the cost of a sample copy Inner Swine. We heard about your zine from A Reader's Guide to the Underground Press and thought it would a nice addition to our collection. If rates have increased or there is an institutional rate, please let me know...*" Wahoo! We're famous, baby. Although this could just be some kid using library letterhead to get free zines, but when a kid rises above simple shoplifting to acquire the Swine, we're impressed, so a comp subscription is on the way regardless.

Well, that's it, a light few months for correspondence, sadly. Send me letters. Letters with dollar bills inside, preferably, but I'll take anything I can get. We now join *The Inner Swine* 8(1), already in progress.

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Friend, have you been craving some warmed-over TIS material you read back in 1996 and threw away? Well, your woes are over, because *The Inner Swine*, in conjunction with Tower Magazines, has published *The Freaks Are Winning: The Inner Swine Collection*, featuring dozens of editorials, commentaries, and other stuff from our first 25 issues. You *could* download it all from our web site, but that would make you a *poopy-pants*.

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EDITORIAL

Pig in Shit #26

WE ARE ALL WHORES

by Jeff Somers



*Unfortunately, I
couldn't write this in
time to save Hugh.*

It's fascinating, I think, the things that society decides should be illegal. Certainly, something like *murder* is inarguably *bad* and should be discouraged. Well, in most cases; I personally would like to have the option to kill one person in my lifetime without consequence. Imagine! Who the fuck would shove you on the subway ever again if you were allowed to murder one person in your lifetime without being punished for it? It would be paradise, because we'd all be so fucking nice to each other. No one would dare be rude. Then again, I'd probably be hungover one morning and I'd waste my pass on the

paperboy or something, and then I'd be the patsy of the neighborhood for the rest of my life: *Somers! Get me a Pepsi from the grocery or I'll shiv you. Move!*

There are some things that seem like poor choices for illegality, or at least good material for argument in a free and open society. There are plenty of people, for example, who think that certain drugs should not be illegal. You can agree or disagree with that depending on your personal outlook on these things, but the point is that there are people who believe that, so there's room for discussion, whether you like it or not. I'm not concerned with illegal narcotics, because I don't use any. Try to take my booze away like the bastards did in the early part of the previous century, however, and I will get extremely agitated.

That's not what I want to discuss in detail here, though. Sure, if a horrifying totalitarian anti-booze state were to spring up from the ashes of our current regime you'd have to pry my fifth of Jack Daniels from my rigid death grip, but that's pretty much my motto: *The Inner Swine: You'll Have to Pry this Fifth of Jack Daniels from My Rigid Death Grip*. No, you've all heard me sing my odes to booze before. I just used that as a convenient jumping-off point, natch. Hey, it's my fucking rag, I can be as incoherent and looney as I want. So here's what I'm getting at: I think prostitution should be legalized.

Why? It has nothing to do with sex. I don't have any interest in whores, and don't much understand men who do. And I've got a hot tamale for a girlfriend so I can't even imagine ever *needing* a hooker. Plus, the hot tamale would certainly de-ball me and wear my testicles around her neck as trophies for the rest of her life if I ever did partake of a hooker. No, I don't have any personal stake in legalizing prostitution. I also don't give a shit about most of the other arguments

commonly used for legalizing flesh-peddling (I think I'm setting a record for synonyms for prostitution; let's see how many I can come up with, want to?), such as health issues, victimless crimes, et cetera. I don't give a shit if oversexed suburban husbands catch the clap from half-and-halves in Times Square alleyways, and I don't give a fuck about women being empowered to wear a mattress on their backs. Nope, the reason I think prostitution should be legal is simple: We're all whores. Making it illegal is like making breathing illegal.

No doubt that was one of *The Inner Swine's* classic leaps of logic that only I can follow at first, and you're sitting there with that look on your face. That *Christ, what an idiot, why do I read this fucking zine again?* look. Oh, I know it well, and am bitter for it. Or, if you're my hot-tamale girlfriend maybe you're sitting there with the de-balling device half out of its box, trying to parse my eighth-grade-level English (my verbal skills, like my emotions, sadly trapped in my teen years) to determine whether what I just wrote can in some way be interpreted as *yes, I want to have sex with hookers*. Allow me to explain why we're all whores.

The simple among us would say that prostitutes sell sex, their bodies. The slightly less dimwitted might say that prostitutes sell the use of their bodies; a subtle distinction but a legitimate one. I'd say that what they're really selling is *their time*. I mean, if they could box up a blow job and ship it to you UPS, I'm sure they would, and www.blowjobinabox.com would be a huge business right now. They sell off minutes and hours of their time for the best price they can get. Once they've sold off their time, they allow their contract employer to determine how they spend that time. Usually, I imagine, it's for sex. However it's part of the hooker mythos that some men don't want sex at all, or at least not exclusively. Whatever odd requests their clients have, the hookers will accommodate, right? It's all about time. You could argue successfully that the equation is a little more complex: It's something more like time plus skill. Where's the skill in lying down and putting your ankles behind your ears? I'd say the skill comes in not screaming every night when you go to sleep, but hey — I've always been a sensitive soul. I wilt in the face of mind-melting despair, which is the only state I can imagine selling my body in.

So where's the difference between a streetwalker and a clerk? Or a doctor? Or lawyer? We *all* sell our time and skills. You get up one morning, put on the proper clothes, present yourself to employers, and say *okay, give me twenty bucks an hour and I will sit here at this desk and process these papers and not scream, or least not scream too loudly*. The whores of the world get up, put on their skanky clothes, and present themselves to employers and pretty much say the same thing, except you can substitute the words *screw these creeps for process these orders*. The difference is semantic. The difference is illusory. The difference is simply that we consider the one transaction sordid and immoral (or most of us, anyway) and the others to be more honorable.

But the basic transaction remains the same. You offer up your

time and the ability, a willingness to perform certain acts. You perform, and you are paid. You're a whore.

So am I, so what's the big deal? We have to live, right? The world in which every man was on his own and able and expected to provide all of the necessities of life via sweat and determination is long gone. Money has made us all into concubines. Taken away our independence, left us subject to its whims. Instead of growing or hunting your food, you have to purchase it. Instead of building your own house, you have to purchase it. Certainly you can still do these things yourself, but even then you will need money to purchase the things that have become necessary, like electricity, the fees charged to process paperwork. Everyone needs money of some sort, so we've all stopped working for ourselves.

And that's where we become whores, you see. We're no longer working for ourselves. There's no longer a one-to-one relationship with the work we perform and the benefit we receive; the work we perform is disconnected from us, generally. Instead of using our time to ensure our survival, we sell off our time and our survival is ensured by the buyer. The details of what we are instructed to do with that time once we've sold it are pretty much meaningless: You'd be changing one word in the sentence 'You perform blank in exchange for money.' I don't care if that word is *karate*, *surgery*, or *watersports*. It doesn't matter, you're still whoring yourself out. You're doing it for money.

Let's take a closer look at whoring and working for a paycheck and see how close they really are:

BOTH REQUIRE YOU TO GO OUT AND MAKE CONTACT WITH YOUR JOHN.

Whores congregate in designated areas and wait for cars to pull up with their windows rolled down. Employees go to job fairs and present themselves to anyone who sets up a booth. Prostitutes will approach likely-looking men in bars and make coded overtures to them, trying to convince them to pay for their wares. Employees will go on job interviews to try and convince someone to pay them for their services.

BOTH USUALLY INVOLVE MAKING THE TRANSACTION OF SERVICES FOR MONEY IN A DESIGNATED AREA, WHICH IS USUALLY KEPT SEPARATE FROM THEIR PRIVATE LIVES.

Whores don't usually take their johns home; they go to a motel or to the john's car, or some other neutral place. Employees usually go to the employer's place of business, unless they are freelancers who do work at home. Even then the employee usually has a designated area within their home for work.

BOTH LEAVE YOU A BROKEN, ELDERLY HUSK OF A HUMAN, FROM WHOM ALL GOOD HAS BEEN SUCKED BY A GREEDY, CONSUMERIST WORLD.

In other words, in both whoring and working, you're getting fucked, and by the end of the transaction you're like as not looking a little used hard

and put away wet (see figure 1, Yasmine Bleeth).

There are those who disagree with me, Your Humble Editor, those who would say that a career of legitimate work can be rewarding and interesting, and much, much different from having your orifices filled ten times a day by sweating, booze-swilling social dysfunctionals. These people are wrong, and they are most likely people who have spent a significant amount of time shlepping through a so-called career, and who are now desperately trying to make lemonade from the bloodstains in their shorts. I could almost certainly find you a whore who thinks of her life as a good one, so why shouldn't sex for money be legal? The answer is simply because we as a society - or better said, those who made up society some years ago - believe sex for money is bad, while, say, manufacturing, packaging, and selling cigarettes is good. Such a society is clearly mad, and no one is required to pay any attention to the rules made by the mad.

Prostitution was, of course, originally deemed illegal mainly because it was unsafe. Back in the days before antibiotics, back when leeching was the cutting-edge of medical science, a whore was nothing more than a walking, talking breeding ground for disease, and restraining their availability was a simple and rather wise health care decision. These days such concerns are lessened. Sure, there is still venereal disease (most of it, apparently, stemming from Mexico. And Newark), but it is not as rampant, or as untreatable. If prostitution were legalized, in fact, the simple availability of government oversight and insurance coverage would likely lessen the occurrence of venereal diseases even more. It would become little more than a service industry. It would probably pay a lot better than your shitty job, too.

Sigh. No one is listening. Brain the size of a planet, and what am I asked to do? Solve world problems? No, just put out this magazine which no one reads. Oh well.

Every job you perform for money that you would not otherwise perform is a form of prostitution, I believe. If you are doing something you love and would do it with or without a paycheck, then the money is incidental, so it isn't really whoring yourself. But let's face it, if you drag yourself to work every day hating life, you are a whore for money. It doesn't matter that you've been given no choice by society; teen girls kidnapped off the streets and forced into prostitution may be victims, but we still call them whores.

It's okay though. Certainly whatever intelligence might be judging us in the afterlife won't be at all concerned with our little laws and attitudes. If it considers whoring yourself a sin, you're screwed. If it doesn't you're gold. It really is that simple, and no amount of "I was just following orders!" is going to save your soul. I don't have any solutions for this, of course - I'm a complainer, not a problem-solver -



Figure 1. Yasmine Bleeth, coke whore.

but I figure the least you can do is relax, be honest with yourself, and enjoy the ride down the mountain into the abyss, eh? And stop giving yourself airs: *You're a whore.*

The Invisible Tatoo

I have an invisible tatoo on my back
in exactly the right spot where I cannot see it
no matter how I twist and turn
at pool parties I stand awkwardly with my shirt on
and in gym lockers I pretend I will shower at home
I don't know what it says, or represents
but I can feel it burning into my skin at night, its shape
and I imagine, if I squint my eyes open,
that I can see a soft glow filling the room.

It is in the shape of a bird, talons extended.

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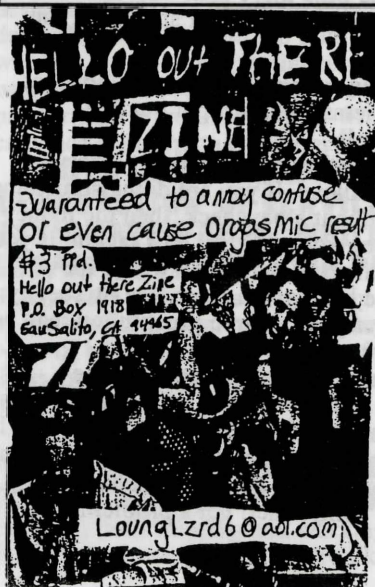


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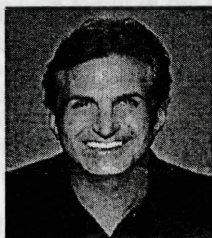
LOOKING AT YOUR BEAT ON THE STREET

What We Do for Money: An *Inner Swine Forum*

by Jeff Somers

STARRING

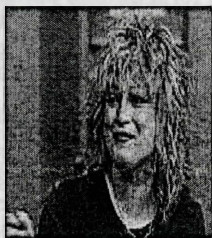
Your Moderator, Jeff Somers



Well-tanned Actor
George Hamilton



Rock Legend
Lita Ford



Forgotten Original VJ
Nina Blackwood



Swashbuckling Star
Alan Swann



Really Attractive Man
Hugh Jackman

JS: WELCOME to another TIS Forum, where we use the Goodness of the world's best people - celebrities - to solve the gnarly philosophical problems facing a complex world!

Filthy lucre - it makes the world go round, doesn't it, mostly because we little monkeys are happy to turn the cranks and oil the gears in exchange for it. One way or another, most of us are spending most of our time earning money, which is fine because society needs an engine and money spins the wheels as well as anything. The problem is that, like everything else the human race touches, we take something that's either basically good or necessary and quickly pervert it into something terrible and horrifying. Like drugs, which ought to be the best part of your day, but instead are a slick downward spiral of addiction, organized crime, and death. Money ought to be a simple necessary fact of life, a way to get us off our lazy asses, a crude

//

organizing device. Instead, it's often the strings which tug at our spastic limbs.

HJ: Excuse me, could you speed this up?

JS: Mr. Jackman, you'll get your chance to disprove my assumption that you're a good-looking shrubbery. Wait your turn.

HJ: Listen, I can't believe my agent signed me to do this stupid thing two years before *X Men* came out, but I've got -

JS: Please! Let me finish my intro!

Ahem. As I was saying...A few years ago I had a conversation with a friend of mine during which he asked me if I would eat human feces for a million dollars. I said no, I wouldn't. He didn't believe me, and stated quite clearly that the gain would be worth the humiliation, notoriety, and possible gastrointestinal disease, that he would be able to grin a muddy grin at anyone who made fun of him and ask to see their bankbooks. This is generally the attitude of anyone I ask about the subject - not specifically eating shit for money, but *doing* shit for money: People really do believe that their time and energy is worth money. I'm not sure I agree, and I'm not sure you will either when you're struggling for breath in the hospital some years from now, looking back on the days and nights and weekends spent working for your cash.

Of course, there's a huge difference between the belief that my time is worth more than money and the practical elimination of money from my existence. To be brief, that ain't going to happen, if only because liquor costs cash. Once you decide that money is a poor substitute for freedom, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to trudge off to work every day with a song in your heart - and, perversely, the only practical solution to the problem is to somehow generate a tremendous amount of cash - *so much cash* that you'll be free of everyday obligations. The only way to be free of money is to have money - it's sinisterly perfect. Oh, sure, I could go off into the mountains and live off the land, and likely be mauled by a bear and left to die, slowly, in some ditch, being gnawed by small animals. I could become Grizzly Somers and eschew money completely. But like I said, liquor costs money - at least liquor that doesn't cause blindness and hysterical paralysis does. My beloved computer costs money. So I'm trapped - far too conditioned and weak to reject this nightmare world of paychecks, booze, and cable TV.

There's no winning for me. There's only degrees of losing. I imagine it's similar for most of us, shuffling through our unnoticed lives.

HJ: Not me, mate. I've got it great.

JS: Interrupt me once more, Shrub-man, and I can change that.

HJ: Fine. Got any more beer? Ms. Ford drank the rest that was in that cooler.

LF: Fuckin' narc!

JS: Yes, just let me finish.

Okay...well, what then? Simple: Once you realize that the only escape from grinding bullshit is to have shitloads of money, the only thing left is to decide just how much you're willing to debase yourself

to get that money. In other words, as the new year commences, I have to ask myself: *What would I do for money?* And: *Is there anything wrong with doing something for money?*

As usual in situations where I find myself faced with difficult questions, I turn to the Best People in the World, celebrities. I have always found that if celebrities can't find a solution, then the problem can't be solved. If we could just get a few of these beautiful people together in the Middle East, we'd all be having a peace cakewalk through the Gaza Strip in no time.

GH: Gaza. That's a funny word.

JS: As usual, we here at *The Inner Swine* have pulled together a group of the most talented people in the world today. We've gathered them here today in the luxurious confines of the TIS Hoboken compound -

NB: Excuse me, did you just refer to this apartment as a 'compound'?

JS: It is a compound. Let's get started. Nina, you're a porn star, so you obviously know something about doing things for money. What's the worst thing you ever did for cold, hard cash?

NB: Porn star? Excuse me?

LF: Dude, you're thinking of Nina Hartley.

JS: Wait a second...which one are you? You two could be twins.

LF: I'm Lita Fuckin' Ford. I was in the *Runaways*. I sang *Kiss Me Deadly*.

JS: It's freaky how much you two look alike. So you're not Nina Hartley.

LF: No.

JS: And neither is she?

LF: No!

JS: Okay! No one here is Nina Hartley, that's good to know, thanks for clearing that up. Okay, lady who-isn't-Nina-Hartley, uh, why are you here then? Did you *know* Nina Hartley?

NB: Jesus, I was a VJ on MTV back in its first year.

JS: You're Martha Quinn?

NB:

JS: Ms. Hartley, you've removed your microphone.

HJ: I think you lost her, mate. Can we move this along?

JS: The Shrub is right! Let's ignore the non-celebrity, who obviously conned her way in here today. I apologize to all the real celebrities for the inconvenience. Now! Let's get started! Mr. Alan Swann, famous star of many adventure movies in the 1930s, I'd like to start with you, since you're my favorite actor of all time. What was the worst thing you ever did for money?

GH: Uh, who are you talking to?

HJ: He's just staring off into a corner. Hey! I see a kitchen through that door, I'm going to see if there're any more Killians in there. Anyone else?

GH: Christ yes. My skin is itching me something terrible today.

LF: (belch)

JS: Mr. Swann? No thoughts on that subject? Okay, I'll come

back to you.

GH: Wait a second...Alan Swann...wasn't he the character Peter O'Toole played in *My Favorite Year*? Wow, you're a strange guy.

JS: Well, George, let's move on to you, since you seem to have something to say. What's the worst thing you ever did for money?

GH: Easy. This tan. I'm not even human any more. I pray for death. Can I go now?

JS: No. Ah! Shrub-man, with refreshments. You celebs! Always serving others. Mr. Harrison, I realize you've had a trying year, what with your cancer and the false reports of your death, but let me probe this issue a little more: Do you regret this 'tan' you speak of? Would you choose differently if you could go back?

GH: I'm not George Harrison, pal. I'm George Hamilton.

JS: ...Who the fuck is George Hamilton?

GH: ...

JS: NO! Wait! Don't take off your microphone! Here, have a beer.

GH: Well...okay. But I'm only staying because I've never turned down a paycheck. Ever.

JS: That's excellent! That's just what I'm looking for! Is a large financial reward worth any sort of humiliation, or is there a point where the negative aspects of an act or experience outweigh any amount of monetary gain?

LF: Let me tell you somethin', buddy...

JS: Nina Hartley seems to have dozed off mid-sentence there. Shrub-man, would you mind giving her a jab?

HJ: I'm not that drunk, mate. You got a stick or somethin'?

GH: Wave the beer under her nose.

LF: ... wha? Let me tell **you** somethin' Mr. Man, I'd do anything for enough cash to buy my own studio. I been writin' songs since 1987, man! I got like fifteen albums worth of songs, y'know? No one wants to give Lita Ford a chance. Everything's gonna turn back my way, I jus' need a chance. I'd do anything. Playboy, Penthouse, Vivid Video....whatever, man.

JS: So you're saying that money's worth anything, I take it.

LF: Dude, I WILL NOT go back to playing weddings, man. Uh-uh, no way. You hear me, fat boy? We had a kid like you back in school, man we used to...what are you looking at? Don't you know who I am? I'M LITA FORD, GODDAMMIT, I sang with Ozzy Osborne. Quit givin' me the stinke! QUIT IT!

JS: Mr. Swann! Protect me!

<TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES. PLEASE STAND BY.>

HJ: It's awright then, fellow. She's been dosed. You can come out from under there.

JS: Right! Welcome back, everyone. Mr....Hamilton, was it? You're here, you might as well contribute, even though I've never heard of you. With that fabulous tan, you must be from Hollywood.

GH: Glad you asked, Jeff. I think it's all relative. The problem with questions like this is that everyone has their own sense of what's worth what. I guess it all comes down to how much you worry about

other people's opinions.

HJ: Excellent point. I mean, humiliation is relative. If you don't give a shite what other wankers think of you, then getting a little pissed on for some cash is awright, inn't it?

JS: Okay - but that focuses on the humiliation portion of it. What about killing someone for money? Is there an amount of money worth murdering someone else?

LF: Wha? Who told you about that? It don't matter, that was in Mexico anyway, and I would do it again. Sure it was worth it. Human life don't mean nothin' to me anymore.

HJ: Uh...I hate to bring attention on myself here, but I'd have to say that asking whether killin' someone is worth a sum of money depends somewhat on the consequences. Getting a billion bucks to whack someone ain't really worth anything if you're rottin' in jail, yeah? So it's relative. Money for killing with a guarantee of no punishment is different from money for killing and being on the run for the rest of your life.

JS: Since you come from Australia, Shrub, I bow to your superior knowledge of crime and punishment. You're saying that the money in question is only worth something if you're free to spend it. Fine, logical enough. What if I guaranteed your freedom?

HJ: Well, then, say the word. I work in Hollywood. I have men killed for breakfast.

JS: So money is worth any horrible act as long as there are no consequences.

HJ: Yes.

JS: George, do you agree with this?

GH: In theory, no, but in practice, let's face it, consequences are the only thing that stops most people from doing anything. And with enough money, consequences become meaningless. To wit: if you kill someone for a large sum of money, and hide that money from the authorities, well, then that money could keep you out of jail for a long time.

HJ: Or buy you a comfortable ride in a foreign country, lad.

LF: Hey, you're kind of cute.

HJ: Well, gotta go! It's been great.

JS: Fucking Australians. Always trying to screw themselves out of a contract. You and Crowe.

HJ: Hey, the bleedin' door's nailed shut.

JS: A necessary precaution, obviously.

HJ: That porno chick seems to be passed out in your bathroom, by the way.

JS: She still breathing?

HJ: Think so.

JS: Fine. Let's continue.

LF: Siddown, handsome. I got some weed.

HJ: May I sit over there instead?

JS: No, Shrub-man. Let's talk about the worst things you've ever done for money. Sex? Porno loops? Japanese commercials?

HJ: Worst thing ever for money? Crickey, it's this. MY GOD WOMAN KEEP YOUR CLOTHING ON!

LF: C'mon, pretty boy, you know you been checkin' me out.

GH: That's it. C'mon, Jackman, let's bust our way out of here. This guy's crazy.

JS: Wait! I'll give you each \$50 to stay!

HJ: ...and a six pack.

GH: Yeah!

JS: Done! It's in the fridge. Well, I guess that just goes to prove that people will do anything for the right amount of money, and that humiliation and embarrassment are the only obstacles - and meaningless ones at that, because time rubs them away, and in today's mobile society we can always escape...and Shrub-man and George-whatshisname are walking out with my beer!

HJ: See ya, weirdo. Don't follow us, I got bodyguards downstairs. George, you know any good hookers in this burg, eh?

GH: Do I! Hope you brought your wallet! Because I, uh, forgot mine.

JS: ...

LF: Well, handsome, I guess that leaves just you n' me. Got any more booze?

JS: Jesus Christ, I hope so.

END TRANSCRIPT

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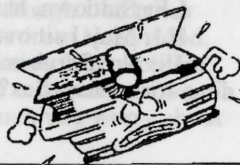
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FREE AS IN BEER

Laying Out a Zine on a PC at No Cost?

by Jeff Somers

PIGS, there was once a time when Your Humble Editor ran around in the outside world rather athletically. No, really. When I was but a lad I was skinny and fast and I would run around all day, winning races, playing ball with a modicum of skill - I wasn't a jock, but I was active. Then a series of head injuries occurred and I rather suddenly became cerebral and sedentary. Whether this was damage or evolution, we may never know. What we do know is that my habit of sitting around thinking has undoubtedly led directly to my writing and publishing a zine. So you can consider yourself blessed or cursed by both my brother Sean, who once threw me into a chair causing a concussion, and some big fat-assed redheaded kid, who once knocked me down in the street causing me to hit my head on a curb - another concussion.

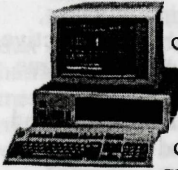
As a sedentary kid who read more than he went outside during a period of my life, I also became interested in computers, although not nearly as much as I probably should have. Back in the early 1980s my parents bought me a Commodore 64, which was, at the time, a pretty kick-ass machine. Actually, looking back, it still is a pretty kick-ass machine, relatively speaking. In any event, I actually did begin to learn the basics of programming and how computers work. Unfortunately, after a few years I lost interest, probably because I never moved on to an IBM PC or Macintosh, and thus drifted away from the exploding personal computer scene. I got back into it a few years ago and picked up where I left off, learning the basics of actually using your computer as opposed to merely running software on it.

So, it's no surprise that I lay out this rag on a PC. Since the theme of this issue is money, though, I began thinking about how expensive it can be to own and use a computer these days - and how cheap it can be, too. I decided it might be worthwhile to explore the different choices everyone has when it comes to acquiring and using a PC to lay out a zine. The short answer is that depending on what you're trying to do, technically, with your zine, you can either spend next-to-nothing or you can spend thousands of dollars. Since we're all DIY publishers, I figure you'll be more interested in the next-to-nothing business, but you never know. There are zines out there that are laid out on expensive computers using expensive software, and there's nothing wrong with that.

Of course, you can lay out a zine using a typewriter, so if you're having trouble buying *food*, forget this article. If you're looking to lay your zine out on a PC without spending much or any money, you have, I'd say, two choices: Go with **Low-End** equipment and **freeware**, or go with **stolen** software. There really aren't many other choices. If you can afford to buy a top of the line PC, you can

probably swing the extra \$\$\$ for a good quality publishing program, so this isn't going to be a review of PageMaker, InDesign, or Quark XPress. If you can afford to buy a Windows or Mac machine and these software packages, more power to you, go ahead and enjoy. If not, read on.

POS PC TO THE RESCUE



First off, you don't need to spend \$1000 on a new computer. Or \$500. Or even \$100, necessarily. The low-end machine you need, at a minimum, is a 1994-era PC with a 486 processor, 500MB hard drive, at least 16 MB of RAM (the more the better, if you can), a CD ROM drive, and any kind of VGA graphics card. Of course, you need a keyboard, mouse, and monitor too. And a modem if one isn't built in - and if the built-in one is a 14.4 dinosaur, you might go for a new 56K modem anyway, but 14.4 will get you where you're going, so it isn't necessary.

Where can you find such computers? My goodness, I've got three of them under my bed. No kidding. I got them from my place of employment for free because it was easier for them to give the units to me than it is to get rid of them. You might know someone like me with some old PCs lying around they'd give you. If not, go to Ebay and search on "486". You'll get somewhere between 500-1000 results, most of which are complete systems priced under \$50. Many will come with software installed, but be careful: If it's the software installed on the PC when it was bought new, it's most likely illegal to use it. Most of these systems will come with a keyboard and mouse, but you'll need a monitor, too. Nothing fancy: 14" or 15" will do just fine. I searched on Ebay for "monitor 14 inch" and got 253 results back, including a Packard Bell color monitor for \$10.50 plus shipping. If you need to get a CD ROM drive to go with your Piece of Shit (POS) system (back in 1994 CD ROMs were not yet standard in every system as they are today) I'd suggest you go with an internal drive, as they are cheaper. These, however, require that you open up the PC and install the damn thing, which can be difficult and confusing for people with no PC experience. An internal drive will go from \$10-50; an external one will cost more. With shipping costs included, you can have a 486 low-end system for about \$100 or so.

Now, a system like that won't be able to run Windows XP, kids, but the point is that Windows XP is expensive software. Your slightly tarnished used system will, however, run lots of older or smaller software. You might want to upgrade it a little: more RAM, maybe, which is cheap, or maybe a better video card or something. If you've got the cash, why not? If you don't have the cash, you can get by on something like the one described above, which will run a variety of operating systems, plus do all the things you want a PC to do: word processing, Internet services, spreadsheets, games - whatever. No, you won't play Quake 3 on it. But you could play Doom II on it.

Once you've got some cheap POS computer sitting in the spare room, you need to throw some free software on it to get it to do something. I'm going to assume for the purposes of this section of the article that you don't want to spend any money, and that you don't want to break any laws, which means that even if your Ebay machine came with Windows 95 and Microsoft Works 97 installed, you'll wipe the hard drive because you legally aren't supposed to use that software for anything, or that the machine came pre-wiped.

I'd recommend **FreeBSD** or **Linux** for you. Both are Unix-based operating systems that are open-source and free to use. You can either download the whole damn thing for free, or you can spend \$30-\$100 for a pre-packaged version on CD ROM. Downloading is free, but then you have to have a high level of knowledge to install and configure the damn thing, plus it will take *forever*. You will literally see the end of the Universe before you finish downloading one of these systems on a 14.4 modem. With a 56K modem you will simply die before seeing the end. Spend the money on the CDs, and you will get the operating system and, more importantly, you'll get a lot of free software along with it, ready to install, free to use. Both FreeBSD and Linux will give you Internet access, web browsers, email clients, and word processors, along with any other kind of software you might desire (spreadsheets, games, IRC, et al).

With either choice you can use Sun Microsystem's **StarOffice** office suite, which is feature-comparable with Microsoft Office, or **ApplixWare's Office Suite 5.0**. Both StarOffice and ApplixWare are quite the memory hogs, however, and if your low-end machine is really, really low end you might find them too much for your system. In that case, I'd recommend **AbiWord**, a standalone word processor which is still in Beta, but which is already an impressive piece of software. As a matter of fact, this article was written on AbiWord. Both StarOffice and AbiWord run on several platforms, including Windows, so if you have to use Windows 2000, say, at work or school you can transfer your files back and forth without any trouble.

Note that I'm not talking about desktop publishing software like Quark here. The offerings on Quark-like programs in the Unix world are non-existent, unfortunately. If you're just looking to lay out your zine with some basic text-wrapping and art placement, nothing fancy, either StarOffice or AbiWord will do the job for you. If you think you need Quark or the like, then skip to the **stolen** section below or break out the credit card and spend the \$800.

If the word 'Unix' scares the bejesus out of you and you don't want to tackle the learning curve of those arcane operating systems, there is another free alternative: DOS. No, not MS-DOS, but DOS-like operating systems. DOS might sound old-fashioned, but you know, Windows 3, 95, 98, and ME were all just GUI shells to various DOS versions — the guts of the operating systems were still DOS. DOS can be a robust and incredibly useful operating system, and if you come from a Microsoft background it can be easier to deal with than a Unix system. Plus, there's just as much DOS freeware out there as Unix, so you'll have no problem finding applications to do your dirty work.

DR DOS is the great descendent of an operating system called CP/M, which, legend tells, once came thisclose to being the operating system in the original IBM PC, losing out to a little known company called Microsoft and their MS-DOS product. MS-DOS was, actually, based on CP/M and the two resembled each other greatly. DR DOS was recently given away free for personal use, although it is not open-source. It is almost 100% compatible with MS-DOS, and thus will run just about all DOS applications. It is professional-grade and network-ready, stable, and relatively resource-easy, meaning it will likely run on your POS computer. **FreeDOS** is an open source project to create a DOS operating system from scratch, and has recently moved into a stable, and workable version. It is also nearly 100% compatible with DOS software, though it is a Beta product and thus can be a little unreliable. You can download both FreeDOS and DR DOS from the Internet; I don't think they are available on CD ROM or on disk.

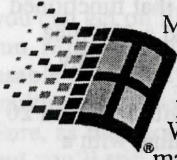
Once you have one of these DOSes running on your POS machine, you've got a choice of literally thousands of software packages, giving you the ability to do anything on your DOS system that you want. Web surfing, email, word processing, spreadsheets - it's all there, baby. There are even a bunch of GUIs to use if you must have a point-and-click experience, although most of them are Beta products like FreeDOS and offer few, if any, usable applications beyond file management and a CD player or two. There used to be **New Deal Office**, a combination GUI and office suite that retailed for about \$70 and would run fine on FreeDOS or DR DOS, but New Deal Inc. has recently had financial woes, and while their web site remains up I don't think you can actually purchase their software, which is a shame - while not free, it was good low-end software. If you dig up a copy somewhere (last version released was 3.2) pick it up.

With one of these DOS choices, your choices are limited when it comes to Desktop Publishing, but you can still manage it. Believe it or not, you can download version 5.5 of **Microsoft Word** for free directly from Microsoft - it's listed as a Y2K upgrade to Word 5.0, but the exe file you download installs a full version of the word processor. This Word is incredibly different from its windows brothers, though, so be prepared to learn a new way of doing things and to do without most of the features Word currently sports - but MS Word 5.5 is a robust and powerful word processor that will let you flow your words, which is the point. There are actually tons of word processors for DOS, but most look like MS Word 5.5 anyway - no graphical environment, everything keyboard and hot-key. At least MS Word is powerful.

There is also the enigmatic but potentially good to great **Envision Publisher**, which is a DOS/Win3.1 desktop publisher that looks pretty crummy when put up against PageMaker or such, but if you're running FreeDOS on a 486 POS machine, it's pretty fucking cool. Plus, it has mouse support and all the usual desktop pub features, yahoo. It just looks low-end, because it is, and the version you'd want (2.04) was last released in 1995. Still, it'll layout your pages, so quit bitching. The only problem is that the downloadable Envision 2.04 I

found is a time bomb shareware, meaning that you get 30 days to evaluate and then you're supposed to send the company \$49 to buy the damn thing; this version becomes inactive after 30 days. \$49 ain't too bad, considering what you can do with this program, but you could also just reinstall the software when it timebombs out.

Got Windows?



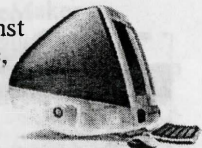
Maybe you already own a computer with Windows running on it, and you want to just get some free software to lay out your zine, eh? Not a bad idea. If your machine came with MS Word or Works or Corel Wordperfect, one of those will do fine. If your machine is low-end and you're looking for something free or very resource-friendly (let's face it, MS Word is a fucking monster), there are other options.

The aforementioned **AbiWord** and **StarOffice** will work fine on Windows 9x, NT, 2000, and XP. AbiWord is a relatively lightweight program that will do basic word processing, which should be sufficient for simple zine layout. If your PC has a bit o' muscle, you could look into the free **602Pro PC Suite 2001** from Software602 Inc. This program is free, but it's a complete office suite (word processor, spreadsheet, etc.) that, like StarOffice, requires a relatively new PC. However, it is free and the word processor is extremely powerful and compatible with MS Word. If you're looking for something smaller, **Atlantis Nova** weighs in at 1.1 MB and is a really startlingly complete piece of freeware word processing. It actually works really well, and its size means it'll run on a very low-end machine.

There is, of course, **Microsoft Publisher**, which retails for about \$100, and **Print Shop Pro Publisher**, also for about \$100. I've never used these programs so can't comment on them, but they are marketed as PageMaker/Quark-like applications for those who don't want to pay for the real thing. Probably more than enough to lay out any zine. You could also look for **PagePlus Intro 1.22** or **PFS First Publisher**, older desktop publishing applications that you can find on Ebay for \$5-\$10 sometimes. These were once mid-range packages that have since slipped into the abyss - hard to find, but might be just what you're looking for.

What about the Mac?

I am not a Macintosh person. I have nothing against Apple computers, I just haven't used many in my time, and my knowledge of how they work is slim. The time I do spend on Macs is generally hurried, desperate, and confusing - as would brief periods on an IBM be for a Mac person, I'm sure. I did, however get some quick feedback concerning the cheap-and-free Mac question, and here, very, very briefly are the nuggets from those discussions.



Cali Ruchala (check out www.diacritica.com) tells me that "...QuarkXPress 3.x runs fine on MacOS 7.5, which is completely free from Apple's ftp server. You need OS8 to use Quark 4.x, I think (that may be wrong — never tried it with 7.5 myself...)

"Furthermore, there's a larger community of people sharing programmes which could, rightly or wrongly, be considered "Abandonware" for the Macintosh. Apple had an OS that functioned fine on a computer with less than 100 mb of RAM and a 400 mhz chip. Granted, MacOS 7.5 is hideous graphically, but that's why there's Kaleidoscope.

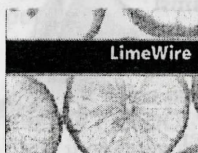
"In fact, I did many, many zines using OS 7.5, with less than 20 mb of RAM, a cracked version of Quark 3, on a machine with a processor that ranged between 20 and 30 mhz. Photoshop was temperamental as hell, but the actual layout wasn't impeded in the least. That computer I think I bought for about \$20. When you go to OS8, you need (1) lots more RAM, (2) to buy the OS (OS8 isn't free like everything before it is, and it's like 30 megs in size; I assume that someone needing to go through this isn't going to have access to a cable modem and Carracho) and eventually (3) you'll probably want a PowerMacintosh, which is still cheap used but a step up from the Apple's 68k models."

Joe Smith emailed me to add his two cents on the cheap-publisher Mac side of things: "When I started publishing my last zine, Orthophobe (now defunct), I did the layout on a Macintosh IICI that I picked up for \$500—the price for the ENTIRE system. It was so old and slow, it crashed if I tried to run OS 7.5 so I was forced to run an even earlier OS (I can't recall the number).

"Regarding software, I used Pagemaker 4.0 (which I pirated from the university I was attending) and it worked well for the first few issues of Orthophobe, which ranged from 48 to 56 pages."

Personally, I've been looking into picking up a cheap Mac for learning purposes and have discovered that there are plenty of options under \$300 for a Mac that'll do anything you need it to. Check out the detailed model descriptions on www.lowendmac.com and pick the lowest one you think you can handle, then look for it on Ebay.com or some other place. There you go for those of you who want a cheap Mac for zining - it can be done!

Stolen software



choice: steal them.

Of course, the options discussed above range from complex and involved to crappy features and performance - I mean, if you have grandiose designs, Envision Publisher is not going to do it for you. If you have no cash but you want to lay your zine out in Quark or PageMaker, you have one

This is a lot easier than you'd think. I must stress here that I am not advocating this choice, and will not provide a step-by-step tutorial

in how to do it. But it's possible, even easy.

First off, you need Windows 95 or Mac OS 8 or better. You can legally purchase these operating systems pretty cheaply these days on Ebay, but if you're looking for completely free you can usually borrow a CD from a friend and use it to install on your PC. I don't know much about Mac OS so I'll stop talking about it now, but Windows 95 will run okay on the aforementioned POS 486 machine you can get on Ebay as well. It may not fly on that machine, but it will run. Microsoft doesn't like to admit this, but Windows 95 is perfectly usable even today for your basic tasks: word processing, Internet apps, multimedia. It will remain perfectly usable for years to come, actually. Sure, as time goes by the new software may not run on Windows 95, but you'll still be able to do just about everything with it. So if you can get your hands on Win95, you'll be set to run Quark or PageMaker, yahoo.

Where to get this stuff? Why, from the Internet, of course. Specifically, from the Gnutella File Sharing network or by hanging around IRC channels. If you don't know what IRC is, don't bother trying. Gnutella is a peer-to-peer file sharing network - similar in concept to Napster, but not limited to a single company or software application. There are various applications that will allow you to connect to the Gnutella network, with all sorts of files — images, songs, videos, and programs — available. It can be a frustrating experience, but with some determination and patience (and a fast Internet connection) you can illegally acquire cracked versions of just about any software program. You've got to be careful about virus and trojan exploits, of course - remember, you're downloading software from strangers and executing code on your machine, Bad Things can happen.

Still, this way you can potentially have a cheap or free system running free software that allows you to lay your zine out like a pro, assuming you know what you're doing. It can be done. Just remember it's illegal, and accept your consequences if you get caught.

My recommendation? Go with FreeBSD or SUSE Linux. You can pick up BSD for about \$15 on Ebay; SUSE for about \$40 (you can also buy FBSD direct for about \$40 and SUSE for \$80 [Pro edition]). Both come on CD ROM with everything you'll need, including advanced office software you can use to produce some pretty decent layouts. Neither has anything that compares with PageMaker or Quark, however, and probably won't any time soon. But for an investment of under \$200 (maybe under \$100) you'll be able to set up a computer system to lay out your zine - and just about anything else you want to do, too.

I'm not suggesting that you **need** a computer to put out a zine - roll a page of blank paper into a typewriter, and go to it. Or handletter something beautifully, and go to it. But if you want to use a PC so you

can save your work electronically, or because you like working on a PC, then remember that you can do it without straining your DIY pocketbook.

Whew, I'm exhausted.

Web Links for Downloads

FreeBSD - www.freebsd.org
Linux - www.redhat.com; www.suse.com; www.debian.org
StarOffice - www.sun.com/staroffice
AbiWord - www.abisource.com
FreeDOS - www.freedos.org
DR DOS - www.drds.org
New Deal Inc. - www.newdealinc.com
Envision Publisher - www.envisionpublisher.com/envision/envision.htm
MS Word 5.5 - office.microsoft.com/downloads/9798/Wd55ben.aspx
Atlantis Nova - www.rssol.com
Freeware - www.dosbin.com; www.completelyfreesoftware.com; www.simtel.com; www.freewarehome.com; www.macosarchives.com
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Kaliedoscope - www.kaliedoscope.net
Low End PC Resources (general) - www.lownedpc.com; www.lowendmac.com
602Pro Suite - www.software602.com
Cheap IBM PCs - www.affordablecomputers.com; www.secondwindpcs.com

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I do not warranty any of these programs, configurations, or attempts to wriggle from under the thumb of Microsoft. If something doesn't work, destroys your PC, or blinds you with a sudden flash of energy, don't come bitchin' to me. You save a few bucks at your own risk.

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Summoning the Will to Go On

I Feel Sorry for the Talented Losers Who Perform in Commercials

by Jeff Somers



I'd like to buy the world a Coke, except I'm going to kill myself for wasting my life performing in commercials. Sorry.

FILTHY LUCRE - it ruins us all, at one time or another. There's no dearth of instructive art on the subject, wherein basically good natured but *fatally flawed* shlub trades common and boring uprightness for a chance at cash, only to be brought low in the end for his greed. But we never learn, and most of us spend our lives pursuing Easy Street. For some of us that pursuit is practical survival: It's an unpleasant fact in today's world that the person with the most ducats usually lives longer and in

better shape. For people like me money is always thought of in a vague, cartoony sense: I picture big beige bags with green dollar signs on them, filled to overflowing with a mixture of greenbacks, gems, and gold doubloons, and me in the background wearing a tuxedo and a monocle, because that's what rich folks do. If I ever got rich, I'd dress up like the fucking Monopoly Man every day.

Obviously my connection to reality is tenuous. Still, I'd do plenty of stupid human tricks for cash, stopping short of the Jeof Vita Feces Test (which asks that ancient philosophical conundrum: *Would you eat shit for a million dollars?* Jeof's answer, horrifyingly, is: yes) but encompassing plenty of acts of questionable morality. Theft? Sure. Insurance fraud? Sure. But the one thing I would never do for any amount of money, aside from the aforementioned shit-eating thing, is *perform in commercials*.

Why not? Aside from a distinct lack of performing-arts talent, that is? Simple: It has to be the single most humiliating thing any human being can do. Here's a scenario: You're sitting at your desk at work at around 10AM on a Tuesday morning, clutching coffee to your breast like better men clutch the bible or their trusty revolver, and suddenly a commercial for *McDonald's* comes on the radio. After a few seconds it penetrates your brain that some poor woman is singing opera - she's singing the McDonald's breakfast menu *in opera*. What's your reaction? Crickey, I'll tell you *my* reaction. My reaction is to rip the

radio from my desk and place it into the nearest freezer, because such abominations frighten me.

I can't imagine the Box of Suffering these poor people are in: They are born, at some point they realize they have some sort of talent, some sort of small greatness within them, they likely spent years of their lives training and learning and practicing...and now they wake up, go to work, and spend their talent and time singing about two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese. How can you *not* have a gun in your mouth twenty-four hours a day? Even the actors in commercials must wake up and drink a fifth of bourbon just to summon the will to go on. I saw a commercial for Taco Bell the other night wherein this portly middle-aged man sang a little song while walking briskly, followed by a large group of 'co-workers', to the nearest Taco Bell, because he couldn't wait to ingest some grade-edible beef wrapped in a limp tortilla. This poor ass has probably been struggling as an actor for twenty years, and here's his big break. His big break ends with him pasted against the plate glass of the nearest Taco Bell because he's so desperate for a taco, and so stupid, that he doesn't think to *enter the building*. He's so blinded by his taco-lust *he walks into a window*.

This guy *has* to go home, swallow some vicodin, and drink until his hair turns white. He *has* to. If he doesn't, he isn't human. He probably thought he'd be Gene Hackman by now.

All of these losers - writers, actors, singers, dancers, musicians, directors - all of them, working in advertising, are a sad, sad lot. They have talent. Maybe it's run-of-the-mill, polite, pedestrian talent, but they have talent that could be used to create something of beauty. Instead, they are devoting their talent to burgers, cars, and soft drinks. Okay, maybe some of them don't care. Maybe some of them realize that their talent is pedestrian and thus it doesn't bother them, maybe they're just happy to be getting paid for something more enjoyable than, say, *my* job. Bully for them. But I keep thinking about the opera-singing woman. You don't learn to sing opera, even to sing opera badly, randomly. You learn it out of love, out of hope that your talent is worthwhile. To be singing about hamburgers is just fucking unfortunate.

I am disturbed by the quality of today's commercials. I am worried about the number of guffaws the witty writing gets out of me, the moments of appreciation for being entertained I feel surging within me. It frightens and confuses me. Used to be, or so I remember, commercials were crappy interruptions



I was going to be an artist; I was going to do Shakespeare. Now I'm shilling Hefty bags on TV. Please kill me.

between shows that were scoffed at and ignored as best as possible. Now they are usually better than the shows they interrupt because they don't have to maintain anything. A commercial is a thirty- or sixty-second short film, and thus requires no plot, although it might have one. All it has to do is deliver a punch line or a response of some sort, and that's easy to do. Now you might be hard pressed to tell when the commercial ends and the shows begin. Which might be part of a huge international conspiracy. Or it might be the simple fact that our attention spans are so short now we...what was I saying? Anyway, commercials are too entertaining these days. Whenever I see or hear a commercial that actually entertains me, I feel sorry for the men and women who wrote the script and performed the piece - these are people with dreams and hopes. Dreams and hopes trampled by the need for cash.

The sad part is, this isn't really all that different from the rest of us. We all have skills, and we all sell those skills for money, prostitutes from our teen years on. The only difference is that the poor slobs who work in advertising have skills that otherwise might be used to enrich the lives of others, whereas you and I...well, whatever our skills are they have little to do with enriching anything except our rotund, red-faced oppressors, right? I mean, the McDonald's Opera Singing Woman might conceivably sing the songs that heal the world, given half a chance. My ability to interpret copy editor's marks, on the other hand, likely won't prevent any wars this year.

Ah, but the difference is that I am selling my skills in the service of something that might believably help the world - medical publishing, which in theory helps educate physicians worldwide, improving all of our health care. Whether this is true or not, who knows? But I like to believe it. I challenge you to say the same about the opera-singing Hamburger Girl. What greater good is she promoting with her talent? She's promoting *heart disease*, *obesity*, and *crappy, crappy food*. She can't even kid herself the way I can. Hence, I imagine she goes home and picks up anonymous strangers for cheap sex to punish herself. People who are using their talents for advertising are just wasting everybody's time, even if they do manage to briefly entertain us while shucking products and services for Our Corporate Masters. Almost every other person on Earth can kid themselves that their employment has a noble purpose, that they are contributing to society as they muddle through their existence. People singing about hamburgers, or acting excited about cars, or writing about television situation comedies don't even have that thin spiritual gruel to sustain them. They are simply and efficiently wasting their time, and their talent, and our time, and our attention.

But what of the dark, moist subgenre of *pharmaceutical advertising*? Surely this little pocket of the mossy underside of our society has *some* claim to value, yes? In the same way that I can claim that my day job ain't so bad, the people in pharmaceutical advertising can be said to be doing some small service for humanity, right, in that they get the word out on drugs that really make a difference in

people's lives. Right?

I disagree, Poncho. It's true, these drugs exist for the ultimate better of mankind, or some of us anyway. When a doctor, after years of training, examines you and recommends that you start ingesting some chemicals to correct an imbalance within you, that's a Good Thing, bubba. When some hack writer being paid thirty grand a year to come up with catch phrases writes something loathsome like "Depression isolates. Prozac can help", he or she is quite simply Sucking Satan's Cock and trying to make depressed people cough up some cash in the vain hope that this particular drug will help them, and fuck their personal physician if he or she doesn't agree. The purpose of advertising is to convince people to purchase something. The purpose of pharmaceutical advertising, therefore, is to convince people to purchase a drug. People are, by and large, extremely unqualified to decide what drugs are best for them; it is a decision best left to their physician. Therefore, pharmaceutical advertising is evil, plain and simple. Even the people singing opera about hamburgers are better off.

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darkened, and dusty.



— Ya can't have an issue of TIS without bad poetry, apparently.

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Do you need a website for your zine, band, distro, hobby or organization? Do you want to avoid lame pop-up windows with ads for big corporations, or floating logos on the bottom of your web pages? Think you can't afford your own domain and web site? You're probably in for a pleasant surprise.

We've set up an affordable, quality web hosting company geared towards people just like us — DIY-types who are long on passion for what they do, but short on dough. And if you can afford one CD a month, you can afford your own domain and web site. Ask us how, we'd love to show you. Send email to diy@hostingforhumans.com and we'll hook you up.

Mention The Inner Swine (this zine!) when you talk to us.

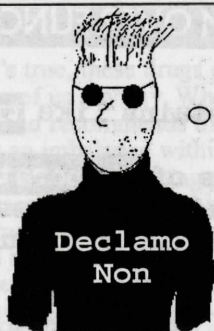
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LESSONS LEARNED AT THE POST OFFICE

The Post Office is one of the last places I mix it up with the mass of flesh that surrounds me. Otherwise I am safe and insulated from the rest of you on nearly a constant basis. But when I have to go out and mail stuff, or buy stamps, or



without dying?) for the PO by noon - a mistake since that's when all the wage-earners can sneak off to it from their jobs. So I expected a line, and wasn't disappointed, and didn't grumble as I got on the back of it, because I am not *stupid*, and thus I realized that at lunchtime on a Wednesday, there will be a line at the Post Office, and if I don't care to wait in a



some such, well, I end up marching off to the local Post Office, where you learn everything you need to know about your fellow humans in little 30-minute increments.

Today's lesson: **People are stupid little trolls.**

I recently had a long list of chores to take care of. After a productive morning, I managed to head out (thinking to myself, as I walked in the cold air, *just how much of one's own phlegm can one swallow*

line I should come back at some other time.

People are stupid #1: No Associative thinking.

The obvious fact that there will be a line at noon on a Wednesday doesn't stop the Trolls from hissing through their teeth in annoyance as they walk in. As if the rest of us, mere actors in their little horror show, had conspired to show up five minutes before

them and create this line just to amuse ourselves. The Trolls all think this because they are stupid, and thus are incapable of the sort of simple associative thinking, which results in an equation like *lunch hour + weekday + errands = line at post office*. Fucking idiots.

People are stupid #2:
No observational skills.



While doing my errands I take along my MP3 player so I don't have to listen to the buzz of uninteresting conversation which always trails my fellow flesh suits like a choking gas. This means I have earphones stuck in my ears. Having earphones stuck in your ears should be the International Sign that I can't hear a fucking word



you're bleating, but this obviously escapes people, as while waiting in line at the Post Office I am often spoken to. It happens like this: The person turns to me and just starts speaking. About halfway through their sentence, I turn and am startled to realize that someone is attempting to speak to me while I am listening to music. Then I pluck my earphones



out of my ears and hold up a small sign I keep for this purpose that reads **YOU ARE A MORON**. This usually causes the idiot to make another annoyed hissing sound and repeat their sentence. If they weren't idiots, they'd realize I can't fucking hear them because I am wearing earphones, and further that **I AM WEARING EARPHONES SO I CAN'T**



FUCKING HEAR THEM.

People are stupid #3:
The expectation that the Universe will fold around their desires. I am coming to believe that people's intelligence is inversely proportional to their perceived importance in the Universe. People who think things should always form into certain expected patterns around them are pretty much life support



systems for their large, pendulous guts. People who realize they are cosmic accidents without purpose or reward tend to be so intelligent they kill themselves young from the pain. The rest of us are somewhere in the middle. People who come into the Post Office with unpacked items and expect the postal employees to pack

everything up in boxes, label everything, and fill out all the forms for them, *while the rest of us are waiting in line*, have something slushy and viscous instead of brains in their heads. When I arrived at the Post Office the people at the head of the line had a large number of huge wrapped gifts - wrapped in Xmas paper, with bows on them - and were

frustrated that the postal employee behind the counter did not a) have boxes big enough for the job and b) showed no inclination to package everything for them. Meanwhile, the rest of us stood there frozen in space, unable to get our errands done because these trolls were either too lazy or too stupid to just fucking box

everything up ahead of time. They left in something of a huff, and probably went to the next Post Office over to repeat the demand.

Well, there you have it. I am spent. You can learn something everywhere you go, if you pay attention, you know. I usually try not to pay attention, though. When

I pay attention it's hard not to hurt people, or at least desire to hurt them, since I am quite weak and ineffectual when it comes to forcing my horrible will on other people. Even when not paying attention, standing in lines always gives you ample opportunity to observe your fellow humans, which always leads to articles like this. Sigh.

Advertisement(s)

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JEFF'S MERRY MINUET

Presenting the Bill to All You Motherfuckers

by Jeff Somers

*"This whole world is festering with unhappy souls
The French hate the Germans, The Germans hate the Poles
Italians hate Yugoslavs, South Africans hate the Dutch
And I don't like anybody very much"*

- "The Merry Minuet" by Sheldon Harnick

TIME, we've been told over and over again, is money. This is proven by the fact that you get paid for your time when you show up for work - you're not getting paid for your skills, your skills simply augment how much you can charge for your time. Time is the one thing in this world you'll never be able to get more of - you've got what you've got, and when the cosmos gives you the middle finger and you drop dead with that look on your face, that's it, game over. So, time is money, and you get paid money for your time.

Well, mostly you do. Let's face it, there're plenty of Time Suckage Entities (TSEs) out there busily siphoning off our time without paying us a dime. It doesn't really make any sense: We charge for our time when we show up for our jobs, but let time-sucks bury their heads in our epidermis without penalty. My company cuts me a check every two weeks to convince me to show up and do their crappy work for them, but Mr. I-Love-Cats on the bus can talk to me for twenty minutes about what he feeds his surrogate children, and I get paid squat? These motherfuckers are costing me money, and I'm not going to take it any more. I have decided that it's time I started billing for my time.

THE PLAN: You can't, of course, just announce that you're billing for your time and expect it to just happen - it takes work and energy. Thankfully, I don't expend much energy on anything these days, and thus have plenty left over. There are several things that have to be put into place before you can start charging people for access:

1. **RATES.** Yep, you need a rate card. It doesn't matter what you decide your time is worth, only you have to clearly display your rates or else people could sue you for overcharging them or for using 'hidden charges' like the goddamn phone company. First, it's helpful to figure out a basic rate — I decided to use what my company pays me to show up. I did a little math:

[SALARY ÷ 52 Weeks]

=

\$22.50 an hour

Hours a Week Actually Worked
(may be somewhat less than 40)

33

And then I had to drink heavily for a few hours, because realizing that I, a beautiful individual human with talents, a good sense of humor, and decent hygiene, am only worth twenty-two fucking bucks an hour is as depressing a thought as anything else ever devised. But I had my base rate there, and I scaled other rates based on whether the customer would potentially be more or less annoying and spirit-draining than my job. Here are the rates I've come up with:

ACTIVITY	HOURLY RATE
Speaking to me without being spoken to first	\$500.00
Delaying me without direct communication with me (i.e. asking questions at the end of meetings)	\$100.00
Salespeople approaching me without being asked surcharge (in addition to 'speaking to me without being spoken to first' charge, above)	\$50.00
Work	\$22.50
Driving like a fuckhead	\$10.00
Unwanted eye contact	\$5.00
Asking polite questions (e.g. "Excuse me do you have the time?")	\$0.25

Of course, I'll be dynamically creating new charges based on my daily interactions with the TSEs, and anything not specifically listed will be billed as WORK. Pretty simple. I'm having T-shirts made up with this rate card on the front, so it will always be on display when people approach me.

2. IMPLEMENTATION.

Obviously, it's easy to *tell* someone you're going to charge them for your time. It's quite another to actually do it. You have to have the necessary infrastructure to bill people. Cash or

checks of course, are preferred and perfectly acceptable, but to really make this work I need to be able to process credit cards.

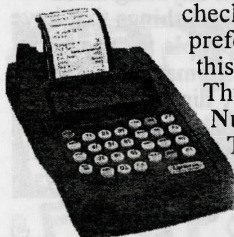
Thus, I've got one of these babies: that's right, a **Nurit 2090 POS Credit Card Processing**

Terminal. I'm not kidding around with this. I'll be able to process Visa, Mastercard, Discover, and AmEx with this little baby using a wireless network connection, and I'll spit out quick receipts for everyone as well.

3. ENFORCEMENT. People who don't value my time in the first place, of course, cannot be trusted to actually pay their bills, so

YOU WILL BE CHARGED for speaking to me

ACTIVITY	HOURLY RATE
Speaking to me without being spoken to first	\$500.00
Delaying me	\$100.00
Salespeople	\$50.00
Work	\$22.50
Driving like a fuckhead	\$10.00
Unwanted eye contact	\$5.00
Polite questions	\$0.25



I'll need some system in place to ensure prompt payments. After all, when Insane Coworker # 367 decides that Friday at 5PM is a good time to tell me all about how sad they are that *The X-Files* got canceled, they may be shocked to be presented with a bill for \$500 at the end of it. Now, the rate card may be obviously displayed on my T-shirt, but lord knows I've lost faith in the observational powers of my coworkers (well, my fellow humans, really) who also fail to notice, on an almost-daily basis, that I am wearing headphones, which means I cannot *hear* them, which means it is pointless to speak to me. So I can imagine that my coworkers and other fellow humans will be quite surprised to discover a bill in their sweaty hands. How to make them pay?

There's really only one way, and it's the same way all companies squeeze the juice out of us: threats. You gotta make them feel the terror, boyo, or they won't bother paying. For those kinds of services, of course, I have Ken West, who happily intimidates whomever I set him upon. I will also naturally refuse to interact with people who have not paid their bills - shutting down their accounts, if you will. This is where I expect to get the most return out of my scheme, because no one in their right mind is going to pay me \$500 for an hour of my time, so the list of people who've lost access to me should get long fast, leaving me inside a bubble of blissful silence, drinking cheap wine from a box, and talking to myself.

It's like I've always said: You gotta be firm with the freaks, or they're gonna overwhelm you. Using my plan to bill for lost time, I figure I'll either get fantastically rich and have to open Jeff franchises, where other pale, yellowish men will pretend to be me and charge people for *their* time, or else I'll end up with no friends with the aforementioned box of wine. Either way, I win.

I know what you're thinking. Think you can do better? Write your own damn zine.

Advertisement(s)

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Zine Culture

Pink@neongirl.eidosnet.co.uk

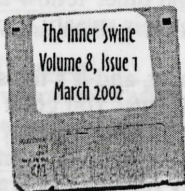
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QUICK & DIRTY E-PUB

Be a Fucking E-Publisher if You Want
Do it for Free, Yo.

By Jeff Somers



Okay, a short, dull article about **E-publishing** and if you don't like it, turn the page and read something else. This is my house, and you don't get to tell me what to do in here. Okay? All right then.

I am amazed that in this day and age so few writers self-publish, because we live in a unique time when it is possible to do so effectively. Print publishing remains a daunting and largely hopeless task for individuals unless they are individuals with money and time to spare, in my opinion; although you *can* create your own perfect-bound books and get them out there if you want to. It just isn't *free*, and even if you totally bust your balls promoting the damned things you're likely to sell very few of them. And many people find Internet publishing (HTML et al), while cheaper, to be intimidating in its use of markup languages and computer protocols.

So be an E-Publisher. Electronic publishing - not Internet, necessarily - simply means a text produced in electronic format. Personally, I think most electronic publishing sucks. Sucks big piles of shit. I'd rather have my arms and legs crushed beneath Zamboni machines than read an E-book, to be honest with you, and fear that the marketing muscle of today's corporations will someday soon force E-books on us. The one compelling aspect of electronic publishing, however, is that it can be done effectively for free. Free is a pretty compelling reason to toss aside your prejudices and start spitting out horrible E-books.

A clarification first: Many people assume that by E-book I would be referring to some proprietary format of digital publishing controlled by a huge company like Adobe or Microsoft, requiring some sort of handheld decoding device or computer software. I'm not, though. If your purpose is to transmit your words in a typeset electronic file to readers, you don't need to use some bullshit piece of proprietary software like Acrobat - and although I use Acrobat to archive the past issues of my zine, I would recommend that you don't. Technologies like PDF or the various E-book formats are very useful for people who

have heavily designed, graphic-filled layouts in their publications. If you're publishing fiction, or any kind of text that has minimal graphics and simple layouts, you don't need anything more than a computer, a word processor, and possibly (but not necessarily) an Internet connection.

There are Luddites in the zine/DIY-publishing world who cringe whenever computers are mentioned, and that's fine, as long as they leave me alone. If you think the 'purity' of a zine is only preserved when manual typewriters, or pencils, or perhaps sharp stones dipped in the blood of your dinner are used - fine, continue to publish that way. Leave the rest of us alone.

To publish an E-book, in all truth, you need only the following:

- One (1) cheap-assed computer, or access to same. This doesn't have to be some cutting-edge monster. An old 386 running DOS, or an ancient Mac running System 7.5.5, will do just fine.
- One (1) free Word Processor. Don't buy one, it isn't worth it. If your cheap-assed computer doesn't have something preloaded you can use, there are free ones out there, many of which are extremely powerful. There are even good ones for DOS that, while visually unappealing in today's GUI world, will do the job. The Word Processor you choose should have the capability to read and write Plain Text (.TXT) files and Rich Text Format (RTF) files, at a minimum. Any other formats supported will be gravy. If you have an Internet connection, you can download small, free programs that will make it through even the slowest modem, no sweat. If you don't have an Internet connection and nothing was preloaded on your computer, well, it's a lot harder. Send me a letter detailing your operating system with \$1 postage and I'll send you one on disk, how's that?
- Something to publish.

Optionally, you can also have an Internet connection of some sort to set up a free web page and free email account. This isn't necessary, but can make distribution of your E-book easier and cheaper.

Okay, so how can you be an E-publisher once you have these things in hand? Simple. Follow these easy steps, and you're there:

1. Keyboard your project. The first step is to type whatever you want to publish into the Word Processor (duh!). Start off by saving it as an RTF file; RTF is a pretty standard format that almost all word processors in the world can read fairly accurately, and it preserves basic formatting like bold and alignment from processor to processor. Keep the layout simple: one column, standard-sized pages. DON'T use lots of weird fonts and a million fancy layout tricks. Just keep it simple, use at most three fonts (and choose those from the standard stuff: Courier, Times Roman, etc.) and keep the style to a minimum too: bold and italic. Forget color. Keep graphics to a minimum as well. Also, double-style bolds and italics, because when you're done with the RTF file, you're going to convert it to text-only so people will have the choice. Text-only is the lowest common denominator of text

files, able to be read by just about every word processing program in the universe.

By adding asterisks around bolds and italics, and giving the chapter openers some simple surroundings, you've got formatting that will survive in a plain-text file, meaning that no matter which version your potential readers get your book in, they'll be able to make sense of it. If you don't double-code your style, your text will be completely vanilla, and a lot is lost. After you've finished keyboarding and creating the alternative plain-text file, you can go back into the RTF file and delete the asterisks for a cleaner look, if you want.

2. Now, it's a simple matter of advertising your E-book somehow. You've got an RTF file and a TXT file that will probably fit on one floppy diskette. The floppy diskette is getting forgotten in today's age of CDRs and Zip Drives, but it remains a hugely useful and undervalued media. They're cheap (about 70 - 90 cents apiece) and cheap to mail, and you can fit *War and Peace* on there if the file is just text with minimal formatting. So, if you assume manufacturing and mailing costs are thus about \$2, you can charge \$3 for your E-book and still make money. Who wouldn't take the risk for \$3, postage included? And to read the file, all they need is fucking Wordpad in Windows or SimpleText in Mac OS, at a minimum. Plus, everyone but those poor, sad idiots in the Mac OS world can use a floppy disk. We can't help the Mac people - they're lost, and have to use a 650 MB CD-R to store a 50k text file. Suckers.

It ain't sexy. Once your reader has the file, they can either read the book on their PC, or they can print it out and read it that way. Once again, not sexy, but I've done it, and it works, and for three lousy bucks maybe others will. You can make labels for the disks if you want, you could even create little custom disk sleeves if you wanted - increasing your costs, but making it look more inviting. The point is, without spending much or any money you're E-publishing, and you don't need some fancy Reader or a licensing deal with Microsoft to do it.

Having Internet access makes it a little easier. You can set up a free web site on the web at one of any number of places like Yahoo! Geocities, where you get a certain amount of space and even free web-building tools to create a quick welcome page. Then, upload samples of your book either as HTML if you want to and know how - which will allow you to keep the basic formatting of your RTF file (there are even freeware translator programs that will take RTF files and turn them into HTML files), or as the plain-text version. Any web browser can read a plain-text file. People can surf to your samples, and if they want to buy a copy they can mail you \$1 and you can email them the whole E-book as an attachment. Cheaper and easier, and you have a nonstop advertisement for your book on the web at all times - sure, it isn't exactly a billboard in Times Square, but people looking for something akin to your subject matter might find your site, and might decide a friggin buck is worth the risk, eh?

And if you don't give a crap about making money, but just want to get it out there, then put the whole thing up for free download, right? No one needs a special program or device to read your book, and they can still print it out if they want to.

The point is, with the willingness to keyboard your manuscript, you can self-publish your book cheaply and easily. You could also just photocopy the manuscript and sell *that*, but the obvious downside is the continuing photocopy costs and the increased postage costs. Once you get beyond \$3 a copy, people start wanting more than a home-brewed photocopy, natch. The electronic file will be crisp and perfect each time, and can be altered as you wish in case additional editing is required.

Is this perfect? No. Very few people want to get a diskette in the mail and go through the trouble of loading it onto their PC, and many publishers don't want to eschew all the fun of complex layouts and eye-pleasing graphics and fonts. You're never going to storm the *New York Times* Bestseller List with a book-on-floppy. But it is a way to publish cheaply, and at least get your work out there - and who knows? Maybe there are more people willing to read a diskette than I think. There *are* a few actual publishers out there who put out E-books on diskette (Hard Shell Word Factory [www.hardshell.com], DiskUs Publishing [www.diskuspublishing.com]), and you can even find them on Amazon.com. There are also at least two initiatives to put books on the Internet in various electronic formats (PDF, HTML, TXT) for free reading or downloading (check out <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/books/> or the fabulous Project Gutenberg at <http://promo.net/pg/>). So *someone* thinks it's a good idea.

What the hell, if you don't have any other options, why not give it a shot? The other choice is to sit around bitching that no one wants to publish your stuff. You might as well do something.

SUB ARTICLE:
My ghetto Fabulous Machine

So, want to E-Publish with no money down? Here's the super low-end machine I scraped together that'll do it. Total cost? \$0, but your mileage may vary. You won't be playing Quake3 or watching Flash animations on this contraption, but you will be able to create simple formatted or text-only books and distribute them via diskette or Internet, depending on your preference and ISP situation.

The Box: A 486 Compaq circa 1994, surplussed by my job. 8 Megs of RAM (expanded with another 8 from another surplus to 16MB), 120 MB hard drive. I had a 14-inch monitor and a 56k modem lying around my house from previous PCs - if you don't have such flotsam at home, you might have to cough up some cash for these items (14 inch monitor and 28.8 modem on Ebay: about \$20).

The Software: DR DOS 7.03 (free download from <http://www.drDOS.net/download.htm>), a MS-DOS compatible operating system; DOSSTART (<http://www.icdc.com/~dnice/dosstart.html>), QUICKMENU (<http://www.?com>) or WINDOS (<http://www.spaceports.com/~ande/windos.html>), GUI-like program launchers/file managers. Windows-like, they allow you to manage your DOS programs and files as icons, and include a few basic utilities; MS Word 5.5a, free for download from Microsoft; NetTamer (<http://www.nettamer.net/tamer.html>) to dial up to an ISP, and also includes FTP, E-Mail, and other Internet services; Arachne web browser, a graphical and HTML 3.2 compatible web browser for DOS (<http://www.arachne.cz/>).

With everything I listed here you can create RTF, Plain-Text, or HTML files, and distribute them via floppy diskette or the Internet. Your total worst-case-scenario cost should be under \$100, probably WAY under. You want to E-Publish? Well, why the hell not.



— My GOD, that was boring.



JUST STAB ME IN THE EYES DEPT.

LOST IN THE LAND OF THE BRITNEY WANNABES

by Jeff Somers

FRIENDS, I was one of those kids who didn't pay much attention to my High School years. You watch certain movies, read certain books, listen to certain middle-aged whiners at bars, and you start to think that High School is supposed to be everybody's Best Time of Their Life. High School wasn't a bad part of my life, it just barely registered. I kind of knew that none of it mattered: they pushed and pushed for us to take part in the community, to join clubs and activities, to show up for all the sporting events and rallies. And tons of kids fell for it, and spent huge chunks of their lives working for these bullshit after school activities. Not me. Even then, I knew it was just a few years of my life that would ultimately be meaningless.

And I was right. I look back now, and I'm fucking *glad* I didn't spend any more effort at it than it took to graduate with mediocre grades. I showed up, made a few friends, had some good times during my early-to-late teen years, but none of it was dramatic or tragic or more important than it was supposed to be. I showed up, had fun, and moved on. I don't regret any of it. If I'd spent the equivalent of half my life at fucking pep rallies or, I don't know, *Yearbook meetings*, I'd probably be pretty goddamn depressed right now.

So as you can probably guess, I don't think about my High School years very much. They aren't repressed memories or anything, I just don't think about it too much because high school just wasn't all that important: There's nothing permanent about it. You do it, it ends, and ten years down the road if you stay in contact with a few people from it you're lucky, and if you learned anything at all useful, you're *really, really fucking lucky*. Being free from any nostalgic bullshit regard for my teen years - Jesus-fucking-christ they were not my 'best years' or any similar appellation; my best years will be in about two decades when I'm one of those filthy rich, still-attractive fiftyish playboys, trust me - you can only imagine my shock and surprise when I was forcibly reminded of what it's like to be a teenager in high school during my attendance of the *Kid's Cool Aid Benefit* in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

I can hear the crickets out there.

What was *Kid's Cool Aid Benefit*, you ask? Briefly, it was a benefit event put on by teenagers from various high schools, and I ended up there because friends of Legal Counsel Danette Knopp had a son playing drums in one of the bands. The son is an excellent drummer, and his band was actually pretty good [1]. Not exactly the second coming of Nirvana, but damned good for a bunch of teenagers, and definitely one of the better acts in the program. Most of the other acts were okay - nothing worse than any event involving the faceless hordes of unspecial teenagers in the world - but the supposed 'headline' act was one of the more horrifying displays of teenaged

hubris ever displayed: *Back To Girls*. Oy vey, I almost suicided via inward-directed mind-bullet. Here's how it was:

When we arrived, we were ushered all the way to the front row, to my horror. The event was being held in a high school auditorium and was filled to the brim with kids. Not just kids, but the exact type of kids I wanted nothing to do with back in high school: empty-headed coolies running around in packs and being assholes. This generally covers about 95% of all *people*, of course, not just kids, and I've dedicated my life to avoiding these sorts of goons. It's much easier now, of course, because I am an adult and can actively avoid them. Back in High School it was harder. Being suddenly thrust into the midst of these short, small-minded trolls was horrifying.

It got worse, though, the moment Back To Girls was introduced. Back To Girls is a group of five preteen/young teen girls who all want desperately to be Britney Spears. The curtain came up and here are a bunch of twelve-year-old girls wearing hoochie costumes and singing *terribly* to backup tapes of lame pop songs. They were doing choreographed dance routines while 'singing', and I respect how much work it must be to learn those routines - not that the routines themselves were very entertaining, but then perhaps I am biased since I've lived a few more years than most of the audience and therefore can tell bad dancing and singing from good. They really really disturbed me, for two reasons.

One, the place went wild with girls screaming everywhere. I found out later that B2G (as I will now refer to them to save typing) has a rather cut-throat management that thinks they've found their ticket to the big-time, and who plant screamers in the crowd. But at the time the sound of teenaged hysteria was fucking spooky. It reminded me of all the hype that goes into being a modern teenager. Time was (long before my own time) when being a teenager was a precursor to adulthood. You got a job, you did your homework, you had an eye on your future. For the past few decades, teenagers have been fetishized into this bullshit 'best time of my life' catalog that their parents work hard to preserve, so you have things like an entire auditorium filled with kids who have nothing better to do than wear the right clothes, listen to the right bands, and try to impress their friends.

Two, while in the midst of all this cup-runneth-over-with-bullshit teendom, I realized that these chicks on stage were pretty much costumed to look like hookers. Sparkle on their faces, bellies bared, hips gyrating - these were twelve-year-olds in the sense that the me-so-horny hookers in Saigon were twelve-year-olds. I admit to a certain bitterness that when I was twelve the girls in my class were not nearly so hoochie-ized, but it was also just plain old *weird* to have these children up on stage singing songs of love while wearing baby T-shirts and torn jeans. And the most disturbing thing of all, of course, was quite simply the fact that out of all the women in the world to emulate, these chicks chose Britney Spears, the most vapid, talentless, and crassly commercialized bitch in the universe. I got nothing against Britney. I hope she invests well and gets out young. But who the fuck

wants *more Britneys*? One is fucking enough. Five of them on stage at once almost killed me.

So there I was, watching in horror as the B2G girls took the stage no less than four times. Now, I know that my own childhood was vapid and commercialized and filled with empty pop idolatry. I also know that I can tell you more about batting averages and situation comedies than world history and economic theory - so I'm not claiming any sort of moral superiority. When I was twelve I didn't want to be a pop star, but then again that might be because I can't sing and look pretty bad in sparkle makeup and baby Ts. I guess part of what bothered me was how bad they were - and I mean, *bad*. They totally sucked. But the crowd of kids at the end trying to get their attention (and, in some cases, phone numbers) made it seem like a good band had just played.

After a moment, though, it made sense to me, because one thing about kids hasn't changed at all: We all wanted to be cool. We were desperate to be cool. All the prepubes screaming at the B2G gals were just trying to get some coolness sprinkled on themselves, and in High School there can't be anything much cooler than five girls with sparkle makeup on acting like Britney Spears on a stage, anywhere. Or maybe the boys were just looking to touch those washboard abs on display - who knows?

At any rate I sat through the whole three-hour horror show politely enough. Some of the acts were fun, some were terrible, and there was, as I've made plain, far far too much *Back to Girls*. But I survived, and came away reminded that all of us, myself included, are always sadly deluded that our small little lives matter for something despite the fact we a) don't know anything, b) haven't done anything, and c) have terrible acne - but we all have our comeuppance, don't we? Well most of us. I guess Britney segued from self-important teen with annoying voice to superstar - lord help anyone who has to deal with *that* ego. Shiver. For most of us though, there's a lot of daylight between our teenaged hubris and our adult achievements. And by *daylight*, of course, I mean *liquor*.

[1] <http://www.1trackmind.net/>



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COMMENTARY

A World of Ghosts

Technology and Mortality

by Jeff Somers



*If only ghosts
were so cute
and cuddly, we
could slaughter
them for their
fine pelts.*

FRIENDS, while I wait patiently for scientists to invent immortality and allow me to shed this mortal coil, I can only sit and drink steadily and contemplate my own demise, hurtling towards me at amazing speeds. Faster now that I live in an apartment with cable television, as I now spend 99% of my time flipping channels and accruing arterial plaque. I grew up in Jersey City, New Jersey, which did not get blessed with cable TV until 1987, by which time I was 16 years old and had grown so tired of waiting for my MTV that I didn't give a shit when it finally arrived. I carried this attitude with me into my college and adult years, and, truth be told I still carry it. If it were up

to me the cable would go. However, I live with TIS Legal Counsel Danette Knopp, which means that nothing is up to me anymore.

So, I watch more cable TV than ever before in my life, which means, you guessed it, that I am haunted by the Ghosts of Celebrities Past.

I'm stunned that no one else is disturbed by this. Every day, dead people pop up on my TV screen and dance for me, ghoulish little jigs that frighten me into hiding behind the couch. In this wonderful world of technology no one is allowed to rest in peace anymore, they are summoned and forced to dance for our pleasure.

There have always been *reruns*, of course, so there have always been ghosts dancing in my home. But when I was younger, several factors combined to keep this creepy feeling of being haunted at bay:

A greater majority of actors were still alive. We've only had a visual record on film since the earliest part of the twentieth century, after all, and television generally won't run silent films, so really the only films I saw on TV as a kid were from the 1930s onward. That was only 50 or so years before, and a lot of those people were still around. Watching "It's a Wonderful Life" wasn't creepy in 1980 because Jimmy Stewart was still alive. It was even better for TV shows, since the earliest ones still being rerun dated from the 1950s, and a huge proportion of those actors were still around. The occasional dead actor was easy to ignore.

I hadn't yet realized that people actually die. We won't get into whatever midlife crises I may or may not have had in my life, but suffice to say when I was 10 I didn't yet connect funerals with, you

know, people. So I had no idea really that Desi Arnaz was *dead*.

There weren't 300 channels of reruns. Like I said, until 1987 I had 10 channels to work with, so the amount of reruns found wasn't quite as stunning or noticeable.

Nowadays, I see at least ten dead people a day on the screen, and it freaks me out. Aside from being a constant reminder that someday people will have to pop in a DVD to see *me* ever again, it's also somehow humiliating that these poor souls are forever doomed to mouth the same dialogue, the same dated jokes, dance the same ridiculous numbers, make the same embarrassing faces. Plus, it's confusing when you get down to the second- or third-tier celebrities, because I am often not up to speed on who's dead and who's still living. Is Squiggy from *Laverne and Shirley* still kicking up his heels? Who knows?

This creeps me out because I often wonder what the nature of existence actually *is*. I know that I think, I know I am writing this, forming thoughts on paper by force of will. But I don't know - really know - if *you* exist. Even though I can see you, smell you, hear you, feel you, you might as well be a three-dimensional television character, you dig? Until we evolve telepathy, I'll never be sure you all aren't hallucinations inside my head. Sure, that's incredibly narcissistic and stunningly egocentric, but that's the way we all are, whether we want to admit it or not.

What does that mean? It means that in every meaningful way, *visual perception equals existence* - that the camera maybe *does* steal your soul. And that means that people I can see are there. And *that* means that Don Knotts is still alive in at least one sense of the word. It means a lot of people, famous and otherwise, are still alive in one sense of the word. So maybe the afterlife is reliving, endlessly, every scene from your life that was filmed. Every **Captured Soul Moment** (CSM). If you're Fred Astaire, you're dancing in tails. If you're Babe Ruth, you're running ridiculously fast during baseball games.

If you're me...the filmed choices are a little less attractive.

You see, now, my problem with this creeping feeling that immortality is all about your image, captured on film, or in bits. Quite simply, my afterlife isn't going to be very good. Let's look at what my choices for endless looping of CSM will be:

WHERE JEFF WILL BE SPENDING ETERNITY (Jeff's Captured Soul Moments)

MY RIDICULOUS COLLEGE-ERA VANITY PIECE: Back in our final fading months of college, Jeof Vita, Ken West, and I decided to make a movie. Why? Who knows? Might have been the liquor, might have been this heady idea we still had back then that we could do anything we put our minds to despite a lack of resources, experience, or talent. In any event, we borrowed a video camera with the intention of filming something scripted. When actually scripting and performing a film became a bit more work than we wanted, the project quickly devolved



into endless vignettes of us mugging for the camera. In this horrifying video, you can see me, long-haired and skinny, making an ass of myself in various situations, usually shirtless. If there are worse ways to spend eternity, I cannot think of them, especially since that was the worst apartment I've ever lived in and was right smack in the middle of my *Ramen Noodles* era.

The video is salvaged, however, by a final fifteen-minute short film in which Ken, Jeof, and I go insane and plot to kill each other, all set to music. It's actually quite entertaining, and an eternity spent whacking Jeof and Ken over the head with a baseball bat is a pleasant enough afterlife, you ask me.

APPEARING AS PETRUCHIO IN A GRAMMAR-SCHOOL RODUCTION OF 'THE TAMING OF THE SHREW': In



seventh grade my class put on various scenes from Shakespeare and filmed them. I appear in tights. Do I really need to say anything else about this piece of film? I'm not sure it still exists, but if it does I can't think of anything worse than to find myself in tights for the rest of forever.

UNFORTUNATE WEDDING MOMENTS EVERYWHERE: Ah



yes, the many hours of video in which I star as Wedding Guest With Face painted on Stomach. Need I say more? I've written several essays on the subject of my wedding-related humiliations (*American Wedding Confidential*) but lord knows my only comfort, and cold stuff at that, is that no one can actually see me cutting a rug after a few too many bourbons. The idea of spending my eternity slumming about in uncomfortable shoes, drinking second-shelf liquor and listening to endless renditions of "Play that Funky Music" makes me very sad.

That's it. Those are my choices if this sudden dark theory turns out to be true: as a 19-year-old longhair wearing a Bloom County T-shirt and sweat pants in the World's Smallest Apartment, or an 11-year-old dandy in tights, spouting couplets. Why so little? Well, my parents never owned a video or film camera, so my childhood is thankfully documented only by still photos, which have some dignity, and in which it is impossible to imagine ghosts existing. And long ago I took my cue from the Mafia and have refused to be filmed for fear that such movies might end up in court some day. So the above are the only two pieces of motion pictures that I can reliably say I appear in, and thus are my only choices for eternity. That *sucks*.

I could, if I accept this creepy new view of the afterlife, try to augment my video existence, but that's harder than it sounds. Just making my CSMs look fun and enjoyable won't cut it - because I'll be living inside them forever, and if they were hell the first time around, they'll be, well, hell again. And again. So the fun needs to be genuine. Plus, lugging around a film crew and capturing myself constantly isn't easy. Or cheap. Still, it's something to consider: Next time you're having the best time of your life, you might want to pause and wish that someone was filming you, so you could spend your well-deserved rest there.



FICTION

PRANK TO WORK IT IN

by Jeff Somers

I handed my license over to the pretty young receptionist with a flirtatious but mild grin, despite my guess that she could be my granddaughter.

"My HDPT number is —"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Helling," she interrupted perkily, "but we have a new policy. I'm afraid you must submit to a Pin Test. We no longer accept HDPT as proof of coverage." She smiled prettily, eyes twinkling.

I frowned. "I've always used my HDPT number. I've been a patient here for six years."

She smiled again, nodding. But I could see her grin grow just slightly brittle. "I know, sir, and all the doctors apologize. But we experienced some security concerns recently, and for the time being we are forced to employ stringent security. We do apologize for the inconvenience."

I considered. I knew I seemed like a typical whining rich asshole, and she — being at best a Class II or IIA employee — probably hated me. But I disliked DNA traces. The government had enough information on me as it was, and I paid plenty to keep it that way. As far as I knew their last update on me was seventeen years old — but that would change in seconds if I submitted to a Pin Test.

Then again, I had a rattle in my chest that made me nervous.

"Oh, all right. Sorry to be a bother. I know you're just doing your job." I held out my hand.

She softened a little. "You're no bother, at all, really. Some of our patients are real horrors, you know."

She said this in a mock-conspiratorial tone that made me think she didn't hate me after all. "That makes me feel better. Maybe you'd care to tell me some stories? Over dinner, perhaps?"

Not pausing in her swabbing and pricking one finger, she glanced up at me. "I'm not supposed to be overly friendly with the patients."

"I see." I didn't want to push things, it was so easy to be misinterpreted when your credit rating outclassed everyone in the room. "Well," I winced as she quite professionally drew blood from one finger, "I'll consider that my loss."

She smiled again as she inserted the samples into her desk workstation. It chimed pleasantly almost immediately. "Very well, Mr. —" she glanced at the screen unnecessarily "— Helling, you can go right in."

I nodded and turned for the door.

"Oh, Mr. Helling?"

I paused and turned back to her.

"Happy birthday! One hundred thirty; that's impressive!" There was nothing nice in her eyes.

I glanced around the room in a reflexive shame reaction. "Thank you." I managed, hating her. I hesitated, watching her cheerful smile slowly turn quizzical. "Do you know who I am? Why I get to be here?"

Her smile was carefully plastic. "No," she admitted.

Nor, I could see, did she care. I turned back to the entrance, hating her. Just as she was undoubtedly hating me, for still being alive.

What had I done? Most people didn't understand, it was technical. Basically, I'd invented the Super Registry System for the Bowman CPU – every computer system in the world ran on a BCPU and I'd been a part of that team. As a result, I got my name on the Preserve Lists. How I got voted into the program is a tedious story; suffice to say my shares in the BCPU profits gave me more cash on hand than most companies, or small countries.

"Hello, Mike, you're looking well."

Dr. Bellinger was a cheerful, loud man. I wasn't sure I cared for him, but he was very good. "Thanks, doc. Getting harder and harder to get in here, ain't it?"

He put a hand on my shoulder and shook his head. "Ah, I'm sorry. But some Hacker faked a bunch of HDPT numbers and we had a rush of illegals in here." He chuckled unattractively. "I almost scheduled a kidney transplant on one particularly good actor, before the Feds flagged the file. So we've had to tighten up security for a while."

I shook my head. "It's all a damn shame."

He looked at me strangely. "Sure, sure. Now, what's the problem?"

I sighed, and was wracked by a few quick, wet coughs.

"Hmmm...your Lung Regeneration might be finking out, Dr. Helling. Have a seat on the unit there and we'll see."

I nodded. I was beginning to hate the doctor, too – not to mention myself.

There were demonstrators in front of my building again, so I told my driver to drive through the park until the police gave us the all-clear. I accessed my mail from the rear console. I ignored most of it: two requests that I speak at commencements, one request for an interview, a few personal notes I flagged 'keep as new', and two death threats which lacked flair or originality or, for that matter, a serious attempt at anonymizing their transfer protocols. I bundled these off to my mail server's security office.

I went back to the personal messages. There was a quick note from Diedre which made me smile; at one hundred and three she was still vibrant and hilarious and still one of the few people who could make me laugh. Then a long report from one of my Kid PhDs at the lab, which I scanned quickly – we still hadn't solved the heat

problems on our experimental processors – but he'd attached almost two gigs of patch code so I forwarded it to my desktop. Finally, there was a typically audio-only missive from my daughter.

"Dad," her voice wheezes into the backseat of the car, "I hope this message finds you well."

Denise is seventy-four years old. She calls me once a week to let me know that she's still alive.

"I couldn't get out of bed today, so I'm calling you from the portable unit. It's damp in here and the arthritis is kicking up its heels."

I could have given Denise full HDPT coverage, but she'd refused. She was growing old, dying. I knew that one day no call would come from her, and that she would be dead.

"I hear they're protesting your building again. I don't know why you stay in New York. Go someplace they can't find you."

Friends and colleagues asked me that all the time, mailing me from their bunkers in the mountains, in the country. They seemed to think new York – any city – was a madhouse. They were right, in a sense. There were protests, bombings, murders – riots. It was dangerous.

"You're too stubborn, I guess. I have to go, I'm getting lightheaded."

She never said goodbye, she just disconnected. I listened to the clicks and hisses of the system eating its tail for a few seconds. Then my driver buzzed in.

"Sir? The police have cleared the street outside your building."

"Okay. Let's go home."

I watched the curfew-emptied park slip by. Pasted on the inside of the front windshield were six black magnetic disks that broadcast my various clearances, which were very high-level, giving me the ability to ignore various curfews, prohibited areas, and access to private lots. We were the only car in the park, as far as I could tell.

"It's a sad and lonely world we've inherited, Charles." I said.

My driver might have been surprised at hearing his name. "Yes, sir." He eventually replied.

There were still some protestors in the streets, and plenty of police. Only illegals and unfortunates walked the streets these days. The rest of us had cars. The poor souls left shouting across from my building were a pathetic bunch. Some were weeping, some were yelling at the cops. Some were unconscious. There was trash and blood in the streets as well, but I didn't ponder it. Most of the protestors turned their attention to my car as we approached, shouting at us. One soul heaved a bottle, which shattered harmlessly against the windshield.

As we swept into the parking garage, I turned to look out the back. It was just a swarm of police.

"Welcome home, Dr. Helling."

I'd never gotten used to the apartment speaking to me. I had the

source code and bus map for the system but my interns considered it a juvenile challenge to keep it TSR in my apartment. Every time I disabled the Verbal Interface they had it back again within hours – a trojan they believed remained undetected in the OS registry alerted them every time I disabled it. In truth, I left the trojan in to keep them amused.

"Good evening, Humbert." I said tiredly.

"Happy birthday."

I nodded. "Quiet Mode, Humbert."

I made a cup of coffee and went into the lab. The apartment was twenty rooms, and I used two of them on a regular basis – three when impressing someone, which wasn't often. The staff kept the place dusted and neat for ghosts and imaginings, parties never held, and a family long gone.

I didn't do any real work. I used my privileged ID to log onto the nets, and I lurked in the unmoderated offshore groups, reading endless screeds against people like me. I never posted anything; it was dangerous and they didn't want to hear from me anyway. I enjoyed reading them, though, because they weren't cleaned up and blacklined like the in-country nets. If you sifted through the garbage you often got news most people never heard. Or cared to.

"Excuse me, sir."

I closed my eyes. "I asked for Quiet Mode."

"I apologize, sir. I have an Emergency Interrupt from Dr. Bellinger."

"Store it, please."

"It is an Emergency Interrupt, sir."

I couldn't lose a privilege battle in my own home. "SU to Root, voiceprint password. Basic shell."

"Yes sir."

"Store all messages."

"Yes sir."

"Shut down."

"Good bye."

There was a slight hum, and then blessed silence. I returned my attention to my browser. People knew I kept my OS off-line. No one would bother me.

"Sit down, please."

I tried to swallow some coughs and failed. I spat into a handkerchief. Across the desk from me Dr. Bellinger kept his eyes averted, studying his fingers carefully.

"Dr. Helling, I'm afraid our tests indicate your synthetic lungs are undergoing a premature degeneration cycle. As you know your organs are genetically tagged to degenerate at a natural pace, since perfect organs invariably are rejected by the imperfect host body." He finally looked up at me. "I'm afraid a replacement procedure is required."

I coughed again. "No."

He had already begun speaking again. "We can admit you next

Tuesday, if that's convenient, and have you home by Thursday. I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but no procedure is perfect. I'm sure you understand." He began looking through files. "Luckily, you're on the Full Med list with the FHD, so none of this is a problem."

I shook my head. "No."

"As a matter of fact, some of the new work these magicians over at —"

"I'm not submitting a claim."

He stopped and stared at me. An expression was on his face. I didn't recognize the expression. From the look on his face, the gentle tremble of his muscles, it seemed like he didn't recognize it either.

"Excuse me?"

I stood up, shaking my head. "No, doc, I've lived long enough, don't you think?"

He stared at me for a moment. "Mr. Helling — Doctor Helling —"

Even I forgot my PhDs sometimes; I'd earned the last one almost seventy years ago.

"—frankly, I don't—"

I offered him an infuriating smile my first wife taught me.

He gestured at my vacant seat. "Please, Dr. Helling." He waited for me to take my seat, then gave me a smarmy smile which reminded me that I didn't entirely like him.

"Dr. Helling, it is not uncommon for people on the HDPT TL list to go through something like this — typically significantly *after* their century mark. Having just turned — what, a hundred and thirty? — you're a prime candidate."

The condescending prick. 'TL' — doctor slang for *to live*, an unkind, arrogant term most MDs had the wisdom to avoid.

I kept the wattage high on my smile. "Are you suggesting this is some sort of mid-life crisis?"

I could see the retreat flash across his face as he realized he'd made an error. He opened his mouth to respond, then seemed to think better of it, shutting it with a click and settling back in his chair.

"Please consider, Dr. Helling, that the majority of the human race does not live as long as you and I. Health science is achieving more every day — a lifespan of two hundred and fifty is becoming common — but such drastic technological and medical resources are not available to most of the citizens. It is highly unusual for you to be as old as you are, Dr. Helling, and you should consider the possibility that you are not equipped with the mental context to deal with your situation."

I nodded. "I *have* come to realize that I have become an artificial being. A piece of wetware."

This was obviously not where he'd thought he'd taken me. He blinked. "I don't see —"

"My lungs, liver, heart and one kidney were lab-created. I am injected twice a year with synthetic enzymes and cocktails that retard the natural erosion of my synapses and muscle proteins. I've got three plastic bones." I shook my head. "Two years ago when I fell and broke my hip, the HD wanted to implant a chip to aid my coordination and

balance." I laughed. "You're turning me into a cyborg."

"I think that's a poor choice of word."

I shrugged. "I do not."

"Dr. Helling, your attitude and reasoning are not unusual for someone of your 'vintage'. Trust me. I have seen this before. Trust me as well when I say that it will pass. In every instance I've encountered this 'malaise' or 'mid-life crisis' it has proven to be brief. Think of it as a 'necessary mental reevaluation of your situation.'"

I could just about see the phantom quotation marks floating in the air by his words. I didn't care for them.

"In other words, a phase."

He looked down at his shoes. "Dr. Helling, I can see you think I'm patronizing you. I assure you I am not. I won't schedule this procedure yet. I ask you not to make any rash decisions. Wait a month before doing anything."

"In case I snap out of this."

He glanced back up at me. "Not much to ask. And in the mean time your illness will be running its course."

"And friends and colleagues can work on me."

He shrugged. "If your resolve on this matter can't withstand your friends and colleagues, Dr. Helling, well – then it isn't resolve at all."

It was my turn to open my mouth and then shut it. "You have a point, doctor. And I admit I haven't made any plans anyway, so 'letting the disease run its course' won't be any great burden."

"Thank you. Can I make another appointment a month from today to discuss this again?"

I stood, nodding. "If I live that long."

He laughed. I think he'd primed himself to laugh at whatever little joke I made on my exit. We shook hands. I was trying to remember Dr. Sallow's private number; I wanted to talk with him. He'd been my doctor for fifty-three years, but he'd retired a year ago at the age of one hundred and sixty-seven.

Doctors ranked in the top three Skill Levels were automatically on the 'To Live' Lists.

We played golf on Sunday. Dr. Sallow had a membership at Lansing Green, which even I couldn't get into. After nine holes we retired for martinis.

"You come to me about that cough, Michael?" he asked.

"Indirectly, Tom." I admitted. "I hope you don't mind."

Sallow was a tall, tanned man with powerful, hairy arms that amazed me with the feats of dexterity he achieved. He flashed a smile. "Mike, I practiced medicine at the top Skill Level for ninety-one years. I didn't do it for the money. Go ahead."

I sipped my drink. "I've decided to not seek treatment."

His glass paused in mid-air. "Mike," he said with a little cough, "that's very dangerous. At your age unsupported physical decay can be fast."

I nodded. Nothing was said for a few moments.

"Is this suicide, Mike?"

I blinked. "I wasn't thinking of it that way."

He nodded, and gulped more of his drink than was necessary. "Legally, you know, it fits the definition. I could submit a report to the HD Council and have you treated against your will."

I sighed and dissolved into coughs. "Will you do that?"

"I don't know, Mike."

I stared into my drink. "It doesn't seem right that I can be forced to live, and the unlucky in the world can't get treatments like this under any circumstances."

Sallow laughed, throwing his head back. "Oh, Mike. It's amazing. You sound like me, forty years ago."

I leaned back with my drink. "Not you too."

He sighed. "Listen, Mike – just listen for a second. Sometimes people keep telling you the same thing simply because it's true. It's not a conspiracy. Everyone goes through this." He held up his hands.

"Everyone. It's natural for you to worry about this; you're intelligent, educated, accomplished – you're an invaluable asset to society." He tapped the table forcefully. "*Those other people are not.* And thus we cannot afford to maintain them."

I looked back at him. "I don't care for that term."

"That's too bad. Mike, the only reason you're a Level One HD priority is your work. You're brilliant, you contribute to society, so society maintains you."

I tried to interrupt. He waved me off.

"It costs billions, Mike. Billions every year, just to keep you alive. That money is not spent on you because you're a nice fellow with pretty good manners. It's an investment. Or, in some ways, a compensation for past achievements." He shook his head. "We cannot afford to spend that money on someone who has nothing to sell. And to throw that away is the height of arrogance, ignorance, and selfishness."

He sat back and raised his glass and obviously expected that to stun me.

"I'm not that important, Tom."

His eyes, ancient and dry in that tan, taut face, flicked to me over the rim of his glass.

"Not for you to decide." he said.

I spent the next two days and nights in my lab, savagely disassembling my team's latest work. My notes were mean and borderline-insulting and I knew most of them would be quaking after reading them, wondering if I was going to fire them all. I had kept Humbert on a basic shell the whole time, basking in silence. Finally I emerged and let him surface. Immediately, his calm, neutral voice came up on the ambient signal.

"Dr. Helling, there is an urgent message from the Federal Health Department. I also have red-flagged messages from Dr. Bellinger, your law office, and Diedre Salinger from the NASA net."

I paused. "Play Ms. Salinger's message, Humbert. Audio only."

"Michael, damn you and your screening! At least I hope you're

screening and not sequestered. The FHD is going to put you down for an Involuntary Procedure, or so my sources tell me. What have you been up to for god's sake? Call me. Any time. I'll give your Sig to my shell for Emergency Override. Call."

I sat down in my kitchen, and rubbed my eyes. "Play the FHD message, Humbert."

"Dr. Helling, pending conclusion of an investigation you have been temporarily scheduled for an IV LUNG REGENERATION and TRANSPLANT. Please contact this office at PTP-slash-FHD-dot-one-one-four."

Silence. I stared at the white counter for a few moments. "Humbert, play the message from Max."

"Mike, this is Max. Listen, buddy, I'm sure you've heard what's going on. If you were planning to refuse treatment, kiddo, you should have brought me in on it weeks ago, to lay the groundwork. At any rate, an M.D. named Sallow submitted your name to an Investigative Committee and they pulled Bellinger's file. All perfectly legal. I've filed the usual injunctions and appeals but the FHD will invoke its 'Best Interests of the Patient' mandate and they'll win. Give me a call or stop in - it's imperative we get cracking on this. I'm not sure what you want me to do."

I leaned back. "Play Bellinger's message, please."

His was brief. "Dr. Helling, I'm sorry. I just want you to know I meant to honor our agreement. It's out of my hands. Best of luck."

I let a moment go by. "Store all four permanently, Humbert. Put a link through to Max, and record it."

"Should this be audio only, Dr. Helling?"

I sighed. "No, give me a flat visual."

Max popped up in midair about a minute later, just his balding head.

"Mike! Thank god! What the hell have you been up to?"

I shrugged. "Work, actually."

He gave me a steady look. "Is it true you refused life-saving treatment?"

I sighed again, and collapsed into coughing. "I hadn't -" cough "realized -" cough "that it had gotten to that point."

He shook his head. "Christ, Mike." He glanced down. "Well, I had to assume you did this on purpose, Mike, so I've filed six motions on your behalf. They'll all get quashed in court, but it will delay things a little." He leveled his stare. "Get your ass in here. I need an indie M.D. to render a diagnosis. And I need you to explain to me why you deserve to die."

I opened my mouth.

"And please spare me the hippie pro-choice death argument, okay?" He snapped. "I'm your lawyer, Mike. I don't need to be convinced; I'll do my best to see your wishes served regardless of how I feel about them. You need to convince the court, Mike. And for that I'll need data. So boogie. I'll send a car."

I nodded. "Fine."

Max blinked away.

"Humbert, alert me when the car arrives for me."

"Connecting to Auto Track...searching...I have it, sir."

I sat and waited.

"Have a seat, Mike."

I sat down in one of the plush leather chairs across from Max's huge oak desk. To my surprise he sat in the other. We watched his pretty secretary – a class III worker Max had granted Level Three HD status at his own expense. It was unusual. I assumed he was having an affair with her, but bumping her two HD grades was hugely expensive.

As she shut the door, Max sighed. "Mike, it's not good. My motions, as expected, didn't last long. And my doctor concurs that without a regen you'll die in a few months. The courts are going to hear arguments tomorrow at noon but," he spread his hands, "I'm not sure what I can argue."

"Max," I asked, "is your shell recording this?"

He glanced upward. "It records everything, Mike. Necessary precaution. Please don't ask me to turn it off."

I leaned forward. I was actually enjoying myself. "Tell them they can perform the surgery, but I'll starve myself."

Max stared at me. I imagined I could hear his office shell whirring and clicking, down at the subatomic level of its nanos.

"If they hook me up to IV fluids," I continued slowly, "I'll try something else."

For a second, Max just watched me in silence. Then he stood up, laced his hands behind his back, and paced away from me, suddenly turning to face me again.

"Zelda, lock my office and go dumb."

A short click of the door lock was the only response.

"Mike, forgive me. I know you've been through this already, and I know your doctors have tried to talk you out of this, but I have to get this straight if I'm going to represent your interests."

"Are you? Going to represent my interests?"

He smiled and looked down at his shoes. "Mike, come on. I'm your lawyer." He looked me in the eye, then. "Yes, I will. But first I need to understand. After I understand, you will need to be evaluated by psychologists. Okay?"

I studied his face, then nodded. "Okay."

He took a deep breath, then paused. "Mike, this is going to happen fast. Don't think I'll be able to delay until...it becomes moot. This will be decided in four days, at most. The HD doesn't fuck around."

This was very disappointing, and I guess it showed. I shrugged. "Okay, Max. Thank you for being honest."

Max waited a moment, and then looked around. "Zelda, resume script, unlock door." He sat back down. "All right. Explain it to me."

"Quite suddenly," I began immediately, "I have realized that I need to let nature take its course." I sighed. "Max, if you really meant what you said, about being a lawyer –my lawyer– then that's all you

need to know, isn't it? I don't think of this as suicide, although I realize that death is a significant possibility. I just need to let the natural order of things assert itself." I shrugged. "Call it a religious belief."

"Mike, I may have to, to push this through the courts."

I stood. "You know how to bill me."

"Where can I reach you?"

"My shell will know how to reach me, Max. Thank you for not dropping me."

He nodded; he was still looking at my chair. "No thanks called for, Mike. I'm a professional."

That depressed me, and I left.

Sitting in the car, I listened to the news absently as we passed through the Federal Checkpoints on the EHS access ramp. We were crawling along, inches at a time. The Feds did full background checks on every person in every vehicle on the EHS ramps; trying to gain illegal access to the ancient highway system was a grave crime, and an enthusiastically prosecuted one.

I had tuned in to one of the offshore stations for news. They were shrill and paranoid and I didn't know if I could believe it all, but I thought there was value in it.

There were riots in Detroit, according to the offshore. Thousands of people had stormed the hospitals, smashing equipment and attacking the staff. Dozens of the Full-Coverage patients had been killed. Cities across the country were implementing contingency plans in case it was an organized conspiracy.

"Humbert, link to the Detroit net."

For simplicity, I'd named all my shells Humbert.

The Detroit net reported rain, heavy traffic, a postponement of the opera that night. And then went to local restaurant reviews, delivered by some pompous-sounding Englishman.

"Disconnect audio, Humbert."

I studied the back of my driver's head as we inched up the ramp. "How are you, Charles?"

His head turned slightly to the side. "Sir?"

"How are you?"

"How do you mean, sir?"

I sighed. "Charles, I'm asking if you are of sound mind, body, and soul. If you have any complaints. If you look forward to waking up in the morning, if you enjoy your work, hate your boss. If your back aches. I am asking you, human to human, how you *are*."

He drove in silence for a few moments. "I don't think that's something humorous, sir."

I'd offended him. Maybe he thought I was throwing high level medical coverage in his face. I leaned back and closed my eyes.

"I apologize, Charles. I was honestly asking."

Another moment. "Very well, sir. I'm very well."

I smiled.

A sharp tapping at the window woke me up. A dour-faced woman was peering at me. I rolled down the window.

"ID, please."

I handed it over. "Nice day, isn't it?"

She took my papers without a word and walked away.

"They're being very strict today, sir." Charles offered suddenly. "Something must have happened."

I told him about the reports I'd heard about Detroit. The back of his head nodded. "That would do it, sir."

When the Federal Officer came back with my papers, she seemed disappointed to have to pass us through.

"What is your destination, sir?" She asked curtly, handing back my dossier.

"Philadelphia."

She jotted this down. "Purpose of trip?"

"Personal."

She glanced at me as she wrote. "Sir, is your car shell recording?"

I frowned. "No."

"Please set it to do so."

I paused, then nodded, coughing. "Humbert, ambient record."

"Doctor Michael Helling, it is my duty to inform you that your file has been yellow flagged by the FHD pending the resolution of Court Docket NY23A49-7. This means that while your movements, financial transactions, and other activities have not been restricted, they will be monitored. My Federal ID is X-V761A and it is four-oh seven p.m. on November 16th. Do you have any questions regarding this action?"

I coughed. "No, officer."

She nodded without looking at me. "Very well. Please sign here and instruct your shell to log this recording with Federal Records."

I signed with a shaky hand, and told Humbert to do so. She tore a carbon from her clipboard and handed it to me.

"Have a good day."

I watched her step back and wave us through.

"Don't speed." I sighed wetly. "We're being watched."

I peered at the slip of paper. Even though I'd had my laser update a few months before and didn't think anything had gone wrong, the paper was blurry in the dimly lit hall of the building. Doors lined each of the walls, each a flat green color, each numbered. I matched the number on the door with that on the paper, folded the latter carefully, and returned it to my pockets.

I knocked. There wasn't a shell interface.

Immediately, a door down the hall opened. I turned in time to glimpse a gray form as it dashed back inside and shut the door behind it. I coughed in the dusty air, and each cough was punctuated by a hitching pain in my chest.

Behind the door, I could hear movement. Then, dim from behind the metal: "Who is it?"

I swallowed coughs. "Denise?"

For a long, shapeless while there was nothing. Then, the door trembled as locks were undone, and it slid inward.

My daughter was an artist of no recognized ability. If she'd been talented her life might have been better – fame brought wealth and health benefits, if she would have accepted them. If she wouldn't take them from me as a gift, I didn't know if she would take them from society, either.

I hadn't seen her in thirty-one years, around the time she'd started to look older than me. Not even on video. So the shrunken, wizened woman who greeted me in astonishment was quite a shock.

"Dad?" she said. "What's going on?"

I couldn't speak. Tears filled my eyes. "May I –" I finally managed. "May I come in?"

She stared at me for a few seconds. Even the best HD rating couldn't stop the aging process altogether, and I looked older than when she'd seen me last. She reached out a thin, baggy arm and touched the lapel of my overcoat.

Suddenly, she stepped back. "Come in!" she said, and I stepped into her apartment.

It was one large room. Dim, no windows. Dusty. Painted white, cold concrete floors. I looked around at the scavenged furniture and the pathetic attempts at decor. I'd tried to keep her from this, but she'd refused.

"It isn't much, of course," she said fussily, her breathing labored. "But the rent is free. The city's declared these old building Squatter's Homes, for people like me."

I'd heard of that program. I sat gingerly on the deflated couch and looked up at my daughter. She was wearing a thin pullover print dress that fit badly. She was standing staring at me as if she had no idea what to do, her hands nervous and fidgety.

I looked around again. The walls were covered in her paintings: She favored sunsets. None of them objectively special, but they covered the walls gloriously, endless interpretations, the active perseverance of hope despite her grim surroundings and crappy father. On an easel in the corner was an unfinished one. I wondered how she afforded the paints, the canvas.

"I sell one, sometimes." She said shyly, as if sensing my question. "I go to the Square sometimes and set up a booth. Sometimes people buy one."

I looked back at her, feeling thick. We look at each other. "Denise," I said hollowly, "I have been such a fool."

It was finally time to be mortal, and only fitting. She'd read about me in the Tech journals, of course. I asked her about the past thirty years: She'd lived in artist communes, been arrested a few times, mostly for Theft of Service when one of the commune members had gotten sick. I'd at least managed to force a good education on her, and she'd been able to act rich when necessary. She told me about her emphysema, how she got out of breath all the time, passed out

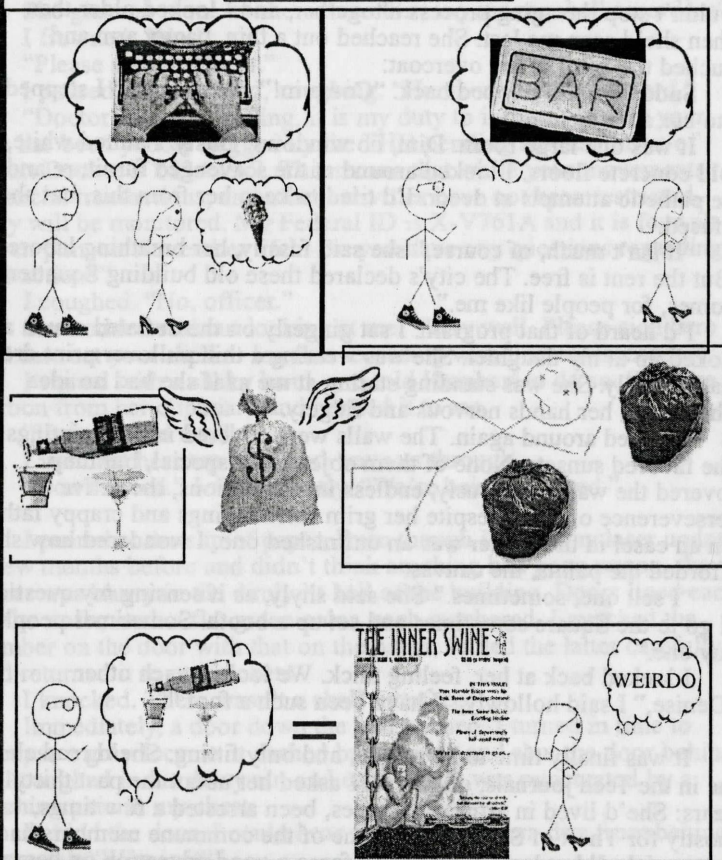
sometimes.

I told her how everything had changed for me, just recently, and how the forces of the world were aligning against me. Then I told her I knew how arrogant that sounded, that I knew I hadn't changed, would never change. I told her how even my work at the lab felt like old work, how I didn't understand anyone, anymore.

She smiled, old and beautiful. "And now you're here at last with me."

Then Denise put on our tea, bitter and dark, and brewed it according to my instructions. And we toasted each other, and laughed for the first time in thirty-one years, and slept.

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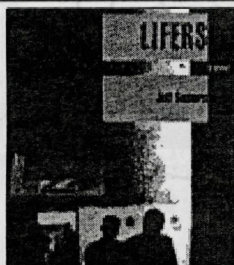


NO FUTURE

The Next Issue, Sort-of Anticipated

Well, another 60-page chunk of my life broken off and handed to you, you unappreciative bastards. But even as the toner dries on these pages and my personal Gimp sits licking stamps and whining piteously, my fevered brain is working on the next issue. As always, there will be some sort of lame theme. This time, I think, the theme will be *Entertainment* in all its vile forms: How we make it, how we use it, the role it serves in our lives. Or has it become our lives? Whew, thoughts like that make me sleepy. Until then, send me some money.

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