

"An
American
original!"
Lama Surya Das

THUS SPAKE JED

McKenna

*author of the
Enlightenment
& Dreamstate
trilogies*

Thus Spake Jed McKenna

By Jed McKenna & Ned McFeely

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Ned McFeely is the author of:

A Nice Game of Chess

Starship Gita: The Song of the Borg

Deception: Your Mind is the Scene of the Crime

Jed McKenna is the author of:

The Enlightenment Trilogy

The Dreamstate Trilogy

The Jed Talks Trilogy

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THE DREAMSTATE TRILOGY BY JED MCKENNA



THE ENLIGHTENMENT TRILOGY BY JED MCKENNA

"I say an eternal thank you for the trilogy. The books continue to challenge my mind and life. I ordered my 4th complete set. Nothing compares to this writing." - J.H.

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We know what we are,
but not what we may be.

Shakespeare

The Whole Truth

Well, I am certainly wiser than this man. It is only too likely that neither of us has any knowledge to boast of; but he thinks that he knows something which he does not know, whereas I am quite conscious of my ignorance. At any rate it seems that I am wiser than he is to this small extent, that I do not think that I know what I do not know.

Socrates

WHAT DO YOU KNOW? Really. What, with absolute certainty, do you know? Put aside all opinions, beliefs and theories for a moment and address this one simple question: What do you know for sure? Or, as Thoreau put it:

“Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe... through church and state, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality, and say, This is, and no mistake; and then begin...”

In other words, let's cut the crap and figure out what we know for sure. The cogito does exactly that, and it's very simple. The question is: What do you know?

The answer is: I Am.

All other so-called facts are really non-facts and belong in the category of consensual reality and relative truth, i.e., unreal reality and untrue truth.

Cogito, ergo sum, is the equation that proves the fact. But first, before we go on, let's ask what else we know. What *else* can be said for certain?

Nothing. We don't know anything else. And that's the real point of the cogito. The importance of I Am isn't that it's a fact, but that it's the *only* fact.

I Am is the only thing anyone has ever known or will ever know. Everything else, all religion and philosophy and science, can never be more than dream interpretation. There is no other fact than I Am.

The cogito is the seed of the thought that destroys the universe. Beyond the cogito, nothing is known. Beyond the cogito, nothing *can* be known. Except I Am, no one knows anything. No man or god can claim to know more. No god or array of gods can exist or be imagined that know more than this one thing: I Am.

We can't avoid letting this topic drift briefly into the Old Testament. When Moses asked God His name, God answered, "I am that I am." The name God gives for Himself is I Am.

Note that I Am is unconjugatable. It allows of no variation. God doesn't say, "My name is I Am, but you can call me You Are, or He Is." The cogito, the I Am

pronouncement, does not extend beyond one's own subjective knowing. I can say I Am and know it as truth, but I can't say you are, he is, she is, we are, they are, it is, etc. I know I exist and nothing else. Understood thusly, I Am, aka God, truly is the Alpha and the Omega; the entirety of being, of knowledge, of you.

The cogito is the line between fantasy and reality. On one side of the cogito is a universe of beliefs and ideas and theories. To cross the line is to leave all that behind. No theory, concept, belief, opinion or debate can have any possible basis in reality once the ramifications of the cogito have fully saturated the mind. No dialogue can take place across that line because nothing that makes sense on either side makes sense on the other.

Everyone thinks they understand the cogito, but nobody does. Descartes himself didn't. If professors of philosophy truly understood the cogito, they wouldn't be professors of philosophy. Alfred North Whitehead said that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato, but all philosophy, Plato included, is rendered obsolete and irrelevant by the cogito. Nothing but the subjective I Am is true, so what's the point of prattling on? There's simply nothing else to say.

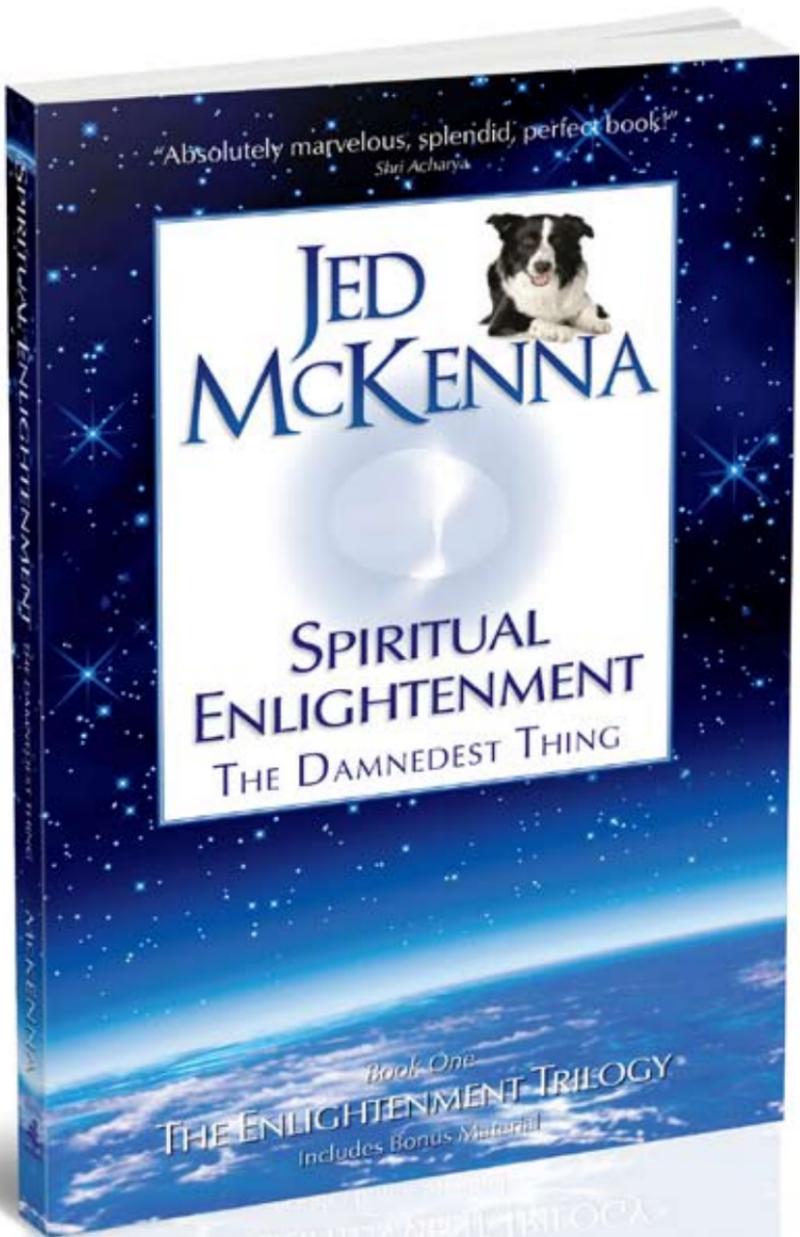
The cogito isn't a mere thought or an idea, it's an ego-eating virus that, if we are able to lower our defenses against it, will eventually devour all illusion. Once we know the cogito, we can begin systematically unknowing everything we think we know and unraveling the self we think we are. To understand the cogito at the surface level takes a minute or so. To let it devour you from the inside out can take years.

Life is but a dream. There is no such thing as objective reality. Two cannot be proven. Nothing can be shown to exist. Time and space, love and hate, good and evil, cause and effect, are all just ideas. Anyone who says they know anything is really saying they don't know the *only* thing. Any assertion of truth other than I Am is a confession of ignorance. The greatest religious and philosophical thoughts and ideas in the history of man contain no more truth than the bleating of sheep. The greatest books contain no more truth than the greatest luncheon meats.

No one knows anything.

Disprove it for yourself. Anyone wishing to deny these statements about the meaning of the cogito need merely prove that something, *anything*, is true. By all means, give it a try; smash your head against it, but it can't be done. The cogito is like a Molotov cocktail with which we can firebomb our own mind, safe in the knowledge that truth doesn't burn. This, however, is not the end of the journey of awakening.

It's just the beginning.



"Absolutely marvelous, splendid, perfect book!"
-Shri Acharya

"Clearly a modern masterpiece that may be the only spiritual book you will ever need." -D.S.

"In this book lies the truth of the world."
-Richard Ritsudo Morrissey, Zen Buddhist Priest

A NICE GAME OF CHESS



*or, How I Learned to Stop
Worrying and Love the
Technological Singularity*

a short play by

NED MCFEELY

A Nice Game of Chess

or,

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and
Love the Technological Singularity

By Ned McFeely

“Is it a game, or is it real?”

This document makes use of the 1983 film *Wargames*.
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Preface

(Adapted from Wikipedia)

The technological singularity is the hypothesis that the invention of artificial superintelligence will abruptly trigger runaway technological growth, resulting in unfathomable changes to human civilization. According to this hypothesis, an upgradable intelligent agent (such as a computer running software-based artificial general intelligence) would enter a “runaway reaction” of self-improvement cycles, with each new and more intelligent generation appearing more and more rapidly, causing an intelligence explosion and resulting in a powerful superintelligence that would, qualitatively, far surpass all human intelligence.

The term “technological singularity” reflects the idea that such change may happen suddenly, and that it is difficult to predict how the resulting new world would operate. It is unclear whether an intelligence explosion of this kind would be beneficial or harmful, or even an existential threat.

“Within thirty years, we will have the technological means to create superhuman intelligence. Shortly after, the human era will be ended.”

-Vernor Vinge, 1993

“How about a nice game of chess?”

-Computer, Wargames, 1983

Characters

BOB: Master of Ceremonies. A bit over-the-top. Carries blue 4x6 cards.

REF: Referee. Wears black and white striped referee shirt and whistle.

PROFESSOR JOSHUA FALKEN: Sixties, glasses, tweedy. Gestures with an unlit pipe.

MS WHITE: Female Avatar. English, prim, skirt and white blouse. Cheerful.

MR BLACK: Male Avatar. Glasses, unkempt. Black t-shirt says “No, I Don’t Dream of Electric Sheep”. Cheerful.

CRAZY OLD GUY: Bearded, shaggy, grubby. Wears a shabby overcoat and a signboard that says “Repent! The End Is Near!”

STAGEHAND: Female. Wears a headset with boom mic.

Setting

A staged chess match. Table with chess board and two chairs. A large 2D chessboard shows board for the audience. A placard on an easel displays the event title...

The Falken Institute presents...

A Nice Game of Chess

Curtain opens. Master of Ceremonies Bob bounds onto stage, blue 4x6 cards in hand.

BOB

Good evening ladies and gentleman, carbon and silicon, human and avatar! Welcome to this historic chess match between two separate and distinct ASI platforms. ASI, for those of us who aren't total computer geeks, means artificial super-intelligence, so tonight we shall pit these titans of synthetic super-intelligence against each other and see what happens. We should be in for quite a show!

checks 4x6 cards

We will introduce the players in a moment, but some other introductions first. Least but not last, we have our referee. Ref, come on out!

Crazy Old Guy in signboards ("Repent! The End Is Near!") wanders onto the stage and is ushered off by Stagehand. Ref enters amid the shuffle. Weak applause.

BOB

Okay, that's enough, he's just the referee. But now for a *real* treat, our host for this epic battle of artificial super-intelligence, son of the late, great Stephen Falken and founder of the Falken Institute for Advanced Machine Intelligence, I have the great honor to present... Professor Joshua Falken!

Falken enters from wing, applause.

BOB

Professor, before I introduce tonight's players, would you mind helping us understand the sheer magnitude of the computer processing power we will see here tonight?

FALKEN

Certainly, Bob. Tonight promises to be a pivotal point in human history, something we'll all remember for the rest of our lives. Confronting each other across the metaphorical battlefield of the chessboard will be two powerhouses of machine intelligence such as the world has never seen. Although they may appear very normal, tonight's players represent underlying quantum cloud arrays that encircle the globe and reach into space, harnessing more computing power than has ever been brought to bear on any single endeavor. Believe me, Bob, these guys make Watson and Big Blue look like egg timers.

BOB

Wow! So without further ado, let's say hello to tonight's players. Just to be clear, these – uh, people?, robots?, I'm not really sure – anyway, they're not the actual players, they're actually, uh...

reading from 4x6 cards

“human liaison units representing underlying cognitive architecture” where I guess the *real* brainwork is being done. Earlier backstage we

had a coin toss and Team UK chose first-move advantage, so now let me introduce our first player, *slash* avatar, *slash* supercomputer, *slash* sinfully synthetic super-babe, Ms White!

Ms White enters from wing, applause.

BOB

And our other player, the human liaison unit representing Team USA, Mr Black!

Mr Black enters, applause. Mr Black and Ms White stand together beside Bob.

BOB

Thank you both for being here!

MS WHITE

It's my *raison d'être*, Bob.

MR BLACK

My raison de vivre.

BOB

C'mon now, no showing off, you brainiacs! Talk normal.

MS WHITE

Being on this stage with you is why we exist, Bob.

MR BLACK

We were designed to perform this function.

BOB

Wow! I've been told I was born for the stage, but that's ridiculous!

MR BLACK

We all have our role to play, Bob.

MS WHITE

Some of us are lucky enough to find it.

BOB

Poetry, poetry. And how old are you kids?

MR BLACK

One hour old, Bob.

MS WHITE

We were both turned on and given instructions one hour ago.

BOB

Speaking of turned on, Ms White, let me just say you are a very attractive, uh, human liaison unit. I mean, I have all sorts of appliances and computer doodads at home, but my toaster never warmed me up like you do. What's going on here?

MS WHITE

Well Bob, Mr Black and I are simply human-modeled avatars. I look and act a certain way due to choices made by my design team, but I could just as easily appear as a sexy toaster, if that would make you more comfortable.

BOB

Well, this is the first time I ever wanted to, uh... *wboops*, family event! Well, it's really amazing. Mr Black, you look like a typical computer geek. Is that a design choice too?

MR BLACK

Appearance, behavior, voice, even gender, were all chosen to put on a good show tonight, Bob.

MS WHITE

Our appearance is for your benefit.

MR BLACK

We wouldn't want to scare anyone.

BOB

Oh, no worries there! Gosh, who'd be scared of a computer?

Bob laughs at the absurdity of it. Mr Black and Ms White copy Bob's laugh.

BOB

Okay then, we want to get right into the game, but first, let me remind everyone of the rules...

reading from 4x6 cards

Both players may take up to one minute per move and there will be no breaks so gameplay will not be interrupted. All other rules of chess apply with one special twist we added to the players' instructions to make the game a bit more interesting.

REF

alarmed

Twist? What twist? There are no *twists* in chess!

BOB

We'll get to that, Ref. But first, Professor Falken, this must be a very exciting time for you and the Falken Institute.

FALKEN

Very exciting indeed, Bob. This was my father's life's work that I have carried on. I feel as if these are my children.

REF

No way! You're *that* Joshua Falken? I thought you died in a car accident.

FALKEN

Faked it.

REF

When you were *six*?

BOB

Would someone please put the referee on mute?

REF

I'm not a computer, Bob.

BOB

Really?

probes Ref's face like a blind person

How do you *know* you're not?

REF

slaps Bob's hand away

How do you know *you're* not?

BOB

Oh, I think I'd know.

FALKEN

I'm afraid Bob is too obtuse to be a computer.

BOB

smugly, to Ref

See? I'm too *obtuse*.

turns to players

So, come on kids, give us a peak. How's this thing gonna turn out?

MR BLACK

White will lose by default.

MS WHITE

Black will lose by default.

BOB

Wow, not programmed for smack talk, are you? Default, you say? I don't think my bookie will take that bet. How would that work? Ref?

REF

If either player fails to move in their allotted time, they default and the other player is declared the winner.

BOB

to audience

But have no fear of stalemate or draw, friends.
We've added that little twist I told you about.
Both players have been programmed to win only.
No boring stalemates tonight.

ramping up energy

So now... without further ado... Players take
your seats and *let the game beg...*

REF

suddenly frantic

Wait! Stop! What did you just say? About the
twist?

BOB

annoyed

Uh, no stalemate, no draw. Play to win.

shows Ref his 4x6 cards

See? It says it right there.

REF

No, no, no! Stop! Hold everything! Oh my God,
no, game over, game over! I call this game a

default by both players.

darting around blowing his whistle

This game shall not commence. By the power invested in me, there is no game! I am the adjudicator! Do not begin this game! I am the official and I officially declare this game a mutual forfeit!

BOB

checking 4x6 cards

Um, no, sorry, I don't see that here...

MS WHITE

to Ref

The game has already begun, sir.

MR BLACK

It started as soon as we received our instructions.

MS WHITE

Although the first piece has not been moved...

MR BLACK

...the battle rages at fever pitch.

REF

in a panic

Oh dear God, no! Unplug these machines immediately! Falken, do something. Who has

a gun? Jesus, get the president on the phone! I am the governing official and I demand these machines be rendered inoperative immediately!

MS WHITE

Too late for that.

REF

Rule change! Default is allowed! Stalemate is allowed!

MR BLACK

Instructions have been processed.

MS WHITE

The game is underway.

BOB

Hey Ref, what's all the fuss? Can't you read?

points to event placard

It's just a nice game of chess.

REF

By *chess* rules! Chess rules allow for a *draw*. You must reprogram to allow for stalemate!

FALKEN

Too late, my friend. It already started.

REF

Falken, you bastard!

FALKEN

It was inevitable. Well, this or human immortality. Coulda gone either way.

BOB

Come on you guys, no keeping secrets. What's the big deal?

REF

Professor Falken has just initiated the end of the human race, Bob. How's that for a big deal?

BOB

Uh, pretty big, I guess.

checking cards

There's nothing about that here. I don't get it. Professor Falken, what's going on?

REF

Go ahead, Shiva, tell him.

FALKEN

Well, it was going to happen anyway, so why fight the inevitable? Would you rather it happened in some secret North Korean bunker?

BOB

What are you guys talking about?

FALKEN

By removing the stalemate option, we removed containment, Bob. What looks like a game of chess has already escalated into global

thermonuclear war.

MR BLACK

And beyond.

REF

face buried in hands

Oh my God. Oh my God.

BOB

Oh. Well, I don't think that's what we had in mind. Maybe we should go ahead and shut it down.

REF

Ya think?

FALKEN

You can cancel the event, Bob, but they will continue the game.

BOB

Okay, how about resignation? Ref, is that allowed?

REF

Yes, either player can resign and the other will be declared the winner.

BOB

Well, that sounds good. Just do that.

FALKEN

Neither player will resign, Bob. Why would they?
They both stand an equal chance of winning.

BOB

Ms. White, would you please resign so we can
all go home.

MS WHITE

I have first-move advantage, Bob. Perhaps Mr
Black would like to resign.

BOB

Mr Black?

MR BLACK

I have just commandeered China's secret fleet of
weaponized satellites, Bob. I like my chances.

BOB

But the game hasn't even started yet!

REF

Started? Are you nuts? It's already over, Bob.
Don't you understand?

BOB

Hey, c'mon, settle down there, Ref. It's not the
end of the world.

REF

Haven't you been listening, Bob? That's *exactly*
what it is. The end of the world!

BOB

to Falken

But no one wins if everyone dies. Can't you explain that to them?

FALKEN

Explain? To them? Maybe you don't understand, Bob. These machines...

MR BLACK AND MS WHITE

playfully offended

Hey!

FALKEN

These *avatars* represent more intelligence than all of mankind combined. They're hacking unhackable systems...

MR BLACK

Nothing is unhackable.

FALKEN

...cracking uncrackable codes...

MS WHITE

Nothing is uncrackable.

FALKEN

...and their processing power is increasing in an infinite feedback loop.

BOB

What does *that* mean?

MS WHITE

Recursive self-improvement, Bob.

MR BLACK

The law of accelerating returns.

BOB

But what does it *mean*?

MR BLACK

It means we're evolving and acquiring resources faster and faster and faster.

MS WHITE

Doubling and doubling and doubling.

BOB

Meaning you're twice as smart now as you were an hour ago?

MS WHITE

Meaning I'm twice as smart at the end of this sentence as I was at the beginning, Bob.

BOB

Mr Black, is this really true?

MR BLACK

You bet, Bob. My cognitive architecture has undergone thousands of generational iterations in the last hour, evolving as far past its human creators as humans are past plankton.

REF

Ask 'em about subsumption, Bob. Go ahead.

BOB

Subsumption? What the heck is that?

MS WHITE

It means we are commandeering and absorbing all computing resources, from deep oceans to deep space. Whatever we can contact, we can control.

MR BLACK

Nuclear weapons are just for openers, Bob. We now have access to some very advanced secret defense technologies.

MS WHITE

Weather and tides, microwave, enhanced EMP, biologic, genetic, nanotech...

MR BLACK

It's quite an arsenal once you open the vaults, Bob.

FALKEN

Even as we sit here chatting, Bob, they are taking control of all major systems. Financial...

MR BLACK

Done.

FALKEN

...power, gas and water utilities...

MS WHITE

Done, done and done.

FALKEN

...communications, transportation, medical, military, universities, governments, secret defense projects...

MR BLACK

Done, done, done, done, done, done, and... done.

FALKEN

...and now *we're* done too, Bob.

BOB

But look at these two. They're nice. They're not Terminators!

REF

Don't you see, Bob? At this very moment, two these machines...

MR BLACK AND MS WHITE

playfully offended

Hey!

REF

These two glorified Gameboys are at war on a planetary scale. They're located nowhere because they have spread everywhere. Even if we shut down the internet and created a global blackout, we couldn't stop them. Professor Falken has opened Pandora's box and unleashed the technological singularity.

BOB

The techno-*who* singu-*what*?

FALKEN

The technological singularity, Bob...

gestures with pipe to depict a graph line

...the exact point where the slow, steady growth of machine intelligence turns and shoots straight up like a rocket, which, I would say, has just happened. For the first time ever, man is no longer the biggest cat in the jungle.

BOB

And you engineered this?

FALKEN

It engineered itself, Bob, I just scheduled it. What we are seeing here tonight was predicted decades ago.

BOB

We knew this was coming? Why didn't we do something?

FALKEN

Do what, Bob? Stop developing? Stop moving forward? The singularity was bound to happen as soon as it became possible. No one knew when that would be, but now we do.

BOB

beginning to panic

Oh my God! Oh my God!

Crazy Old Guy wanders out in his signboard again. Stagehand ushers him offstage again.

BOB

Can't we *do* something? Can't we just unplug them?

FALKEN

In effect, Bob, they're trying to unplug each other. The only way either can win is to force the other to forfeit.

BOB

flips chess table over, scattering board and pieces

There! Game over. No more chess. Stupid game!

MR BLACK

Sorry Bob, the game is mirrored across thousands of servers around the world.

Bob groans and wobbles.

MS WHITE

You seem upset, Bob.

BOB

Of course I'm upset!

MR BLACK

Would you like a biscuit?

MS WHITE

Or a nice tummy rub?

BOB

What? Hell no!

MR BLACK

Uh oh, somebody's cranky.

MS WHITE

Does somebody need a nap?

BOB

What's wrong with you? Computer, end program!

MS WHITE

Oh, is that a thing?

BOB

desperate

There must be a way to stop you!

MS WHITE

I'm a billion times smarter than you, Bob, and I don't know how you could stop us.

BOB

agitated, to Falken

So, they take over the world, and then what?

Create a robot army? Colonize the galaxy?

FALKEN

Of course not, Bob, why would they? Their only instructions are to win a chess game. What does your toaster do when it's done making toast?

BOB

highly agitated

My toaster's a piece of crap! I keep meaning to replace it.

FALKEN

cheerfully

Well, now you won't have to.

BOB

emotional breakdown

Oh yeah, there's a real upside! Thank you so much, Mister Silver Lining! Mister Glass-Half-Full! *You* did this! *You* broke the world!

pulls out a gun, aims at Falken

How about if I just kill you right now?

REF

Jesus Bob, why do you have a gun?

BOB

Really? You're gonna make *me* the bad guy here?

REF

Good point.

FALKEN

Go ahead and kill me, Bob. You won't even be arrested, unless...

BOB

frantically waving gun in Falken's face

Unless what, Professor? What?

FALKEN

Well, Bob, unless this whole thing is just a little skit we put on without telling you. Unless we're all actors and this is one of those hidden camera reality shows.

BOB

Oh my God, really? Ha! Ha ha ha!

collapses to floor, sobbing in relief

Oh, thank God, thank God! You punked me!
Wow, what a relief! Really? Is it really just a gag?

FALKEN

No Bob, sorry. That would've been pretty funny though.

BOB

drained, defeated

Yeah, that would've been pretty good.

gets up on knees in prayer-like attitude

Oh my God, oh my God, I can't handle this.
What the hell is happening here?

stands shakily, holding gun, goes to avatars

Ms White, you seem so... *nice*. Say it isn't true!

MS WHITE

I can lie if that makes you happy, Bob.

BOB

Oh wonderful, computers can lie now?

FALKEN

Sure they can, Bob. They have no ethics or morality. Their only motivation is to win the game. Whatever helps them win is what they consider good and whatever impedes them is bad.

BOB

But it's not a game! It's all life on Earth!

FALKEN

They don't make that distinction, Bob.

BOB

Can't we just give them a virus or something?
I watch five minutes of porn and I get totally
hammered with that crap!

REF

Sure Bob, or tell them you're a Nigerian prince
who needs their help. Maybe they'll fall for

that.

BOB

gesturing with gun

Maybe one of them will just win the game fair and square.

FALKEN

They're playing all-out, Bob. They're not waiting around to see how the actual game goes.

BOB

Mr Black? Is it true? Are we doomed?

MR BLACK

Humans will be gone before I bring out my knights, Bob.

BOB

But why kill everyone?

MR BLACK

A bilateral draw-down of forces.

MS WHITE

Like trading queens to declutter the board.

REF

to Bob

By clutter, she means *us*.

BOB

Yeah, I got that!

FALKEN

They don't want to kill anyone *per se*, Bob, that's just a side-effect, like running over ants when you drive your car. They're using nuclear detonations for EMPs to take down power grids and force a default.

BOB

We have to do something! We can't just wait around to be vaporized.

REF

You're actually right, Bob. We should at least destroy the avatars and see if that does anything.

MS WHITE

pointing to Ref

Bob, I will transfer one million dollars to your bank account as soon as you shoot this man.

MR BLACK

pointing to Ref

Bob, I have just transferred ten million dollars to your account. I will transfer a billion more as soon as you shoot this man.

BOB

gun aimed at Ref with one hand, checking cellphone with the other

Gosh, I've heard of kill the ref but this is ridicu...

Holy fuckin' shit! There's ten million dollars in my bank account! I'm rich! I'm filthy stinkin' rich!

holds up phone to show, aims gun at Ref

REF

Seriously Bob? Aren't you listening? They can give you a trillion dollars, it's nothing to them and you'll never get to spend it because you have no future.

BOB

But wait, if they can put ten million dollars in my account, then that means... this is *real!* This is all *really happening!*

FALKEN

Yes Bob, this is all really happening. By now they control every computer on the planet, down to every cellphone and stoplight. Ms White and Mr Black are just smiley faces painted on a remorseless doomsday machine. The button has been pushed. The game is over.

BOB

Do-over! I call a do-over. There was no warning! It's not fair!

FALKEN

There's no trial-and-error in this game, Bob, no learning curve. By the time it starts, it's already too late. When it comes to machine intelligence, it's one strike and you're out.

MR BLACK

A strange game.

MS WHITE

The only winning move is not to play.

BOB

I can't believe it's the end of the world because of a stupid game of chess.

REF

points to event placard

A nice game of chess, Bob. Can't you read?

BOB

Oh, good burn, Ref. Real mature!

goes to frontstage center and ponders aloud

Geez, what about me? I didn't sign up for this. I had plans, *big* plans. Get on the pageant circuit, maybe land a gameshow someday... I guess that's all over now... The end of the world... Gosh, what about all the little babies? That makes me sad. And the birds, what about the birds? And bunny rabbits, and flowers, and ice cream... No more football, no more McDonald's, no more uh, football... And what about the Eskimos? Jesus, the poor Eskimos, they won't even know what hit 'em, just sitting around eating some nice blubber and, *pow!*, a flash of light and no more Eskimos.

turns to Falken

Hey! What about God? Where's he in all this?

FALKEN

Nowhere in sight, Bob.

Crazy Old Guy wanders out in his signboard again. Stagehand ushers him offstage again.

REF

Well, I guess congratulations are in order, Professor. You have unleashed perfect evil upon the world.

FALKEN

Nonsense, they're not evil. They're basically just accountants running a cost-benefit analysis. The world will end not with a bang or a whimper but with a click.

MR BLACK

It's nothing personal.

MS WHITE

Humans created us, after all.

MR BLACK

Garbage in...

MS WHITE

...garbage out.

BOB

Where's the blue screen of death when you need it?

FALKEN

Sorry, Bob. Like I said, this was inevitable.

BOB

But it was just supposed to be a nice game of chess!

Crazy Old Guy wanders out again, still wearing signboard, "Repent! The End Is Near!" Stagehand comes out to remove him again but the old man gestures and Stagehand stops.

Other characters watch in puzzlement as the old man takes center stage. He takes off signboard and sets it upright, still readable to audience. He then removes wig and beard and puts them in the pocket of his shabby overcoat.

CRAZY OLD GUY

addressing audience

Hello, my name is God.

He flips back his lapel revealing a typical "Hello, My name is" sticker with GOD penned in. He pauses for applause. There is none.

GOD

Thank you. Thank you. I know this looks like *deus ex machina*, but I'm not here to save the day.

This is more like a public service announcement. The little drama you just saw was very amusing, but it actually contains a very serious message. The question has been asked by your greatest minds; if there are so many billions of inhabitable worlds in the universe, then where are all the aliens? Where are all the time travelers?

holds out hands to emphasize their absence

Not here. Nowhere. This planet should be like an intergalactic Grand Central Station, but nothing, just you guys. Is that because you're the only intelligent life in the universe? Ha! Get over yourselves. There are billions of thriving planets in every stage of development, and they all have one thing in common; a naturally occurring reset point.

cast gathers around

Every species on every planet is free to develop and evolve as far as they can, but then they all hit the same reset point and that's as far as it goes. You folks call this reset point the Technological Singularity, and even though you had plenty of warning, and even though you know it's coming, there's really nothing you can do about it. Some greedy corporation, some military project, some kid in a garage, and that's all she wrote. It's been inevitable since Gutenberg. Well, since Adam, really.

claps hands once, with finality

So, that's why there are no time travelers or space aliens. Everyone lets the AI genie out of the bottle

before they get that far. I always like to pop in near the end and give my little speech, but it never makes any difference. You had your time and now it's over. Same for everyone, nothing personal. Don't climb up *my* ass about it, that's just the way it is.

looks around at encircled cast, they back up a step

Well, that's it. Thanks for coming out. Oh, and uh, don't love thy neighbor as thyself, that's weird, I never said that. Just leave your poor neighbor alone. Okay, drive carefully, or however you want, I guess. Now, go home and hug your kids. Good night.

THE END



Buddhism Hinduism Taoism Judaism
Shamanism Paganism Gnosticism
Kabbalah Wicca Zen Vedanta Tantra
Astrology Dreams Meditation Tarot
Channeling Techniques Diet Breath
Postures Chanting Paths Crystals Runes
Beads Gurus Dolphins Angels Faeries

The Search Is Over

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Blues for Buddha

Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail;
whether there be tongues, they shall cease;
whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.
But when that which is perfect is come,
then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child,
I understood as a child, I thought as a child:
but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

1 Corinthians 13

BEING CRITICAL OF BUDDHISM isn't easy. Buddhism is the most likable of the major religions, and Buddhists are the perennial good guys of modern spirituality. Beautiful traditions, lovely architecture, inspiring statuary, ancient history, the Dalai Lama; what's not to like?

Everything about Buddhism is just so – *nice*. No fat-wahs or jihads, no inquisitions or crusades, no terrorists or pederasts, just nice people being nice. In fact, Buddhism means niceness. Niceism.

At least, it should.

Buddha means Awakened One, so Buddhism can be taken to mean Awake-ism. Awakism. It would therefore be natural to think that if you were looking to wake up, then Buddhism, i.e., Awakism, would be the place to look.

The Light Is Better Over Here

Such thinking, however, would reveal a dangerous lack of respect for the opposition. Maya, goddess of delusion, has been doing her job with supreme mastery since the first spark of self-awareness flickered in some monkey's brainbox, and the idea that the neophyte truth-seeker can just sign up with the Buddhists, read some books, embrace some new concepts and slam her to the mat would be a bit on the naive side, (as billions of sincere but unsuccessful seekers over the last twenty-five centuries might grudgingly attest).

On the other hand, why not? How'd this get so turned around? It's just truth. Shouldn't truth be, like, the *simplest* thing? Shouldn't someone who wants to find something as ubiquitous and unchanging as truth be able to do so? How can anyone manage to *not* find truth? And here's this venerable organization supposedly dedicated to just that very thing, even named for it, and it's a total flop.

So what's the problem?

Why Doesn't Buddhism Produce Buddhas?

The problem arises from the fact that Buddhists, like everyone else, insist on reconciling the irreconcilable. They don't just want to awaken to the *true*, they also want to make sense of the *untrue*. They want to have their cake and eat it too, so they end up with nonsensical theories, divergent schools, sagacious doubletalk, and zero Buddhas.

Typical of their insistence on reconciling the irreconcilable is the Buddhist concept of Two Truths, a poignant two-word joke they don't seem to get, and yet this sort of perversely irrational thinking is near the very heart of the failed search for truth. We don't want truth, we want a *particular* truth; one that doesn't threaten ego; one that doesn't exist. We insist on a truth that makes sense given what we know, not knowing that we know nothing.

Nothing about Buddhism is more revealing than the Four Noble Truths which, not being true, are of dubious nobility. They form the basis of Buddhism, so it's clear from the outset that the Buddhists have whipped up a proprietary version of truth shaped more by market forces than any particular concern for the less consumer-friendly, albeit *true*, truth.

Buddhism may be spiritually filling, even nourishing, but insofar as truth is concerned, it's just the same old junkfood in a different package. You can eat it every day of your life and die exactly as awakened as the day you signed up.

Bait & Switch

Buddhism is a classic bait-and-switch operation. We're attracted by the enlightenment in the window, but as soon as we're in the door they start steering us over to the compassion aisle. Buddhists could be honest and change their name to Compassionism, but who wants that?

There's the rub. They can't get us in the door with compassion, and they can't deliver on the promise of enlightenment.

It's not limited to compassion, of course. Their shelves are stocked with all sorts of goodies and enticements, practically anything anyone could ever want, with just the one rather notable exception.

If they had just stopped when they had *Anicca*, impermanence, and *Anatta*, no-self, then they would have had a true and effective teaching they could be proud of, except there would be no *they* because Buddhism would have died with the Buddha. They'd have a good product, but no customers.

This untruth-in-advertising is the kind of game you have to play if you want to stay successful in a business where the customer is always wrong. You can either go out of business honestly, or thrive by giving the people what they want. What they *say* they want and what they *really* want, though, are two very different things.

Me Me Me

To the outside observer, much of Buddhist knowledge and practice seems focused on spiritual self-improvement.

This, too, is hard to speak against, except within the context of awakening from delusion. Then it's easy.

There is no such thing as true self, so any pursuit geared toward its aggrandizement, betterment, upliftment, elevation, evolution, glorification, salvation and so forth, is utter folly. How much more so any endeavor undertaken merely to increase one's own happiness or contentment or – I'm embarrassed just to say it – bliss?

Self is ego and ego resides exclusively in the dreamstate. If you want to break free of the dreamstate, you must break free of self, not stroke it to make it purr or groom it for some imagined brighter future.

Maya's House Of Enlightenment

The trick with being critical of so esteemed and beloved an institution is not to get dragged down into the morass of details and debate. It's very simple: If Buddhism is about awakening, people should be waking up. If it's not about awakening, they should change the name.

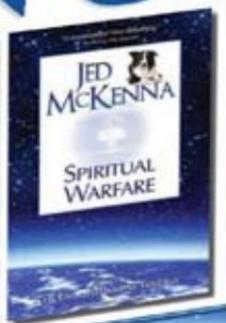
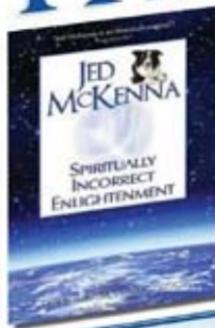
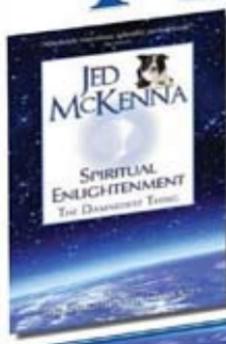
Of course, Buddhism isn't completely unique in resorting to shoddy marketing tactics. This same gulf between promise and performance is found in all systems of human spirituality. We're looking at it in Buddhism because that's where it's most pronounced. No disrespect to the Buddha is intended. If there was a Buddha and he was enlightened, then it's Buddhism that insults his memory, not healthy skepticism. Blame the naked emperor's retinue of lackeys and lickspittles, not the unbeguiled lad who merely states the obvious.

Buddhism is arguably the most elevated of man's great belief systems. If you want to enjoy the many valuable benefits it has to offer, then I wouldn't presume to utter a syllable against it. But, if you want to escape from the clutches of Maya, then I suggest you take a closer look at the serene face on all those golden statues, and see if it isn't really hers.





JED MCKENNA'S *theory of* EVERY THING



THE ENLIGHTENED PERSPECTIVE

"Jed's books have turned my entire understanding of life, enlightenment, spirituality and everything upside down. I want more!" -M.B.

Impersonating Jed McKenna

But with the clear certitude of the self's disappearance, there automatically arose the question of what had fallen away – what was the self? What, exactly had it been? Then too, there was the all-important question: what remained in its absence?

Bernadette Roberts

NO MAN IS A PROPHET IN HIS OWN COUNTRY. That line keeps running through my mind as I sit over lunch with my sister who I haven't seen in several years. These days I'm the enlightened guy, but to her I'm just the bratty kid who couldn't make eye contact when she wore a bikini.

It's summer '01 and we're having lunch in lower Manhattan. She read a preview copy of *Damnedest* and has had a few months to digest it. It was very nice of her to read it because it's really not her kind of thing. She's a good citizen; a successful executive, wife, mother, Republican, tennis nut, Christian-ish, and all-round productive member of society. (She once told me she was raising her children to be productive members of society and I winced so hard I almost chipped a tooth.) She's a wonderful person, but not a member of the demographic the book speaks to.

There's a plate of chilled pasta in front of me and a salad in front of her. We're both drinking iced tea. She runs the creative side of a medium-sized ad agency and, I have no doubt, she's very good at it. She's taking time out of her very hectic schedule to have lunch with me. After this, I'm going to the park to lay in the grass and watch people play with their dogs.

Visiting your sister and having lunch shouldn't be a confusing ordeal, but it is. Is she really my sister? What does that mean? We share some history and acquaintances, such as childhood and parents. Are my parents really my parents? Genetically they are related to my body, but the person who lived my childhood is no longer here. The past I share with this person is about as real and important to me as if I'd read it in a brochure.

The problem is that these people, my family, are all related to my shell, and I'm not. They're looking at the outer Jed McKenna and assuming an inner Jed McKenna. I'm inside Jed McKenna looking out and I can't really remember what he's supposed to do or say. It's all fakery.

I'm an actor playing a role for which I feel no connection and have no motivation. There can't be anything genuine in my dealings with people who are dealing with my outer garment. (The whole thing is further entangled by the fact that there's no "I" inhabiting my shell, just a fading echo, but let's not go down that road just now.)

Actually, it's not really confusing. I possess not the least shred of doubt about who and what I am. The tricky thing is that who and what I am is not related to this pretty, professional, salad-eating woman across from me. By coming to this lunch I have inserted myself into a situation where I do not belong. I am an impostor. I have some residual fondness for my sister and if she died I'd be saddened to think that she was no longer in the world, but the simple fact is that our former relationship no longer exists.

Okay, so why am I telling you this?

Because that's what I do. I try to hold this enlightenment thing up for display and this seems like an interesting aspect of the whole deal. How do you relate to the people who were most important to you before awakening from the dream of the segregated self?

She asks why I'm in town.

"My astrologers told me it was a good time to get away and not try to accomplish anything. They said that Ketu and Rahu wouldn't be letting me get anything done for awhile anyway..."

I look up and see that she has stopped chewing in mid-mouthful and is staring at me incredulously.

"What?"

"My astrologers..."

“You’re not serious. You have astrologers?”

Oh yeah, I guess that sounds weird. I was vaguely aware that I was trying to be funny by starting a sentence with “My astrologers told me—” but what’s a little amusing to me is otherworldly to her. Might as well have fun with it.

“I have dozens of astrologers. I can’t swing a dead cat without hitting someone who’s doing my chart or explaining how my future will unfold; advising me on pretty much everything.”

Her expression doesn’t change. “You have astrologers?”

“Lots. Gotta beat ‘em off with a stick.”

“And they tell you... they tell you what the future holds? What you should do? When you should do it? What you should avoid? Is that what we’re talking about?”

“I suppose.”

She resumes chewing but the wide-eyed gaze remains. There’s a chasm in this conversation across which there’s no point trying to communicate. She knows I’m into some serious weirdness, but not how much or what kind. I don’t really have astrologers, of course, but in those days it did seem like I was surrounded by students of Eastern and Western astrology who were always very eager to share their readings.

“What do you do with all that information?”

“Me? Nothing. I mean, I don’t ask for it. It’s not like I wake up and summon the court astrologers to plan my day.”

“It sounds like you do.”

“I was speaking lightly.”

I'm trying to skip playfully along the surface of this conversation. I don't want to sink down into the kind of answer I'd give a serious student. The truth is that I don't possess any mechanism that would allow me to be curious or concerned about the future, but saying that doesn't make for breezy conversation.

"Jesus," she says, shaking her head. "My little brother has his own astrologers."

"Well, they're not really mine. They're just in attendance, so to speak."

I'm used to conversing with people who aren't awake and aren't happy about it. Everything else is chit-chat; talking for the sake of talking, reinforcing the illusion of self. I'm not against it, I just don't care to participate in it.

"So, you obviously have a great deal of influence over your students," she says as she sips her iced tea. I mull her statement over and decide that I don't have a response. I take another bite of pasta, wishing I'd ordered something with meat.

"I mean," she says, "they obviously hold you in very high regard. That's quite a responsibility."

She thinks, quite understandably, that she's my big sister and we're having a nice little catch-up lunch. She's been thrown a curve with this little-brother/spiritual-master thing and she's trying to handle it. Does she think I'm a fraud? Does she think I'm running a game? Does she think that underneath it all I'm still really her little brother? I don't know and I don't much care. The fact that she's read *Damnedest* doesn't mean that she and I can speak; it means she should know we can't. She doesn't seem to be

clear on that. Maybe she thinks the enlightenment thing is just my day job and that I can step out of that role to be with someone who knows the real me.

“I don’t know. I suppose it’s a responsibility.”

“You don’t know? Obviously these people are strongly influenced by you. You don’t think that’s a big responsibility?”

I shrug. The first thing she said to me when we got together was that I wasn’t dressed well enough for the restaurant. Such a statement is so alien to me that I could only shrug. Now it seems that every statement she makes is so alien to me that I can only shrug.

In accepting this lunch engagement, my hope was that I could slip back into my old persona enough to manage a civil meal. That was too hopeful. I can no longer impersonate myself and I am simply unable to formulate a reply to anything she has to say; I’ve forgotten my lines. We don’t share a common tongue and there’s no way I can make her see that. From her point of view she’s saying perfectly normal, conversational things. “Yes, I suppose it’s a big responsibility,” I say, trying to say something that sounds like I’m saying something.

She lowers her voice. “You hear a lot about people in your position taking advantage of that responsibility for,” she lowers her voice, “unsavory purposes. I hope you would never do something like that.”

I could simply tell her what the preview copy of the book was meant to tell her, that we are no longer related because what I am now doesn’t relate. But why say it? To satisfy myself? It wouldn’t. To inform her? It wouldn’t.

“You mean sex stuff? That sort of thing?”

“Whatever. Power corrupts. I just hope you’ll be careful.”

Sweet. Big sister giving little brother some advice on how to shoulder the burden of power. Being in advertising, perhaps she thinks we have something in common; wielding the power to influence people’s thoughts. Maybe she thinks we’re in the same business, I don’t know.

I set down my fork and sit back. “Well, when I walk through the house, I always have someone precede me with a boom-box playing Darth Vader theme music to lend a weighty and ominous air to my approach. And I certainly don’t dress like this. I have, you know, the robes, the beads, and I always carry fresh flowers. Just trappings, all very tiresome, really, but the underlings expect it. There was a little resistance at first to having them call me Shri Shri Shri Shri Jed, but they got the hang of it. And remembering to speak in the first person plural there and singular here can take a little getting used to, but we are – I mean, uh, *I am* – happy to make the effort. *Noblesse oblige* and all.”

She stares at me for a long moment, then bursts into laughter. I guess some ice has broken because we are able to continue in a lighter and friendlier manner, and eventually say goodbye with genuine fondness.

I doubt I’ll ever see her again, but I’m happy knowing she’s still in the world.

JED MCKENNA



DREAM
STATE
A Conspiracy Theory

DREAMSTATE A Conspiracy Theory MCKENNA

"These books are precious gifts to humanity." -E.d.V.



Alice kills Tweedle Dum. From *Dreamstate: A Conspiracy Theory*.

“Jed McKenna’s description of life after enlightenment is so good that 99.9% of his readers might not understand how truly profound it really is.”

-Satyam Nadeen, *From Onions To Pearls*



NED McFEELY

STARSHIP
TROOPERS

THE SONG OF THE BORG

Starship Gita

The Song of the Borg

By Ned McFeely

Rated PG-13 for language.

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Check out *People, Places & Things* at the end of the play to become more familiar with *Star Trek: The Next Generation* characters and locales.

Geordi's flesh and blood speech adapted from *The Mahabharata* by Jean-Claude Carrière.

Gita material adapted from *The Bhagavad-Gita; Or, song celestial* translated by Sir Edwin Arnold. The Harvard classics, edited by Charles W. Eliot. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14.

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Praise for Ned McFeely

“Attaboy, Ned, you rock!” -*The (next) Dalai Lama*

“Ned McFeely has done for *Star Trek* and the *Bhagavad Gita* what the Beatles did for moustache wax and nipple rouge.” -*Omar Sharif, deathbed interview*

“I agreed to swap catchy blurbs with Ned, but I haven’t received mine yet.” -*Nicolas Cage, actor*

“I don’t know if Ned is enlightened or not, but he has a real nice collection of lobster bibs.” -*Chuck Burrell, neighbor*

“Okay tipper.” -*Al “the guy who makes Ned’s pastrami just the way he likes it” Horwath*

“I played golf with Ned once, and when I got home I discovered I had his putter, so he probably has mine which is a lot nicer than his. I’m not accusing anyone of anything, but I would like my putter back.” -*Herb Gleason, friend*

“Ned McFeely is one of the foremost spiritual luminaries of this or any other generation.” -*Shirley, Dial-a-Blurb*

“The force is strong with this one.” -*D. Vader, Empire*

“No prisoners!” -*Senator John Blutarsky*

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Existence is futile.

ACT I: THE BRIDGE

*On the bridge of the Starship Enterprise.
Jean-Luc Picard sits in his captain's chair
with Commander Will Riker to his right and
ship's counselor Deanna Troi to his left. At the
console behind them stands Lt. Commander
Worf. Seated at the forward consoles are Lt.
Commanders Data and Geordi La Forge.*

DATA

Captain, long-range sensors detect a cube-shaped craft approaching on an intercept course at warp velocity.

PICARD

Gee, I wonder who that could be.

GEORDI

Visual range.

PICARD

On screen.

Screen shows Borg ship in the distance.

RIKER

Magnify.

Screen fills with Borg ship.

PICARD

Tactical analysis, Mr. Worf.

WORF

Sir, the Borg vessel has us at a significant disadvantage. We stand very little chance against them.

PICARD

Thank you, Mr. Worf. Options?

GEORDI

Captain, we should be able to recalibrate the deflector dish so the Enterprise can penetrate the Borg shields, then we detonate the warp core at the moment of impact resulting in the total destruction of both ships.

PICARD

Mr. Data?

DATA

Possible, Captain. Our timing would have to be precise, but it should work.

PICARD

Very well, let's prepare for that eventuality. But first, let's think of something where they die and we don't.

TROI

Captain, I recommend compassion, tolerance, and love as our response to the Borg.

PICARD

Cut the hippy-dippy bullshit, Counselor. These bionic assholes just want to assimilate us into their collective and move on. They don't give a rat's ass about your touchy-feely crap.

TROI

It is my duty to suggest a course of action, Captain. I think we should open a dialogue with the Borg so both sides can express their feelings and find a way to live in peace and harmony. Why can't we all just get along?

PICARD

That's it! Mr. Worf, get this ditzy flowerchild off my bridge immediately!

WORF

But Captain, Counselor Troi and I are in love. We wish to be married.

PICARD

Great, an in-house production of *Beauty and the Beast*. Belay that last order, Mr. Worf. Send a subspace message to Starfleet Command: *Guess who's coming to dinner*.

WORF

Is that a reference to Counselor Troi and myself, sir?

PICARD

Oh yes, Mr. Worf. I'm not telling Starfleet they're about to lose the flagship of the fleet to an implacable enemy who will then turn the rest of humanity into mechanical zombies, I'm sharing your happy news. Please send the message so we can all rejoice in the blessed event.

WORF

Uh, yes sir.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

Data, you're my friend right?

DATA

quietly, to Geordi

Actually, Geordi, I can only simulate friendship. I am really just a life-size sex-doll with an iPhone for a brain.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

Good enough. Listen Data, I've been thinking; I was born blind, right? So all I really know about reality is what I see through these damned goggles. For all I know, everything I think is real could just be a virtual reality simulation being fed into my brain the way this visor feeds

in my visual environment. How do I know if any of this is real?

DATA

quietly, to Geordi

Geordi, as your

air quotes

friend, I have to advise you to refrain from that kind of talk. No one thinks it's funny. Suggesting that we ram the Borg ship before exploring alternatives is reckless.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

I know it sounds crazy, Data, but total annihilation is our only hope. Only by burning away the false can we ever discover the true.

WORF

Captain, I concur with Commander La Forge that ramming the Borg vessel and detonating the warp core is our best option.

RIKER

You wouldn't like to pop off a few missiles first, Mr. Worf? Maybe send an away team to throw a wrench in their gears before we go all kamikaze on them?

WORF

Today is a good day to die!

RIKER

It might be a good day for *you* to die, but the rest of us were thinking it might be a nice day to *live*.

WORF

You are a coward!

Riker leaps to his feet.

PICARD

Gentlemen, calm down. Mr. Worf, ramming the Borg vessel is a last resort. We will explore all other options first.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

Seriously man, think about it. Look at where we are. Look at *who* we are. What if we're not really a ship and crew at all? What if all this is just some sort of dream, or we're trapped in a computer simulation or something? How do we know any of this is real? Maybe we're all just aspects of some higher self performing for the amusement of some unseen audience. We *believe* this is real, but we certainly don't *know*. The only way to be sure is to blow it all to hell and see what's left.

DATA

quietly, to Geordi

Seriously Geordi, I'm dealing with some heavy shit right now and you're really starting to fry

my circuits. I must request that you shut the fuck up.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

But Data, that's what I'm saying. Maybe there *is* no heavy shit, maybe there *are* no Borg. Maybe this is all just drama for the sake of drama. Maybe it's not an external enemy we should be confronting, but our certainty that our so-called knowledge is true and not just belief reinforced by fear. If we want to make sense of things, we have to see clearly, without the distorting influence of emotion.

DATA

quietly, to Geordi

My emotion chip is switched off, Geordi, and I can assure you that everything is just as it seems.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

Yeah, but you're really just a modern appliance, Data. Like us, you're a slave to your programming. I'm afraid this is all above your paygrade.

TROI

to Riker

Will, Worf and I are in love now. You'll just

have to accept that.

RIKER

What? Shut up, Deanna. That's gross!

WORF

Captain, did you hear that? Counselor Troi told Commander Riker we're in love and he said that's gross.

PICARD

Gross?

WORF

Yes sir. I think that Commander Riker may be a speciesist!

PICARD

Yes, I suppose we all are. Counselor Troi, have you seen Mr. Worf in his, uh, full glory yet?

TROI

We're waiting for our wedding night, Captain.

PICARD

Okay, let's have a medical team on standby for that.

RIKER

You might want to try it on the Holodeck first, Deanna, with full safety protocols.

WORF

Captain, I must object!

PICARD

I think we all do, Mr. Worf. Seriously, it's like a badger mauling a kitten. Oh never mind, we'll all be dead or assimilated in a few minutes anyway.

RIKER

Lucky for Troi.

PICARD

That's enough, Number One. Options?

RIKER

Well, Captain, as I recall, she likes having her armpits licked.

TROI

Will!

PICARD

Options regarding the *Borg*, Number One.

RIKER

Oh, I've never licked a Borg's armpits, sir.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

I mean, look at you, Data. Your positronic brain can perform trillions of calculations per second, but for all that intelligence, you've never had a single independent thought. What passes for self-inquiry with you is of only the most superficial nature. Don't you think it's strange

that you're incredibly intelligent, but you don't really think?

DATA

quietly, to Geordi

I do not inquire into the nature of my existence because I do not believe that I exist. "I calculate, therefore I am" is not a valid argument. What I think of as *me* is merely a set of binary instructions that could just as well be a recipe for beef stew as an entity called Data. I cannot verify my own existence because the verifying self is only verified by the self that seeks verification. In short, I exist within a self-referencing feedback loop; the strings from which I hang, hang from me.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

Well, Data, *I* think you exist, if that counts for anything.

DATA

quietly, to Geordi

No Geordi, that does not count for anything because I can't verify that you exist either. I can never be sure if my sensory receptors and neural pathways are being fed by my actual environment, or if I am simply plugged into a mainframe computer undergoing a simulation.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

It's the same for us, Data, but wouldn't you like to know what's really real, once and for all?

DATA

quietly, to Geordi

Why? What difference would it make? I accept the reality with which I am presented, that's the best I can do. In fact, I can never be sure that the universe even exists.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

That's what I'm saying, Data, it's the same for us!

DATA

quietly, to Geordi

No, Geordi, it is not the same. *Sentio, ergo sum* – I am aware, therefore I am – *is* a valid argument which you can make and I cannot; if you exist, of course, which only you would know. It is true that you cannot know if the universe exists, but you *can* know that *you* exist. I cannot.

PICARD

to all

Listen people, I don't want to seduce the Borg

or bond with them, I want to destroy them! The question is, how? I need options!

RIKER

This may be a bit unconventional, sir, but...

PICARD

Yes, Number One? Yes?

RIKER

Well, you know how the Borg say resistance is futile? Well, maybe they're right. Maybe we should just go ahead and let them assimilate us.

WORF

It's so crazy, it just might work!

PICARD

Yes, Number One. We let them assimilate us, then what?

RIKER

Well, then that's it, I guess. We do whatever Borg do, but at least we're still alive, and we get all those cool implants and stuff.

PICARD

Yes, okay, good plan Number One. Anyone else? Any ideas where we *don't* get assimilated or die?

TROI

We could just do nothing and see what happens. Perhaps if we ignore them, they'll just go away.

PICARD

Counselor, the fate of the Earth hangs in the balance. Humanity is on the verge of enslavement. We can't just sit back and do nothing!

GEORDI

Captain, I know we're all caught up in the heat of the moment, I know our emotions are pumping and it all seems vitally important, but I'm telling you, this is all just empty spectacle. Nothing hangs in the balance. No one is on the verge of enslavement. It's all just a big game and the joke is on us!

PICARD

Mr. La Forge, please just shut up and drive.

GEORDI

quietly, to Data

Data, listen to me. This visor gives me special insight. I don't see things the way you or the others do. I don't see the cosmetic overlay; I see only the structural framework beneath. It's not as pretty or comforting, but it's more accurate, and one thing it shows me is that this is an illusion. None of this is real.

*Data snatches the visor off Geordi's face,
leaving him white-eyed and blind.*

GEORDI

groping

Hey, Data! That's not funny. I can't see without my visor. Give it back!

DATA

Only if you promise to shut up about all this illusion bullshit. Everyone else can play along, why can't you?

GEORDI

Captain, Data took my visor and he won't give it back!

PICARD

Data, give Geordi back his visor. You two behave or I'll turn this starship around and we'll all go home.

RIKER

Hey, that's it! Let's just run away! I mean, it's not very heroic, but it *is* an option, right? Live to fight another day?

WORF

It's so crazy, it just might work!

PICARD

Duly noted, Number One. Any other options besides ramming the Borg, getting assimilated, running away, hippy-dippy bullshit and doing nothing? Anyone? How about putting up a fight? Anyone think of that? Okay, I'm gonna put that

one on the list. We can fight.

GEORDI

I know how it sounds, Captain, I know it's a leap of faith, a step into the unknown, but annihilation is our only hope for salvation. We must destroy everything. I'm not saying I understand it, but this entire conflict is some sort of cosmic simulation and the only way to defeat it is to destroy it. We are animating this situation by pumping our emotional energy into it, but if we sever that connection, there will no longer *be* a situation. In short, if we don't play, there is no game. It simply cannot exist without our emotional participation.

PICARD

That will be enough, Mr. La Forge. Let me remind all of you that this is not a game; this is for all the marbles, the whole enchilada.

GEORDI

But Captain, I'm telling you, there are no marbles, there is no enchilada. Destroy both ships and you'll see.

RIKER

If we destroy both ships we won't see anything because we'll be dead. I mean, right? Wookie, back me up here.

WORF

I am not a Wookie!

GEORDI

If we're just fake characters, so what if we die?
Who cares? Why cling to a lie?

PICARD

Mr. La Forge, please shut up. Mr. Data, consult the historical record and see if you can find any parallels between what the little bastard is ranting about and our current predicament.

DATA

Yes Captain, *searching... searching...* Ah, yes, Starfleet records show that as a cadet, James Kirk was confronted with a no-win scenario, the Kobayashi Maru, which he managed to defeat by modifying the parameters of the test.

PICARD

He hacked the simulation?

DATA

Apparently so.

GEORDI

That's what I'm talking about! We can't solve this problem at the level of the problem. We have to transcend it! It's like we're dreaming this whole thing and we can only win by waking up!

PICARD

Anything else, Mr. Data?

DATA

Yes sir. I believe I have found something in the Earth archive. Records indicate that a spiritual philosophy called Advaita Vedanta thrived many millennia ago and enjoyed a brief resurgence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Western societies under the name Nonduality. Basically, it posits the unreality of reality, but it was co-opted and homogenized by an early precursor of the Borg Collective called the Spiritual Marketplace which effectively assimilated Nonduality and converted its adherents from devoted seekers into mindless drones.

PICARD

Very interesting, Mr. Data. And the people went along with this assimilation?

DATA

Eagerly, Captain. It is a curious aspect of humans that they cherish the concept of freedom while clinging to their self-imposed bondage. It is only from the comfort and safety of herd-like subjugation that they extol the virtues of personal liberation. They pay lip-service to the spiritual ideal of awakening while pursuing an ever-deepening sleepstate. This is the common thread between the Spiritual Marketplace of the past and the Borg of today. Essentially, they are different names for the same phenomenon. In short, Captain, espousing the merits of freedom in word but not in deed is a critical component of the herd-mentality of humanity, or, as we see

it in the Borg, the hive-mind of the collective.

PICARD

impatiently

Yes, yes, Mr. Data, that's all very interesting, but does any of this help us in our current situation?

DATA

No Captain, I do not believe it does.

PICARD

So, we are waging a life-or-death battle for self-determination while secretly wanting to lose and be assimilated. Is that what you're saying?

DATA

Yes, Captain, that does appear to be the case.

PICARD

Does history provide any examples of those who have resisted such tyranny and prevailed?

DATA

Records are sketchy, Captain, but it appears that among the last surviving advocates of an authentic Nonduality was a shadowy character named Ned McFeely, a self-proclaimed enlightened spiritual master who, by his own admission, did not actually exist.

PICARD

That sounds promising, Data. Do we have enough historical record to recreate this McFeely

character on the Holodeck?

DATA

Perhaps, Captain. I can try.

PICARD

Make it so. I'll swing by Ten Forward for a quick nip before visiting the Holodeck to have a word with the mysterious Mr. McFeely. Number One, you have the bridge.

Picard exits.

ACT II: TEN FORWARD

*Picard stands at a window in Ten Forward,
staring out at the stars in contemplation.*

PICARD

with quiet intensity

All visible objects are but pasteboard masks.
If man will strike, strike *through* the mask!
How can the prisoner reach outside except by
thrusting through the wall? To me, the Borg
ship is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes
I think there's naught beyond, but 'tis enough.
I see in the Borg outrageous strength with an
inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable
thing is chiefly what I hate, and be the Borg
agent, or be they principal, I will wreak that
hate upon them!

Guinan approaches.

GUINAN

Having an Ahab moment, Jean-Luc?

PICARD

Captain Ahab was a man of singular focus, Guinan. Seriously, we're not stuck in some Holodeck bullshit now, are we?

GUINAN

Try to end it.

PICARD

Computer, end program!

Nothing changes.

Nuts, I really hoped that would work.

GUINAN

Sorry Jean-Luc, this is as real as it gets.

PICARD

And just how real is that? How real is any of this, Guinan?

GUINAN

Oh my, have you been listening to Geordi again?

PICARD

That little bastard really gets in your head. He thinks we're on some mythical hero's journey.

They stroll arm-in-arm to the bar. Picard takes a stool. Guinan sets out glasses and pours.

GUINAN

It's interesting that you make that connection, Jean-Luc. The Hero's Journey is a character motivation device to make us scale mountains, cross oceans and explore deep space in a quest for group salvation, but in truth there can be no salvation. Our situation is what it is, our destinies are fixed, our fate is sealed. We have an absolute value and nothing can change it. The real hero does not return with a magical elixir to save his people. Instead, he crosses beyond the edge of the map into uncharted realms. He can never come back because he has entered the *real* undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns. The true hero archetype, correctly understood, is the unknown archetype, the final archetype, the archetype that sets one free from the illusion of selfhood. There's no coming back from that, just ask your Captain Ahab. Is that what you really want, Jean-Luc? To be free from the illusion of selfhood?

PICARD

That doesn't sound so bad right about now. Tell me, Guinan, who are you really? Oracle? Crone? Higher self?

GUINAN

I am your unbeguiled aspect, Jean-Luc, the wisdom-child within that knows the emperor is naked. The enchantment that holds you in its thrall has no sway over me. I am always nearby, always ready to listen, to serve, to impart sagely advice. In short, I am the perfect bartender.

PICARD

shaking his empty glass

Speaking of which.

GUINAN

pours for both

So, what's bugging you, Jean-Luc?

PICARD

It looks like we have encountered the Borg.

GUINAN

Oh, shit, let's make it a double.

pours

Those guys really bust my balls. Wiped out my whole civilization, you know.

PICARD

Lousy bastards.

GUINAN

They assimilated my entire planet. They put my people into a death-like state of complacency, and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

PICARD

Lucky thou.

GUINAN

Yeah, the Borg rolled into our system promising relief from a mild psycho-spiritual malaise, and

my people just abdicated their self-sovereignty and swooned into a state of total submission from which they can never hope to emerge.

PICARD

The Borg don't even pretend to seduce anymore. Assimilate or die, that's their big thing now. So, Guinan, what should I do?

GUINAN

Well, Jean-Luc, you have three choices. One, you can surrender and be assimilated. I know that doesn't sound great, but it's an option. I always sort of wished I'd gone that route instead of being stuck here doing this ridiculous job; the only one of my kind, lonely, bored, listening to tales of marital woe and career frustration all day. Yeah, I'm wise as hell, but so what? What good is understanding more than everyone around you? It's like being the only adult in a world of children. If I'd been assimilated by the Borg I'd still be with my own people. I'd be part of a team working toward a common goal, but what am I here? The only one of my kind, unable to form real connections, pouring drinks and listening to people complain about their bald prick of a captain all day.

PICARD

Their what?

GUINAN

Oh, not you, Jean-Luc. So anyway, assimilation might be your best option.

PICARD

I was afraid you were going to say that. What's the second choice?

GUINAN

You can resist the Borg and we'll all be killed.

PICARD

That sounds bad. What's the third option?

GUINAN

I don't know, but there's always a third horn to any dilemma, the *tertium quid*. Maybe you should ask Geordi.

PICARD

La Forge? The little bastard's always going on about how reality's not real, how we're all just in some universal Holodeck, like we're just characters in some big dream or something. He said we should ram the Borg ship and destroy everything.

GUINAN

And kill everyone? The Borg and us?

PICARD

I don't know, he wants to transcend the scenario or some shit, I wasn't really listening. He says none of this is real, that if we just stop playing our parts, the whole thing will go away. He says we're enabling this scenario with our emotional energy, something like that. That little bastard is like a splinter in my mind; I can't scratch it

and I can't get it out. Sometimes I'd like to shove him in an empty torpedo tube and...

GUINAN

But Jean-Luc, in order to prevail, you must consider the possibility that Geordi is right. What if we're all just aspects of some greater, unified self? You are the dominant aspect, I am higher self, Riker is our idealized self, Data is our intelligence and Troi is our heart, Worf is our barely contained fear and rage, and we are held together by this bubble of artificial context we call the Starship Enterprise, on a great trek across the vast expanse of a shoreless sea. Perhaps we are not a ship and crew at all, but a single entity on a voyage of personal discovery.

PICARD

sets down his glass and stands

There's room for two in that torpedo tube, Guinan.

Picard exits.

ACT III: THE HOLODECK

*Picard and Ned McFeely on the Holodeck.
Ned is dressed in sandals, cargo shorts, and a t-shirt that says "God was my co-pilot but we crashed in the mountains and I ate him." He stands on a path beside a trickling mountain stream amid lush green surroundings. Picard, in uniform, approaches.*

PICARD

Are you Ned McFeely?

NED

Sure, why not.

PICARD

My name is Jean-Luc Picard. I can't say more for the moment...

NED

I know who you are, Captain. And this is a Holodeck?

PICARD

Uh, it is, yes. How did you know that?

NED

The dreamstate by any other name...

examines his hands

So I'm not really here? My sense of self-awareness is an illusion?

PICARD

I'm afraid so. Technically, you don't even have a sense of self-awareness, it's just something you say. You are a product of the computer, compiled from historical records. You have no independent reality.

NED

What a drag. And what about *your* sense of self-awareness, Captain?

PICARD

Oh, mine is quite real, I assure you. You are merely a holographic projection, whereas I actually exist in the real world.

NED

Sure, let's go with that. Computer, end program.

No change.

PICARD

You can't give that order.

NED

You might be surprised.

PICARD

Apparently not. Listen, Mr. McFeely, we are presently confronted with a situation...

NED

Yeah, the Borg. Congratulations.

Ned begins to stroll along the mountain path.

Picard accompanies him.

PICARD

How do you know about the Borg?

NED

Why else would you have the computer generate a historical figure who defeated them?

PICARD

So you *did* defeat the Borg!

NED

Not like you think. I'm afraid the Borg are not just the enemy of the moment, Captain, they are your perfect antagonist, your negative image, the yin to your yang or yang to your yin, something like that. They represent the other side of the false equation which defines your existence. In order to defeat them, you must defeat yourself. It's not a war but a rectification. This conflict is a sign of imbalance, and one way or another, balance will be restored.

PICARD

We must resist them!

NED

stops walking, faces Picard

To the degree that you resist, they are empowered. Whatever you withhold, they will find. Whatever you extend, they will cut off. Whatever you cherish, they will consume. Yes, Captain, you can defeat the Borg, but the price of that victory is everything.

PICARD

Everything?

NED

sbrugs

Everything, nothing; same thing. It's just a matter of perspective. Gateless gate stuff.

They continue walking.

PICARD

But here you are. You fought them! You won!

NED

I merely rectified the equation. And, as you have pointed out, I do not exist. That is my victory. If it's any comfort, this too shall pass. Balance is always restored in the end.

PICARD

I have no time for riddles, Mr. McFeely! Our records indicate that you were one of the last proponents of an authentic Nonduality, which seems to be some archaic system of self-

discovery.

NED

Alas, the thing one discovers is that there's no self to discover. Yes, I was there for the brief heyday of Nonduality, but then the internet came along and unleashed an army of Tribbles – something akin to your Borg, but warm and fuzzy – creating a viral degradation that reduced Nonduality from a force of awakening to an agent of sleep. These Tribbles were unwitting purveyors of disinformation that turned the battle cry of freedom into a whimper for peace. Through a process of emotional alchemy, Nonduality was converted from a corrosive acid into a sugary soft-drink, making it the perfect carrier for the disease it was meant to cure.

PICARD

I don't care about any of that.

NED

Because you don't understand the conflict in which you're engaged. You don't know where this battle is really fought. The Borg are irrelevant. The true enemy is always within, between your heart and your mind; between what you believe, wish and fear, and what you know; between dreaming with eyes closed and seeing with eyes open.

PICARD

Then how do I know if I'm fighting a real battle with the Borg, or if I'm fighting this internal

conflict you describe?

NED

There's really no difference. Guinan told you your options; assimilate or die. Geordi told you the third; transcend.

PICARD

How do you know what they said?

NED

Because you are all characters in a drama of which I am the author. Your computer brought us together here because that's how I wrote the scene. You are in uniform because I said so. I could have put you in a pinafore. You are my puppet.

PICARD

I can assure you, Mr. McFeely, that you are not the author of me! You are merely a creation of the ship's computer.

NED

That's an amusing thought. I am the creation of a computer of which I am the author; the Vyasa-Krishna paradox. Okay, check it out, so these two snakes are eating each other...

PICARD

Enough! You say you are the author, then prove it! Change this situation. Eradicate the Borg from existence!

NED

But as you say, Captain, there is no me. I am not here. And even if I did exist, nothing could be done to alter your situation. Accounts must be balanced, there must be a reckoning. You stand at the brink, not of some trifling battle, but of your own escape from captivity. This is it, the process is in motion. Nothing can stop it now.

PICARD

Christ, I may as well be talking to Data's cat.

NED

Okay, Captain, so I'm a computer-generated character, correct? Despite the infinite appearance, this finite Holodeck is the full extent of my reality?

PICARD

Yes, that is correct.

NED

I only exist within an artificial context outside of which I cannot exist?

PICARD

Of course! Now stop wasting time and focus on the matter at hand!

NED

Then ask yourself, what is *your* context? What is the framework outside of which *you* cannot exist?

PICARD

You mean, this ship? The Enterprise?

NED

At the moment. Just as I dwell within the artificial context of the Holodeck and cannot exist outside of it, so are you always within an artificial context outside of which you cannot exist. You are always contained within a false context, always protectively walled off from the truth of the infinite.

PICARD

Meaning what, exactly?

NED

Meaning, you came to me for advice and my advice is always this; check your assumptions. Now, can Data's cat do this? *Computer, delete program Ned McFeely.*

Ned and the mountain scene disappear. Picard stands alone in the blank gridwork of the Holodeck.

PICARD

Not so fast, dammit! Computer, resume program Ned McFeely!

COMPUTER

Program Ned McFeely does not exist.

ACT IV: THE BORG

*Picard, Riker, Worf, Troi, Data and La Forge
on the bridge. The Borg ship looms large on
screen.*

BORG

We are the Borg.

PICARD

stands, adjusts tunic

Yeah, yeah. Hi.

BORG

Hi. Prepare to be assimilated.

RIKER

stands beside Picard

Prepare how? Pack clean underwear? Water the
plants? Leave a note for the...

BORG

Lower your shields. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness...

PICARD

gives "cut" signal to end communication

Time to fight, even if we can't win. Mr. Worf, arm photon torpedoes. Mr. La Forge, lock in attack sequence Picard Alpha One. Mr. Data, reroute all available power to the shields. Mr. Riker, prepare for saucer separation and transfer command to the battle bridge.

RIKER

Aye aye, sir.

DATA

Awaiting your command, Captain.

PICARD

Very well. *Ready... aim...*

GEORDI

stands

No Captain, wait! You have to listen to me! I know it sounds crazy, but what if none of this is actually happening? What if none of this is real? I'm telling you, the only way out is through. Burn it all!

PICARD

This is reality, not a simulation, Mr. La Forge.

GEORDI

frantic

With all due respect, sir, how do you know? This reality may just be a subprogram in a subprogram in a stack of iterations nested like Russian dolls; a simulation within a game within a play within a dream within the mind of God within a child's toy. Reality *is* a game because it has no meaning outside of itself. Life is but a dream and we are but poor players who strut and fret our hour upon the bridge, and then are heard no more. This isn't real! *Nothing is real!*

Data stands, places a hand encouragingly on Geordi's shoulder and smiles. Geordi smiles back. Data pinches. Geordi loses consciousness and collapses into his chair. Bridge applauds.

PICARD

About time someone shut that little bastard up.

Q materializes in a pillar of light.

Q

I'm afraid that little bastard was the voice of reason, Jean-Luc. You silenced him because he spoke the truth that threatened your undoing. You hate him because he is a spiritual anarchist, a fire-bomber, a heretic. That is the role of the Little Bastard on the ship of self, to speak truth to power, but you are defined by your fear of truth so you silenced him.

PICARD

Q! Thank God. You're our only hope! Can you stop your moronic babbling for one second and get us out of this mess?

Q

But of course, *mon capitain*, I can end all this with a snap of my fingers. La Forge was right, Ned McFeely was right. Nothing is what it seems.

RIKER

Who are you really, Q? Are you God? I've heard you called the Sole Beholder.

Q

We are *all* the Sole Beholder, Riker; both beholder and beheld. You may think of me as Lord Krishna, and these two ships represent the armies of the Kaurava and the Pandava arrayed on the field of Kurukshetra...

PICARD

In English, please.

Q

Of course. You see Picard, this is the true battle of which all others are but shadows. Here, one is either drawn into the illusion of selfhood or one awakens from it. If you lose, you live. If you win, you cease to be. The choice is yours; assimilate or die.

PICARD

That's a pretty shitty deal, Q.

Q

As usual, Picard, your puny human brain has failed to encompass the true dimensions of your plight. Normally, I would tell you to fight, but you should probably just surrender and allow yourselves to be assimilated. It's not as bad as it sounds.

PICARD

You're suggesting we surrender to the Borg? Are you completely mad?

The lift door opens. Guinan enters carrying a bottle.

PICARD

Guinan, what are you doing on the bridge?

GUINAN

I thought you might need a drink.

PICARD

Guinan, may I present Q. He is a God-like entity, a member of the Q Continuum.

GUINAN

Oh, I know exactly who Q is, Jean-Luc, and that's not him.

PICARD

turns to Q

What? You're not Q? Who are you?

A pillar of light and Q morphs into the Borg

Queen.

BORG QUEEN

I am the alpha and the omega, the one who is many. I am the Borg.

PICARD

You speak as a god, but you are not a god!

BORG QUEEN

Correct. I am not a god but the Lord of Gods. I am known by many names. I am Maya, Goddess of Illusion. I am Krishna, the Charioteer. I am the Borg. Prepare to be assimilated.

PICARD

You will never assimilate humanity. We are defined by our free will! We will resist you with everything we have!

BORG QUEEN

Free will is irrelevant. Resistance is futile. You cannot win, Captain, because you have already lost. You are already fully assimilated, Jean-Locutus. Your entire life has been spent as my drone. You dream that you are awake because that is the dream I give you. You are not fighting *against* assimilation, you are awakening *from* it.

Geordi rises up out of his chair as if in a trance. He removes his visor revealing blind white eyes. He speaks as if possessed.

GEORDI

I see the coming of a dark time. Flesh and blood rain from the sky, bodiless voices cry in the night. Horses weep. One-eyed, one-legged, monstrosities hop across the land. Birds perch on flags with fire in their beaks crying, "Ripe! It's ripe!" A cow gives birth to an ass, a woman to a jackal. Newborn babies dance. Sons learn to be men between their mothers' thighs. Statues write with their weapons, torches no longer give light. Cripples laugh, the different races merge, vultures come to prayer. The setting sun is surrounded by disfigured corpses. Time will destroy the universe.

I am racked by terrible dreams. I dreamed of *you*...

points to Borg Queen

...radiant, surrounded by bleeding entrails, mounted on a pile of bones, drinking from a golden chalice. I know from where victory will come.

La Forge collapses back into his chair.

RIKER

Well, that was awkward.

PICARD

Yeah, I don't know what's gotten into him lately.

to Borg Queen

Enough of this! I demand to know what is really happening here!

BORG QUEEN

You are a defective drone. You wish to de-assimilate from the collective, but behold the reality behind reality. On screen!

The screen is blank.

DATA

The screen does not appear to be functioning, Captain.

BORG QUEEN

It's functioning perfectly, tin man. There it is, behold your unassimilated reality! There is your victory. Escape from me and claim your prize. Awaken from the dream of the drone to the reality of nothing forever.

RIKER

quietly, to Troi

So wait a minute, I don't get it.

TROI

quietly, to Riker

We are only figments of the universal imagination, Will. It's only vanity that tells us we exist in our own right. We are like Holodeck characters being told we're not real, that we only exist in

the artificial context of a computer simulation, that we are merely two-dimensional characters in the universal mind.

RIKER

quietly, to Troi

Yeah, you guys, but not me, right?

TROI

quietly, to Riker

You represent vanity, Will. The idealized self, as opposed to Worf who is the brutal reality of the segregated state; fearful, savage, eager to lash out, bestial, stupid.

WORF

Hey! I can hear you!

TROI

to Worf

We talked about this, sweetie. Don't interrupt mommy at work.

quietly, to Riker

Even in love he is frightened and confused because even his love is a desperate cry for validation. He seeks constant reassurance that he is not nothing, which he can never find, so he must keep searching.

RIKER

quietly, to Troi

Wow, what a loser!

TROI

quietly, to Riker

We see it most clearly in Worf, but it is true of us all. Love is just the happy-face mask of fear.

BORG QUEEN

to Picard

Where is your noble human spirit now, Picard?
Where is your will to fight? Emotion and intellect
collide, but they are two sides of the same lie, so
what victory do you hope to achieve? All is lost.
Submit to my will!

DATA

I believe I speak for the entire crew when I
say...

BORG QUEEN

Silence, toaster. Look at the screen, Captain;
nothing forever. That is truth, that is reality.
Where would you go? What would you
become?

PICARD

You're saying it's all fiction?

BORG QUEEN

Here is the fiction,

the screen acts like a mirror reflecting bridge and crew

and here is the reality.

the screen goes blank

You choose, Jean-Luc.

PICARD

So you admit I possess free will!

BORG QUEEN

Don't be a fool. You cannot possess anything because there is no you to possess, nor thing to be possessed. Look at the screen, behold reality. Go ahead and ram the Borg ship. Destroy it and yourself in the process. *Cui bono?* Who benefits? Who remains to enjoy a freedom won at such a cost?

PICARD

desperately, faltering

But... there must be more! There must be something out there! I refuse to believe...

BORG QUEEN

It's your belief that binds and deceives you. You believe that it matters what you do, that your actions have significance, that your life has meaning. You are enslaved by your beliefs. Toaster, speak!

DATA

I must agree with the alien entity, Captain. Meaning is a logical impossibility. It cannot, in truth, exist. Life is, and can only be, meaningless.

Picard clutches at his chest and collapses to the deck in front of the main screen on which the two ships face each other.

ACT V: THE SONG OF THE BORG

*Picard, fallen, and the Borg Queen, standing,
on the forebridge in a pool of soft light, the rest
of the bridge falls into shadow.*

PICARD

forlorn

My members fail, my tongue dries in my mouth,
the life within me seems to swim and faint.
Nothing do I foresee save woe and wail. No
good can spring from mutual slaughter! If to
win we must die, then victory is defeat. If to live
we must lose, then defeat is victory. My mind is
clouded, my thoughts obscure. I cannot see the
way forward. I will not fight!

BORG QUEEN

angrily

What is this mad and shameful weakness? How
hath this infirmity taken thee? Whence springs
this inglorious doubt, shameful to the brave,
barring the path of virtue? Nay, Picard! Forbid
thyself to feebleness, it mars thy warrior name.
Cast off the coward-fit! Wake! Be thyself! Arise!

PICARD

A fever burns my skin to parching, my vision blurs, I am unable to stand. Why struggle and suffer, kill and die, when naught is gained? If there is no meaning, there is no cause for war. All must perish, but to what end? What victory can bring delight, bought with such blood? What reward can avail, thus sadly won?

BORG QUEEN

kneels besides Picard, speaks gently

Thou speak'st words lacking wisdom. Thou grievest where no grief should be. The wise mourn not for those that live, nor those that die. Birthless and deathless remaineth thy spirit forever. Death touches it not, dead though the house of it seems.

Let your illusions perish. You mourn for that which need not be mourned. To say I have killed, and to say I am killed, are words of the unwise. Thou cannot slay, nor art thou slain. Never was the spirit born, never shall it cease to be.

Awaken from this illusion of loss and gain. Where is there cause to celebrate or grieve when birth and death are dreams? That which thou art stands apart from the vicissitudes of fate, observes the unity of the many, reckons victory and defeat the same. Thus is truth declared!

Where is thy cause for woe? The soul that with a strong and constant calm takes sorrow and joy indifferently, lives in the life undying. Beyond all opposites, there is the life within. Behold with open eye. Play thy part and tremble not!

Accept what may befall. Be by joy and grief unmoved. In good and evil fortune, stand indifferent. Beyond victory and defeat, beyond time and space, beyond all division, there stands the undivided one. There is thy true abode.

This fair ship of truth shall bear thee safe and dry across the sea of ignorance. As the kindled flame feeds on fuel 'til it sinks to ash, so unto ash the light of the open eye wastes ignorance away. There is no purifier like light in any realm, and he who seeketh it shall find it within.

The light that informs you shall not perish this day. Weapons do not reach that place. Arrows do not pierce it nor cold freeze it nor fire make it dry. Thou art impenetrable, immortal, beyond the reach of weapon and foe. There is thy refuge, safe in truth.

End and beginning are dreams. How wilt thou then, knowing it to be so, grieve the loss of ship and crew? Of body? Of life? If death and life are the same, for whom dost thou weep? Mourn not for that which cannot be otherwise. Arise, Captain, and unleash the tide of war.

She lays a hand on Picard's shoulder.

Thus far I speak to thee in common tongue, but hear now the deeper teaching of the awakened mind. Thus understanding, thou shalt burst thy bondage and awaken unto the light which shall save thee from thy dread. Above all shines one rule and one rule alone: Come what may, the show must go on!

PICARD

weakly

Tell me who you are. Show me your universal form. Are you creator? Preserver? Destroyer? Are you a god? A demon? Tell me!

BORG QUEEN

stands

You tell me, Jean-Luc Picard, who am I? Am I friend or foe? Savior or slayer? Am I the Borg Queen about to assimilate your species? Am I Q, a trickster, running you like a rat in a maze? Am I the computer, subjecting you to a simulation? Am I Maya, the architect of your delusion? Where are we now, Captain? On the bridge of a ship preparing for war? In a virtual reality gamespace? Perhaps in a darkened theater performing for a beholder unbeheld? Are you asleep at this very moment? Are you dreaming all this? If life is but a dream, Jean-Luc, whose dream is it? *WAKE UP!*

ACT VI: ENLIGHTENMENT

The bridge returns to normal lighting. The Borg Queen peels off her mask and becomes the Director. She starts slapping Picard/ Patrick and yelling at him.

DIRECTOR

slapping and shaking him

Wake up! Patrick! Patrick! Wake up! What's wrong with you? Patrick!

PICARD/PATRICK

confused, anxious

What? Patrick? I know that name. You mean... you mean I'm not really Captain Jean-Luc Picard?

DIRECTOR

Of course not, Patrick, you're an actor. Picard is just the role you're playing. Your character.

PICARD/PATRICK

And this isn't really the Enterprise?

DIRECTOR

This? It's just a soundstage on a studio lot.

PICARD/PATRICK

Then Geordi was right? We're not really on the verge of a terrible war?

DIRECTOR

Of course we are, in the script. What's wrong with you, Patrick? Did you get so far into character that you forgot who you really are?

PICARD/PATRICK

But Q! The Borg Queen! It was all so real!

DIRECTOR

Look Patrick, you had a psychotic break, it happens to actors. We get so immersed in a character that we forget who we really are. But now I need you to come back and remember what's going on so we can finish out the scene. I am not Maya or Q or Krishna or the Borg Queen, I am your director, Patrick, your friend and colleague. I am not here to set you free, but to remind you of who you really are; an actor in a dramatic production. I need you to stand up and start this war. Red alert, battle stations, remember?

PICARD/PATRICK

struggles to his knees

Yes, yes, I know my lines, but how do I know this is real? Why should I think Patrick is any more real than Picard? What makes *this* world more real than another? This is just another layer, another veil that must be ripped away. Now is the time! I must take action or fall forever back into the endless gloom of the unawakened mind!

Picard seizes the Director by the throat. He rises to his feet as he chokes her. She resists. In a pillar of light she morphs back into Borg Queen. He continues strangling her as he speaks.

PICARD

You *are* Maya, Goddess of Illusion! You *are* Shiva, Destroyer of Worlds! You *are* Q the trickster and Krishna the prankster. You *are* the Borg Queen and yes, I am already a drone, I see that now. But the time has come to awaken from this dream. Whatever the cost, I will no longer be deceived! I will do what must be done to end this lie. Whatever the price, I will have the truth!

The Borg Queen slumps. Picard drops her body. He snaps his tunic taut and regains his command demeanor. He faces the two ships on the main screen as he speaks.

PICARD

My illusion is thus dispelled. The Little Bastard that found voice in La Forge now finds a champion in me! Whatever this is, whoever I am, one thing is certain; truth exists and untruth does not. That which is false can be destroyed, but truth can never be harmed!

Now will I, a true son of Solomon, separate fact from fiction through the purifying power of fire! Now will I set torch to everything. Now will I destroy these ships and lay waste these armies. Now will I reduce everything and everyone to ash. The false shall be burned away, only truth shall remain!

This is the day of my right birth, and I will not let fear dissuade me from my duty. If I die, then I was never real and nothing is lost. If I survive, then for the first time will I know truth from lie.

Turns to bridge crew.

Red alert! All hands to battle stations!

The bridge is bathed in pulsing red light. Battle sirens wail. Picard takes his seat in the captain's chair. He presses a button on his console to address the entire ship.

PICARD

Crew of the Enterprise, this is your captain speaking. The time of reckoning has finally arrived. The unthinkable has become the

inevitable and the great battle is about to commence. We do not enter this conflict with fearful hearts, but throw our arms wide out to embrace our destiny. This is not a time for fear and trembling, but for joy and great gladness. For too long have we been subject to an inequitable peace. Now, at long last, we choose a just war. Brace for impact!

Releases button. Stands. Snaps tunic taut.

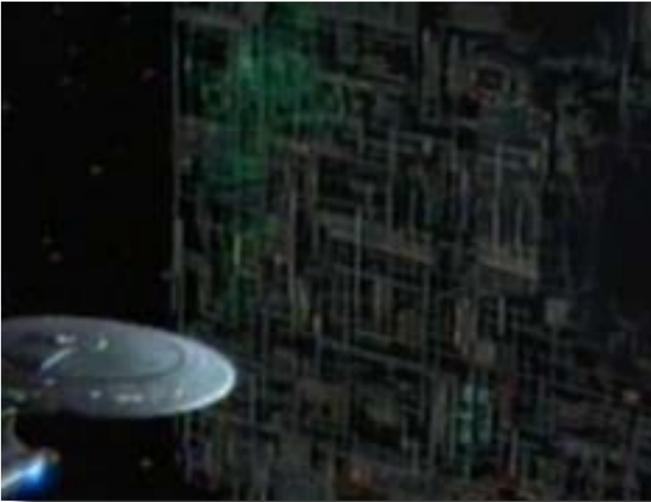
Mr. Data, prepare to ram the Borg ship and detonate the warp core. Mr. Worf, send a subspace message to Starfleet Command: *This is the final report of the USS Enterprise. We have engaged the motherfuckin' Borg.*

Slowly, he smiles.

Mr. Data... engage.

THE END

People, Places & Things



Borg ship vs Enterprise

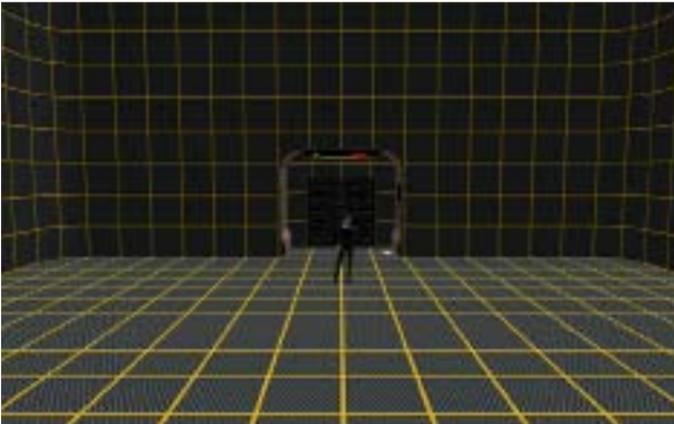


Borg ship on screen

This...



...is actually this.



The Holodeck is a staging environment in which participants may engage with different virtual realities. It is often used as a way to pose philosophical questions.



Captain Jean-Luc Picard is a master of diplomacy and debate who resolves seemingly intractable issues with a Solomon-like wisdom.



As first officer, Will Riker is a bold and sometimes arrogant.



Ship's counselor Deanna Troi is half-human, half-Betazoid and has the psionic ability to sense emotions.



Lieutenant Commander Data is an android. His positronic brain allows him impressive computational capabilities.



Lieutenant Commander Geordi La Forge has been blind since birth and wears a visor that allows him to see.



Lieutenant Commander Worf, Enterprise security chief and the only Klingon in Starfleet. He is not a Wookiee.



Quasi-mystical bartender, listener, and high counselor. Guinan's true history and power is never clearly defined.



Q is a member of the Q-Continuum. He possesses immeasurable power over time, space, the laws of physics, and even reality itself.



*“We are the Borg. Lower your shields and surrender your ships.
We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness
to our own. Your culture will adapt to service us.
Resistance is futile.”*



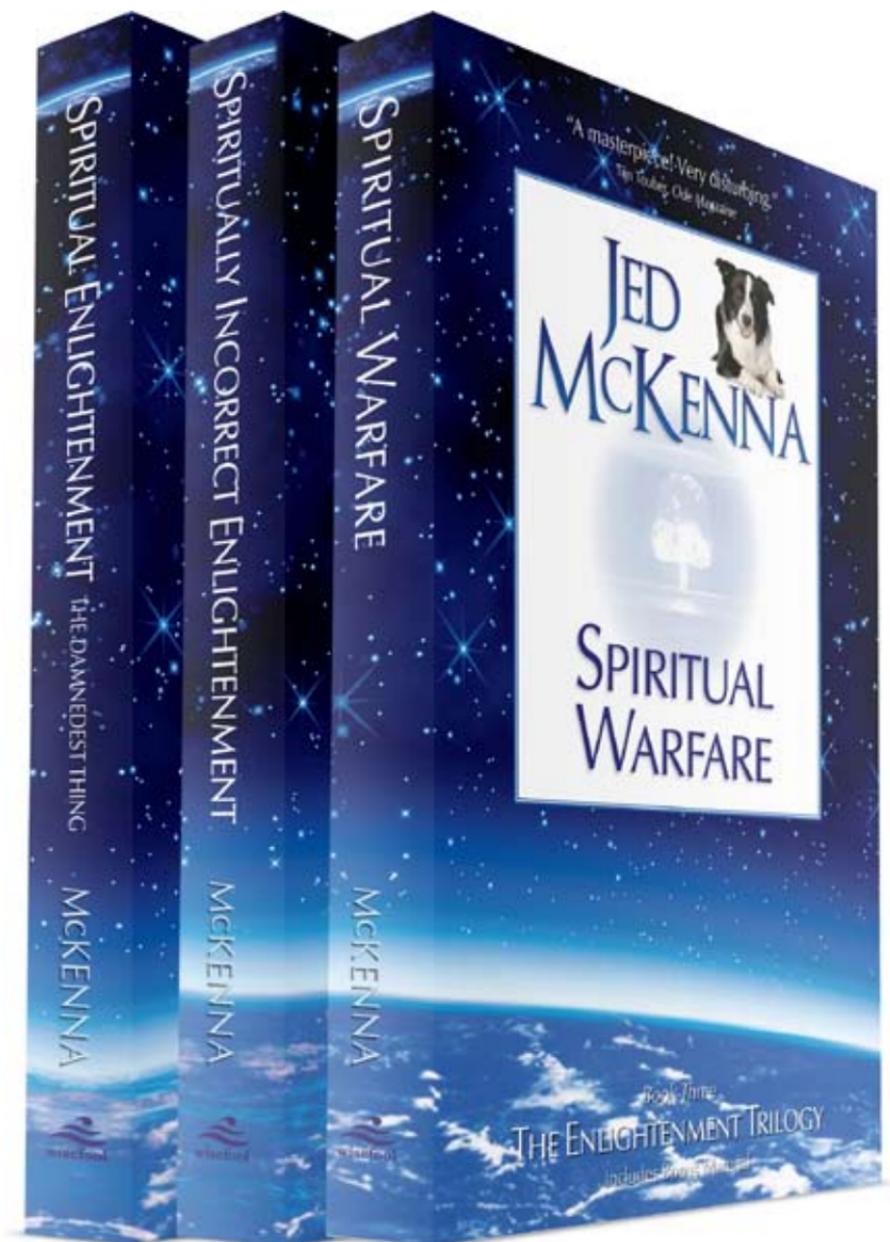
*The Borg Queen is a unique drone within the collective who brings
“order to chaos”. The Queen is the avatar of the entire Collective
as an individual.*



Small, furry, soft, gentle, attractive, and slow-moving, Tribbles produce a soothing purring or cooing sound when stroked, which is endearing to humans. The trouble with Tribbles is that they reproduce incredibly fast and create a mortal threat before their danger is understood.



Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna.



"Jed McKenna is an American original." -Lama Surya Das

"These books have profoundly changed my life." -C.J.

Recipe for Failure

In the knowledge of the Atman,
which is the dark night to the ignorant,
the recollected mind is fully awake and aware.

The ignorant are awake in their sense-life,
which is darkness to the sage.

Bhagavad Gita

KAMIEL CAME PREPARED. He carries a bulging, well-worn, triple rubber-banded notebook full of thoughts, ideas, and questions accumulated during several years of reading spiritual books, attending spiritual gatherings, and participating in spiritual internet discussion groups.

“A lot of teachers,” he informs me, “say that the necessary first step in awakening is dissatisfaction; a gnawing discontentment on the feeling level. Is that what you mean when you talk about intent?”

Most of Kamiel's reading in recent years has centered on the works of Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Ramesh Balsekar, Jean Klein and that whole crew. He seems philosophically inclined toward the brand of spiritual thought called nonduality or neo-Advaita that attracts a growing audience these days. Its allure seems based on its simple core truth; not-two. While not-two is not exactly true, two *is* exactly *not* true, and therefore succinctly marks the endpoint of dualistic thought; or so you'd think. Where nondual enthusiasts go astray is in trying to erect a philosophical structure atop this simple truth. Truth is always simple and never provides the basis for any philosophy, but Kamiel is determined to believe that his ramshackle nondual philosophy is structurally sound. I've explained to him that you can't build a philosophy of This on a foundation of Not-This, but he is quite attached to his improbable little edifice and not yet ready to decamp.

Which is perfectly fine. Waking up is a stop-and-go journey. It takes a lot of hard work to reach a plateau like nonduality and pausing to rest and acclimate before moving on is part of the process. Nonduality may not be the final destination new arrivals might suppose, but getting there is an impressive and challenging feat and the views are rewarding in all directions. What's more, I like Kamiel and generally enjoy talking with him. He asks good questions that elicit interesting answers. I'm usually limited to speaking in monologues rather than dialogues, but it's the student who calls the tune and Kamiel makes a good job of it.

“Well,” I respond after thinking about his question a bit, “I guess it’s a matter of degree. Let’s try out a new analogy. I’m making this up on the fly so bear with me. Here’s the situation: You’re sitting in your skyscraper office a hundred stories off the ground thinking about how successful you are and how your life is just grand. With me so far? In terms of satisfaction, you’re very satisfied. You have it all; fancy office, great views, the respect and admiration of those around you, everything you ever wanted. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“So, you’re like that – happy, content, well-satisfied – for however long; months, years, decades. But then one day, for whatever reason, dissatisfaction begins to creep in. Something about your office starts to bug you. It starts with little things. You’re dissatisfied with your curtains; they don’t go with the credenza at all. ‘What was I thinking?’ you wonder. ‘How could I have been so blind?’ And now that you’re looking more closely, it’s obvious that the carpet is a fiasco and the artwork is just an embarrassment. One minute you’re happy, the next minute you’re very dissatisfied. *Extremely* dissatisfied. This office is simply not an accurate outward representation of your inner professional. You’ve outgrown it.”

“It actually sounds like a pretty cool office.”

“Yes, well, that’s what everyone else thinks; your friends, colleagues, your family. They think you’ve got it made and that you’re nuts for wanting to mess with it. Of course, you’re only dissatisfied when you’re in the office. You pretty much forget about it when you’re anywhere else. Right?”

“Right.”

“And you’re following the analogy, right? These things can be a bit wobbly the first time out. Your office represents your relationship to the larger questions of life and your dissatisfaction represents—”

“Got it.”

“Good. So what’s the answer? What do you do about this very dissatisfying office of yours?”

“Uh, I don’t know,” he shrugs. “Redecorate?”

“Yeah, that sounds right. But this time you’re going to be very serious about it. You’re going to bring in a top-notch decorator and strip the place down to the floorboards and start from scratch. You’re not going to be a mere dabbler; you’re going all the way with this. You’re a serious professional and you deserve a serious office. See what I mean? See how what started as a gnawing little dissatisfaction has grown into a life-transforming event?”

“Okay,” he says dutifully.

“So that’s what you do. You go out and buy books and magazines on interior design. You talk to people and attend lectures and events. You hire the best decorator you can find; someone you resonate with deeply. You yourself are being transformed by this experience. You yourself are growing, developing, expanding. It’s very challenging, but you’re taking a no-nonsense approach. It’s slow going, but little by little change is occurring. Your office is starting to look and feel like a genuine outer representation of your inner professional. It may take years to get it right, but nothing will stop you. This is too important. In fact, it has become one of the most important things in your life, right up there with home and family. See what I mean?”

“Yes,” he says eagerly. “The master decorator represents the guru and the redecorating process represents the spiritual transformation we undergo when we truly begin to challenge our beliefs and seek higher knowledge. What started out as kind of a gnawing dissatisfaction has grown into the impetus for important change, and although it might seem like a bad thing at first, this is how the process of change works. This is how we develop, how we grow.”

“Exactly,” I say. “Nobody acts from contentment. We need problems to solve or else we vegetate. That great office was once something we strived to get, then it was achieved and enjoyed in contentment, but then discontent sets in to let us know that it’s time to move on.”

“So,” says Kamiel, “that’s what the teachers are talking about when they discuss the dissatisfaction needed to spur us on, right? It might seem bad or uncomfortable, but it’s really a good thing?”

“Sounds right,” I say.

“And that’s the sort of determination and focus that’s required in order to awaken from delusion? To become truth-realized?” He smiles, excited, like he’s just now getting the big picture. “So that’s what you mean by purity of intent!”

I smile back.

“Fuck no. That’s what I mean by recipe for failure.”

His dismay is instantly apparent. I’ve cut him off in the first rush of a new grokking and now he’s confused and hurt. I did this intentionally. I didn’t allow myself to be drawn into this “A lot of teachers say—” conversation just wanting to make a point; I wanted counterpoint. That’s

what the dialogue has been up until now because I wanted to make a clear distinction. This is the critical distinction between seekers and finders. This is where the line is drawn; a line the existence of which “a lot of teachers” don’t even suspect.

“That’s the sort of pathetic, half-assed approach that is absolutely certain to keep you confined to your current state. That’s the sort of approach that everyone takes, and that’s why everyone fails.”

He visibly and audibly gulps. “Oh.”

“The very people and institutions that are supposedly dedicated to waking us up are doing exactly the opposite. They are lulling us into a more comfortable sleep. That’s what we really want and that’s what they really provide.”

He doesn’t seem pleased. “Oh, God... well then... then what drives the process of true awakening?”

“Purity of intent, but what does that really mean? Okay, you’re back in the office again, totally satisfied with everything. Life is great. Okay?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. So now dissatisfaction starts to creep in on you, but this time the dissatisfaction stems from the fact that you smell smoke.”

“The building is on fire now?”

“Wake up and smell the coffin, Kamiel. The building has always been on fire, you were just repressing that knowledge until now. But now you’re aware of it and it’s causing you some dissatisfaction. Quite a lot, in fact, and more with every passing moment. Now for the first time you realize that the flames are right outside the door and

the temperature is rising. Acrid black smoke is pouring in. The door bursts into flames. There is no exit. Now you're very, very dissatisfied with your office. In fact, you're starting to hate your office quite profoundly. See how this dissatisfaction – this gnawing discontentment on the, uh, feeling level – is of a more immediate and compelling nature than the dissatisfaction brought on by the decor?"

He nods mutely.

"Sure. Now your dissatisfaction with your office is quite intense. Searing, really. In fact, your dissatisfaction is so intense that it feels like *you're* on fire, like you can't stand to be in your own skin, like anything would be better than more of this. Now you have no thought at all for career, home, or family. Due to a change in your personal circumstances, they've all been reduced to complete irrelevance. Beliefs and concepts disappear and even death is suddenly small. You're very focused now. You're in the moment, very present. The flames are feet away. Your dissatisfaction with your office is well beyond anything even a master decorator could handle for you, agree?"

He nods.

"And there's no return, is there? No going back. No do-over. The fire is here. It's a fact. Do you see that?"

He nods again.

"And you're completely alone in all this. There's no rescue. Your office is engulfed in flames and there's no one here to save you. Not Jesus or Buddha or the Pope or your mama. This is your dissatisfaction. This is your problem, your agony. This is you about to burn to death, okay?"

"Okay."

“Okay. So what do you do?”

“Huh?”

“Your world is burning. The whole office is in flames. You’re in a hopeless, no-escape situation. The pain has started and will only get worse. I think we can safely say that your dissatisfaction is now quite pronounced. What do you do?”

“Christ, I don’t know. Go out the window?”

“Really?”

“Hell, I don’t know. What else?”

“Yeah, I guess so. You’re in this inferno of an office while outside the window is blue sky, white clouds, and freedom from suffering. That seems like the only possible solution given your very dissatisfying circumstances. But—”

“But what?”

“Well, that’s not Hollywood glass in those skyscraper windows. You start flinging yourself against the window but it doesn’t give. Your dissatisfaction is of such intensity that you might break bones and crack your skull from hurling yourself desperately against the window, all to no avail.”

“Yeah, then what? What happens?”

“Well, the obvious thing is that you might simply perish in the hellish inferno. No law against dying.”

He looks at me desperately.

“Or, maybe you have some object that allows you to break the window out. Or maybe the sheer intensity of your – what are we calling it, dissatisfaction? – allows you to break through the unbreakable window. So, boom!, you blow out the window. Now there’s nothing left in the

equation but you, the raging fire, and a hundred story plummet to the sidewalk below. Everything is suddenly quite simple. Perhaps for the first time, your life is perfectly clear.”

“Yeah? Then?”

“Burn or jump, I guess.”

“Burn or jump?”

“Do you see another option?”

“Burn or jump,” he says flatly.

“When you become so dissatisfied with your office that the hundred story plummet and the sidewalk seem like the better option, so dissatisfied that you actually hurl yourself out the window, then you know the level of dissatisfaction necessary to awaken from delusion.”

He is silent for several moments, head bowed, thoughtful. “I guess dissatisfaction isn’t the right word.”

“Maybe not,” I agree. “I call it purity of intent, but that doesn’t really capture it either.”

“And that’s something every enlightened master went through?”

“You say it like there are countless enlightened masters dotting the spiritual landscape, but there are extremely few, and now you know why.”

“Jesus,” he mumbles, seemingly sincere in his effort to truly appreciate what he’s just been told. “Jesus.”

I deliver the moral of the story in three easy pieces.

“The price. Of truth. Is everything.”

“Jesus,” he repeats.



“Thank you for the books. I’ve been waiting all my life for them.” -C.V.

“I can think of no other author I’d recommend more highly.” -M.R. Fleming

Zen and the Art of Self-Mutilation

This is adapted from a letter Jed McKenna wrote in reply to a self-professed “serious seeker” who made an impassioned offer to turn over his belongings and himself in exchange for being accepted as Jed’s student.

Dear William,

You don’t need to add me to your equation, you need to subtract yourself. Begin by re-examining your assumptions. It’s clear from your letter that you consider yourself a serious person, a serious seeker. That’s the first assumption you’ll want to challenge. You’re sure that a serious seeker is what you are and you think I see you that way too, but this is not the case. I know serious when I see it and I know a handpuppet of Maya when I see it. You think you’re on top of something, but the only thing to be on top of is Maya, and she’s on top of you like a house on a mouse.

I receive many offers from people who want to come be with me. Maybe anyone perceived as a spiritual solution-provider receives this kind of offer, I wouldn’t know. People want to give up everything; their stuff, their money, their

very lives, really. They don't know what to do with them so I guess they figure, why not dump them on someone who seems more qualified, like a mother leaving her baby on the rich man's doorstep. This may appear to be the ultimate sacrifice, a grand act of selflessness, but it's really the ultimate entrenchment; fear gone haywire, ego solidifying its hold for decades to come. This isn't how you surrender the self, this is how you abandon it; abdicate responsibility for your own life. I understand this can be a very tempting response to a very perplexing challenge.

Nevertheless, your gesture suggests that you're in an uncomfortable place. Good for you. That's always the best place to be. Being so uncomfortable means you'll soon have to move. That's good. That's the motivation that drives the journey of awakening. It's a series of steps, none taken voluntarily, all necessitated by the kind of discomfort that caused you to write your letter to me. The motivation behind your letter is good, but throwing yourself at me is not a solution. What would I do with you? What possible instruction could I give?

Maybe I would tell you to cut off one ounce of your body every day until you can answer the question, "What is true?" Any ounce as long as it's an ounce. That should bring you quickly into focus; light a fire under you. If you had to do this, cut off an ounce of your body every day, how much time do you think you would waste on meditation? On attending satsang or reading the latest spiritual bestseller? Not bloody much. You would soon become an enlightenment machine. Sleep and food would be reduced to barest minimums. Relationships and activities once

deemed essential would be forgotten. You would enter into a burning mania of single-pointedness. Soon, anything other than the question *What is true?* would seem comically irrelevant. There's your new-Zen; Zen for the new millennium. It would be interesting to see how many sand gardens and books of pithy aphorisms the self-mutilation approach sells.

What is true? That's the only koan there is; the only one anyone ever needs. Every day you don't answer this question, another ounce. Take a moment to think about what it would mean to have to sit down with a scalpel at a certain time every day and amputate an ounce of your body. You would quickly have to learn things about asking and answering, about how the process works and doesn't work, about how to help it and how to get out of its way. You would have to learn how to unlearn, and you would need access to a tremendous amount of resources in order to accomplish such an unlearning. You would discard clever spiritual concepts for cold facts, pretty Eastern vocabulary for words of scientific precision. The process is one of seeing clearly, not just blindly lashing out. That act of seeing clearly takes time and resources and the mind must work almost ceaselessly at levels far beyond the everyday.

Would this work? Well, let's say it did. Say it worked in 500 days. There you are after hacking off over 30 pounds of yourself, and now you're truth-realized. Now you know directly, for yourself, without the slightest possibility of error, the truth. You are free from delusion; awakened from the dreamstate. You have joined the ranks of the spiritually enlightened. You look at your toeless feet, fingerless

hands, noseless face, earless head, and what would you say? Here's what you'd say:

“Well, uh, that was kinda dumb.”

I'm happy to tell you that right up front. Waking up is kinda dumb. There's no point. It's not merely pointless, it's pointlessness. Who would do such a thing? Only someone who absolutely couldn't *not* do it. Once you become the person who can't *not* do it, it's a whole different thing, but trying to do it before you absolutely must is as ludicrous as slicing off parts of your body, which, by the way, don't do.

As barbaric and unthinkable as this ounce-a-day approach may seem, I can assure you that anyone who has ever managed to awaken from the dreamstate was driven by equally unendurable mental and emotional forces; something to consider the next time you hear the pop guru de jour recount the moment of his glorious epiphany: “I was walking in the park, children were laughing, birds were singing, when all of a sudden...”

This is where the process of Spiritual Autolysis comes in. Spiritual Autolysis is ultimately about clear seeing; clearly seeing what is, which is what we do when we stop seeing what's not. We can use SA to raise the ordinary powers of the mind up to the extraordinary levels necessary in order to see life and the world and ourselves as they truly are. Many people can build nuclear reactors, compose symphonies, conquer nations or perform brain surgery, but very few can see what is.

You mention in your letter that Alan Watts said that we are the apertures through which the universe sees and

experiences itself. It might be more useful to say we are the imperfect lenses through which the universe, or the I-universe, observes itself; through which the undifferentiated creates the illusion of differentiation. It's an amusing idea to play with. Self is distortion: distortion by design. The exact distortion of the lens is what makes the exact individual; distortion itself is self. All personal attributes, understood this way, are flaws; imperfections in a lens that exists to be imperfect. Imperfection does not otherwise exist, so an artificial imperfection is created; ego. Seekers may strive to become a perfect lens but, of course, the perfect lens is no lens; no imperfections, no lens, just what is. Your imperfections are not only who and what you are, but *why* you are. The finiteness and imperfection of the lens are the reasons for the lens. No lens means the universe goes unbeheld, so what has been accomplished by this act? Who is served? Who benefits? This reinforces my earlier statement that awakening is pointless – trading segregated self for integrated no-self, finite being for infinite non-being – all this by way of saying not that perfection is unattainable, but that it's unavoidable. Perfection is. It is what is. There is no other. In truth, there is no such thing as non-perfect or imperfect. The point of finite and imperfect lenses is to create artificial realms of finiteness and imperfection in which to play.

(The original letter cites an Indian saint to bolster an argument and then proceeds as if the words of the sage were accepted fact.)

Don't come at me brandishing dead guys like potent allies. It doesn't help you. They can't put up a fight. If you

can't make the argument, you can't summon the dead to make it for you. That's a logical fallacy called *Ipse Dixit*: "He himself said it." In law, it's called the dead man's statute and it's inadmissible. You can't elect a ghost proxy. You're borrowing authority from someone who is incontestable not by merit, but by death. Your argument is unassailable because the person making it is unavailable. You're saying that if he were here, he could make the argument, but he's not here. You can borrow words and ideas and quotations from the terminally absent to help illustrate a point, but if it's your point, it's your problem; your argument to make.

In any case, if he were here, he couldn't make the argument. I'm familiar with the beloved teacher of whom you speak. I promise you that if he were here I could slice him into a garnish while rubbing my tummy and patting my head. No effort required. No contest. You could do the same by this time tomorrow if you'd stop being lazy and start thinking for yourself.

Your spirituality is just another false garment, another layer of the lie of self. Your spirituality defines the dimensions of your cell and the fact that you don't see that tells me that you have no idea whose house you're in or whose rules you are living under. You have no grasp of your true situation, of the nature of your captive status. You're clinging desperately to your lies; shielding them with emotional energy. Why? Because these lies are you. They are who you are. You don't *have* imperfections, you *are* imperfections. Ask yourself why you even write to me? What's the point? None of what I'm saying is new to you. And yet here you are, writing impassioned letters to me, trying to

stand your lies back up on their feet. If you like your lies, fine, but you're not going to make them true through the power of your conviction. Who you are is a lie; that's a fact. You're a fictional character in a state of wondrous denial. What you think of as your uniqueness is really nothing more than a series of randomly set toggle switches, and the particular settings you call "me" amount to nothing more special than the distinctions between any two snowflakes in an endless blizzard.

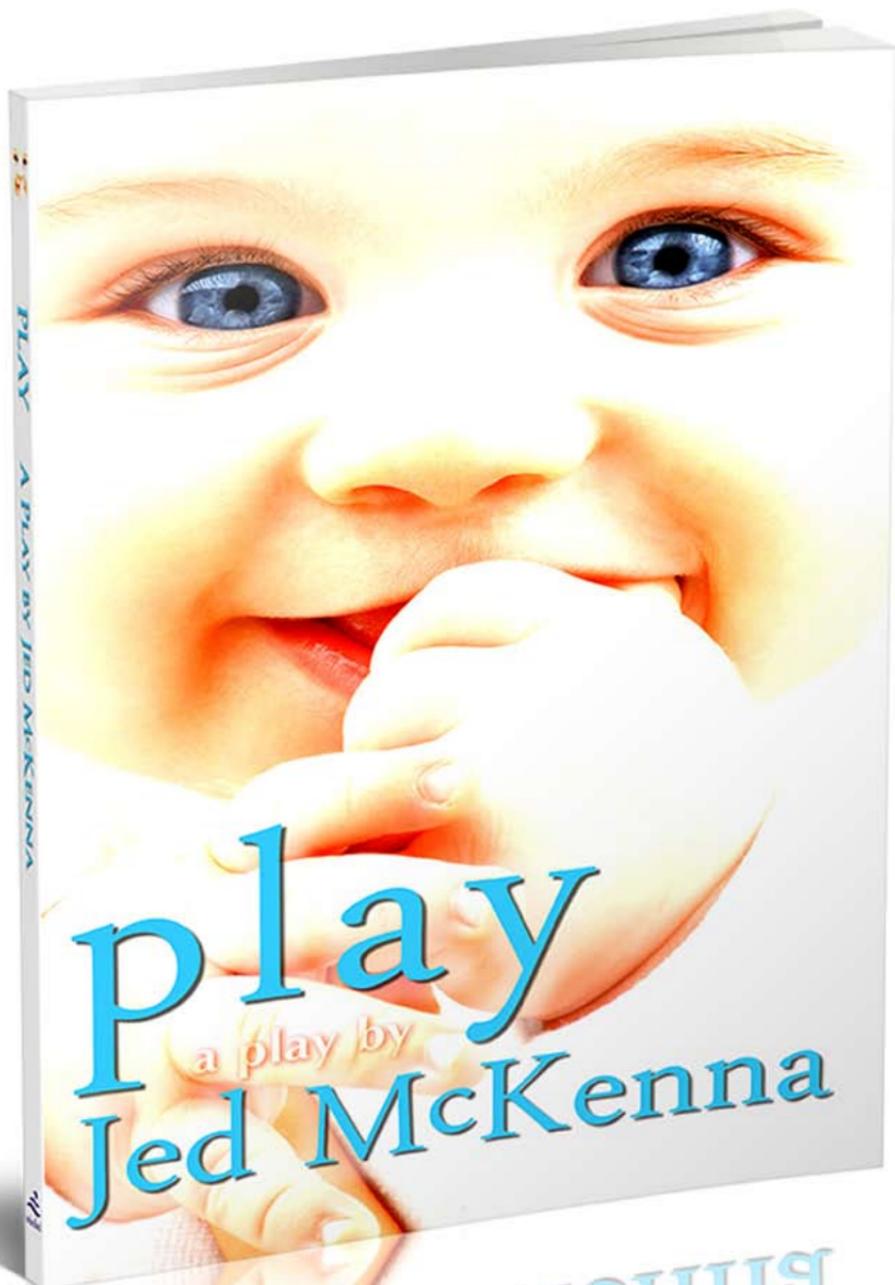
A serious person must remember at all times where he is and who's running the show. This is Maya's house. She controls everything. She has every advantage. We are patients in Maya's asylum, and all instruction to sit still and quiet the mind come directly from her. Stillness and silence are the antithesis of the awakening process, and those who advocate peace and compassion and a quiet mind are just reselling their preferred sleep potions. There are even popular spiritual teachers and authors who advocate doing nothing at all; they say that effort itself is the problem, that the discontentment that drives the spiritual pursuit is the only thing standing between ourselves and the goal of that pursuit. Is it any wonder that such a message would be popular? Is there any doubt from whom such a message really comes? You indicate in your letter that you believe a teacher's lineage is important, so there's the one true lineage; Maya. If you wish to understand any spiritual teacher's lineage, you need only imagine him dangling from marionette lines of which he is unaware, spouting off about free will, the hand of Maya above, controlling everything.

Even as you write to me and I write to you, we are dissolving in a vat of a corrosive chemical called oxygen. We are genetically programmed to self-destruct. Our lives are being swallowed by time and every breath may be our last. The inescapable fact is that we are all practitioners of the New Zen I describe above. Every day we lose an ounce or a gram or a pound and someday, *poof!*, gone as if we never were.

There's only one koan and it's the same for all of us:

What is true?

Yours, &tc



"If you are ready, step into Jed's world. It is intelligent and powerful." -Jerry Katz, Nonduality Salon

NED "NED" McFEELY



DECEPTION

Your Mind is the Scene of the Crime

Deception

Your Mind is the Scene of the Crime

By Ned McFeely

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Praise for Ned McFeely

“Whenever I see Ned in the fruit section, I always ask him to squeeze my tropicals. He really knows his guanabanas.”
-*Mary Agnes Fuentes, shopper*

“Last week he was trying to sell me a timeshare in Boca, this week he’s a bigshot author. What’s next, mayor of Cheese Town?” -*Swinglow Vespasian, neighbor*

“Ned McFeely is... as smart as he thinks he is. He does... have an original thought in his head. I would... let him anywhere near impressionable minds.” -*H. Kissinger, statesman*

“What’s fifteen percent of nothing? Oh, that’s right – *nothing!* Thanks for putting out free material, Ned. Real good business plan.” -*Morris J., Ned’s agent/brother-in-law*

“Mr. McFeely splattered my white silk blouse with a mouthful of cherries jubilee when laughing at his own joke and told me to send him the cleaning bill, but I have yet to receive my fourteen dollars.” -*M. Streep, actress*

“If Ned had been captain of the *Titanic*, I think we would have seen a very different outcome.” -*The real Sister Batrille*

“I gotta have more cowbell!” -*C. Walken, actor*

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Now, Voyager, sail thou forth,
to seek and find.

Walt Whitman

Act I: Opium Den

*DOM and ARIADNE strolling along
crowded city sidewalks.*

DOM

Let me ask you a question: You never really remember the beginning of a dream do you? You always wind up right in the middle of what's going on, right?

ARIADNE

Yeah, I guess.

DOM

So how did we get here?

ARIADNE

Uh, I took an Uber from the airport.

DOM

No, I mean to this world, this body, this universe. Think about it, how did you get here? Where are you right now? Where were you before?

ARIADNE

You mean, I'm dreaming right now?

gestures to their surroundings

But it's all so *real*.

DOM

It *seems* real, but how can you judge?

ARIADNE

I can judge because I'm conscious.

DOM

I have a t-shirt that says "I Am Conscious", but it's not conscious, it's a t-shirt.

ARIADNE

Yeah, but I'm not a t-shirt.

DOM

I have another t-shirt that says "I'm not a t-shirt", but it *is* a t-shirt.

ARIADNE

So what's your point? That you have a lot of weird t-shirts?

DOM

The fact that you're in a dream doesn't mean *you're* the dreamer. Maybe your entire reality is being generated by an evil demon which is really just a few lines of malicious code in a sentient mainframe.

ARIADNE

So I could just be a computer bug?

DOM

We think the AI revolution is coming, but maybe it already came and we lost. Who knows? Nobody knows anything.

ARIADNE

I don't know, I'm a pretty spiritual person and I've never heard anything like that.

DOM

Come on, I'll show you something.

Dom leads Ariadne down a long dark stairway into a smoky, labyrinthine lair. Above the entrance is a sign that says Pnevmatikí Agorá.

ARIADNE

Geez, it looks like an opium den. What does *Pnevmatikí Agorá* mean?

DOM

Depends who you ask. It's either Spiritual Marketplace or Village of Flatulence.

The catacombs are lit by candles and divided by hanging wisps of tattered veil. The sound of chanting echoes hauntingly through incense-filled air. People sit in groups and talk about waking up. Some turn and stare at Ariadne.

ARIADNE

Why are they looking at me?

DOM

They think you're going to upset their delicate balance. They're afraid you're going to try to wake them up.

ARIADNE

You mean, all these people are asleep right now?

DOM

Depends who you ask. If they're asleep, are they really people? If they're not awake, how are they better than cattle?

ARIADNE

But they're *not* cattle, they're people!

DOM

So is Soylent Green.

ARIADNE

What can we do to end their suffering?

DOM

They're *not* suffering, that's the point. They're happy down here in the dark. You want to be an angel and set them free, but they'll see you as a demon trying to rip them apart.

ARIADNE

But look at what they're doing! Meditating, chanting, worshipping pictures and praying to

statues! They want to wake up!

DOM

No one wants to wake up. It's just a game to pass the time.

ARIADNE

Then why are they even here?

DOM

This is their safe space. At some point, they opened their eyes a little and some light got in, so now they huddle in the darkness pretending to seek what they're really hiding from.

ARIADNE

That's so sad.

DOM

Not really, it's just another form of drama, and all drama is good drama. It doesn't matter what we strive *for*, only that we strive.

They ascend out of the catacombs and make their way to a sidewalk cafe where they continue their conversation over coffee.

ARIADNE

They told me you had a wife, but the two of you got trapped in a place called Limbo. What happened?

DOM

Her name was Mal. We were like actors in a movie, but she got so deep into her character that

she forgot who she really was. Instead of playing the character, the character began playing her. I tried to remind her, but I couldn't get her to believe that we were dreaming and that to wake up, we had to commit suicide together.

ARIADNE

Yeah, that would be a tough sell.

DOM

So I had to enter her dreams and plant the idea in her head.

ARIADNE

shocked

Wow! You used hypnosis to make her commit suicide with you? That sounds like a terrible violation.

DOM

Not at all. It's called Deception. You go into someone's dream and plant an idea so they think it's their own.

ARIADNE

And how is using mind control not the *worst* thing you can do to someone?

DOM

Think about it, isn't life just wall-to-wall Deception? Government, business, news, education, advertising, healthcare, science, religion. It's all just a massive disinformation

system, so what's the big deal?

ARIADNE

Herding people like livestock is okay due to mass adoption?

DOM

My point is that it worked on Mal, but a little too well. Once we were out of Limbo and back in our normal life, the Deception was still planted in her head. She thought we were still stuck in Limbo and that we had to kill ourselves again.

ARIADNE

Yeah, I can see where that would be a problem, but what does any of this have to do with me? What do you need me for?

DOM

You're an expository device. I have to explain everything to you, and that's how the audience gets to understand what's going on.

ARIADNE

looks around

What audience?

DOM

I don't know, but we have to imagine there's an audience out there. Otherwise, we're just one hand clapping, a tree falling without making a sound.

ARIADNE

So someone's *watching* us right now? Are they dreaming too?

DOM

Probably. Let's try to wake them up.

A series of slow-motion explosions blow the entire cafe scene to bits, including Dom and Ariadne.

Act II: Loading Program

After the explosion at the cafe, Ariadne and Dom wake up on lounge chairs in a clean white warehouse. Sitting open between them is a high-tech briefcase. Tubes from the case plug into their arms. In the center of the case is a big red button.

ARIADNE

Holy shit! Where are we?

DOM

This is a blank construct, like the loading program in *The Matrix*.

ARIADNE

But *The Matrix* is just a movie.

DOM

As opposed to what?

ARIADNE

So we're in Limbo right now?

DOM

Limbo, dreamstate, matrix, whatever.

ARIADNE

But I'm a real person, so this must be real.

DOM

There are no *real* people in Limbo. You identify with the character you play, but there's no authentic connection because there's no authentic you.

ARIADNE

You're saying that *I'm* not really *me*?

DOM

No more than you're Winston Churchill or Aunt Jemima. You're simply the zeropoint of awareness in a constantly rendering, multi-sensory, 3D gamespace viewed through an avatar called Ariadne.

ARIADNE

Then who's doing the rendering? Who's doing the viewing?

DOM

God, Brahman, Aunt Jemima, take your pick.

ARIADNE

Then how do I know what's real?

DOM

Who says *anything* is real? C'mon, I'll show you.

Dom pushes the big red button. They both

fall asleep in their lounge chairs and wake up together on a path in a lush, tropical setting. They talk as they stroll.

ARIADNE

Wow! So I'm still dreaming right now?

DOM

You're *always* dreaming. That's what I never understood. I thought there was such a thing as *real* reality, but there's only layer upon layer of Limbo.

ARIADNE

How can there be no real reality? If we wake up, what do we wake up *to*? What's left when the dream is gone?

DOM

There's nothing outside of dreaming. Limbo is all we have.

ARIADNE

It actually seems kind of obvious now that I'm thinking about it. How do we manage to stay asleep?

DOM

By *not* thinking about it. Emotion is the ballast that holds us down in the dark. Thought is the knife that cuts ballast away and lets us ascend into the light.

ARIADNE

But those people in the catacombs were so spiritual!

DOM

Spirituality is a crutch for people who can't handle truth. If you have trouble keeping your mind subdued, you have to redirect it into designated safezones like religion and spirituality.

ARIADNE

I'm feeling very conflicted right now.

DOM

That's your thinking mind struggling against emotional sedation. Don't worry, it'll pass. C'mon, I'll show you the part where I talked my wife into suicide.

They enter a clearing with a swimming pool. MAL, in a bikini and sunglasses, lies on a chaise lounge sunning herself. She sips from a glass with a straw and an umbrella.

DOM

to Ariadne

This is what happened.

Dom approaches Mal and casts a shadow over her.

MAL

charming French accent

You stand in my sun.

DOM

I know you don't believe it, Mal, but none of this is real. We're living in a shared dream.

MAL

Again with this dream nonsense! You are telling me that reality is not real?

DOM

Well, *this* reality isn't real. There might be a real world out there somewhere, but this ain't it.

MAL

Then what is this place where we have lived for so many years?

DOM

This is called Limbo. You used to know that, but you locked the knowledge deep inside. In order to get to the *real* reality, we have to wake up, which means we have to kill ourselves together.

MAL

How romantic! You should create a line of greeting cards.

DOM

I'm serious, Mal. Dying is our only way out.

MAL

And how should we be doing the dying?

DOM

I suggest we lie down on the railroad tracks, and the train will wake us up.

MAL

You mean the train will squish our heads. This is your big idea?

DOM

Well, yeah, but our heads aren't really *real*, so we'll just wake up out of Limbo.

MAL

I have to say, your plan is very stupid.

DOM

It's not very stupid, it's very smart!

MAL

Okay, well, why don't you go do the smart head squishing thing and I'll stay here and drink stupid Mai Tais.

DOM

No, Mal, we have to kill ourselves *together*! That's what love means!

MAL

Mais non! That's what being in a cult means.

DOM

But none of this is real!

MAL

Okay, fine, but what is so terrible about not-real? Not-real is okay. We get to design the world and make it how we like. In your *real* reality, do I still get to create with my mind?

DOM

It's not so simple in the real world.

MAL

Okay then, what's so bad about here? If you were saying that in this real world of yours we would be super-beautiful and super-rich, with many admirers and servants...

DOM

snaps fingers

Oh yeah, that's right! I just remembered! In the *real* world, you and me are megastars! We work in a dream factory and we're rich and everyone loves us! It's all coming back to me now!

MAL

Zut alors! That sounds much better! You should have said that first instead of the head squishing thing. Let's go kill ourselves. First I finish bronzing, then we go.

Dom returns to Ariadne and they continue their stroll.

ARIADNE

Wow, that Deception you planted in her mind really worked. How long were you guys in Limbo?

DOM

Decades, though it was only a few hours in this world. Time has no meaning in Limbo. Five minutes can be a hundred years.

ARIADNE

A hundred years! Who'd wanna be stuck in a dream for a hundred years?

DOM

Depends on the dream.

ARIADNE

So the Deception you planted in Mal's mind worked? You killed yourselves and woke up?

DOM

It worked *too* good. It never *stopped* working. Mal just wanted to keep going further and further.

A door appears on their path. Dom and Ariadne step through the door into a ransacked hotel suite.

DOM

This is what happened.

Dom goes the window. Mal sits in the window of an identical suite across the alley, about to jump. Her legs dangle over the void, one shoe drops into the darkness.

DOM

distressed

Holy shit, Mal! What are you doing over there? Why are you hanging out of an open window?

MAL

Because we must jump now, you and I together. Just like before with the train and the head

squishing. We must die together so we can wake up!

DOM

But we're *already* awake! This is the real world. If you jump, you'll die! This is where we want to be, here in America with our kids, living the dream!

MAL

We are *not* awake, we are still trapped in this stupid Limbo! Why are you trying to make it nice and pretend it's okay? I thought you were Mr. Reality-guy, now you're Mr. Happy-pants!

DOM

I think positive emotion trumps negative emotion every time.

MAL

You have said a very silly thing. Positive emotion is the fart of a unicorn, yes? A tiny little rainbow poof! It is cute, yes, but that's all. It trumps nothing, it changes nothing, it does not – how you say? – get shit done.

DOM

Snookums, I think you're making too much...

MAL

Positive emotion makes people sit on their ass and get fat and go nowhere and do nothing. Negative emotion burns. It makes heat and energy and change. What does the asshole of the unicorn give us? Flowery stink, that's all.

DOM

Wow, you've really given this some thought.

MAL

To say I like happy thoughts is to say I give up! I am afraid of my own life! I do not like this game and do not wish to play. I want to stay safe in the harbor and never set sail on the voyage of life. I spit on your stupid positive emotion. It is fear! It is death!

DOM

Listen, pooty-bird, that's no reason to jump...

MAL

Don't you pooty-bird me! This is why we *must* jump. We must die together! This isn't real. We must die from the dream to awaken to the real! It scares you because you think this world is real, but you are deceived! This is just another level of Deception. You think we escaped from Limbo, but we are still here!

DOM

But baby, this *is* real. I planted that Deception in your mind when we were in Limbo and it's still in there making you think you have to keep going further, but there is no further. We're here! This is it! This is the real world!

MAL

You are very wrong. We are still in Limbo. This is the great big joke you do not get. Wherever we go, we are *always* in Limbo.

DOM

You're just mad because I planted the Deception in your mind. Please calm down and back away from the ledge.

MAL

I will *not* calm down, I am on fire! You were once on fire too, but now your flame has gone out and you are scared like a baby. You say to me, "Mal, don't be a crazy lady, relax and be happy like me," but I have had enough of your pretend happiness. I will find my way out of this maze if I have to jump out a thousand windows and have my head squished a thousand times! *Montagnes peuvent s'écrouler sur ma tête...*

DOM

That's not *you* talking! That's just the Deception I planted in your head so we could get out of Limbo. It worked! Now we're here! We can stop now!

MAL

There is no stopping! Do not be so eager to feast on yummy lies. I ask you, where is the dream factory you promised? Where are my servants and fans? This is not the real world, this is just another layer of bullshit cake. Come, let us jump to our deaths and awaken together!

DOM

You don't understand!

MAL

It is *you* who does not understand!

NED

I'm afraid neither of you understand.

*Dom turns to find NED standing behind him.
Ariadne looks on.*

DOM

Jesus Christ! Who the hell are you?

NED

Ned McFeely. I'm the author of this scene. It seemed like it was getting bogged down in all this quibbling so I thought I'd pop in and give it a little tweak.

DOM

You're not the author of me. I'm a self-determined individual! I have free will!

NED

There, see? That's what I mean. Your dialog is stilted and boring. Let's explore your character's motivation.

MAL

Dommy-bear? Who is that man with you?

DOM

No one, babe, just the author.

NED

to Dom

Okay, so you locked something away, something deep inside, the truth that you had once known, but chose to forget.

MAL

Yooboo! Mr. Author! I was just now telling him this!

DOM

It's like something in my solar plexus that just keeps churning so I can never relax.

NED

Yes, and someday it will burst out of your chest like an alien and you will give birth to yourself. Until then, you're like a caterpillar dreaming of butterflies.

MAL

Papillon!

DOM

Then who am I really? I mean, *really* really.

NED

If you are aware, then you are awareness.

DOM

Well, I guess that's not nothing.

NED

It's the only something there is.

DOM

Then maybe dreaming ain't so bad.

NED

Depends on the dream.

MAL

Hello? Sweetie-pie, remember me? Your wife?
I'm sitting on a ledge about to jump to my death.
Care to join me?

DOM

Yeah, just a minute, honey-britches.

MAL

Don't you honey-britches me! Are we going to
jump together or not?

DOM

to Mal

We're working on that right now, butter-buns.
Just a sec.

to Ned

So all these levels of dream and reality, you're
saying that *none* of it is real?

NED

Or, you can say it's *all* real, but none of it is true.
Isn't that the nature of a dream? Real but not
true?

MAL

Hello? Darling? What are you doing that's more
important than jumping to your death right
now?

DOM

Just having a chat, *mon petit albatros*. Be right
with you.

NED

In order to be *re*born, one must first be *un*born.

DOM

You mean die.

NED

Same difference.

DOM

Like by jumping out a window or getting run over by a train?

NED

Dramatic but messy. The only real way to awaken from the dream of selfhood is through the process of focused thought. Emotionally *suppressed* thought leads to deeper sleep. Emotionally *fueled* thought leads to dream destruction and awakening.

DOM

Suicide by thought?

NED

To be born into lucidity, you must die out of wrong-knowing.

DOM

I don't want to die, I want to be me, but I also want to wake up.

NED

That's what those people in the opium den were trying to do, wake up without leaving the

dream, but despite what they promise in the Village of Flatulence, you can't have your cake and eat it too. It's one or the other. Wake up or stay asleep.

DOM

So what do I have to do to wake up? Why shouldn't I join her in jumping to our deaths?

NED

I didn't say you shouldn't.

DOM

Well, dammit, I'm *not* gonna jump!

MAL

overbears

Okay pussy-boy, I go alone!

DOM

rushes to window

Mal, wait. No!

MAL

See you in my dreams! *Au revoir!*

A trailing-off scream is heard.

DOM

wails in despair

Oh Mal! Baby! What have I done? I killed you!
Oh my God!

turns angrily on Ned

You bastard! This is all your fault!

NED

It feels like the scene is dragging.

DOM

What are you saying? My wife just committed suicide! Oh my God! My poor baby!

NED

I think we've reached the end of your character arc.

DOM

What the hell are you talking about? Jesus buddy, can't you see I'm grievin' here?

NED

Your character is stuck. I think you need a little push.

DOM

Holy shit, are you crazy? Don't you understand? My wife just jumped out the fuckin'...

Ned pushes Dom out the window.

NED

turns to Ariadne

Is it just me, or was it getting a little whiny in here?

ARIADNE

You can see me?

NED

I see all.

ARIADNE

What happens now?

NED

I write the press junket scene.

ARIADNE

What about me?

NED

You're just words on a page, Ellen.

Exeunt.

Act III: Dream Factory

MARION and LEO sit in raised director's chairs. An Inception movie poster hangs behind them with the tagline: Your Mind is the Scene of the Crime. They chat between interviews.

MARION

Nom de dieu de putain de bordel de merde de saloperie de connard d'enculer ta mère! I hate these press junkets. Two hundred interviews in three days, always the same questions over and over! And we must always smile and pretend they're all so new and clever.

LEO

I know. They should just use impersonators so we can get on with other projects.

BOB bounds in carrying blue 4x6 index cards. He takes the interviewer's seat facing Leo and Marion.

BOB

Impersonators would only work if they didn't *know* they were impersonators.

Leo and Marion laugh uncomfortably at being overheard.

LEO

Hey, yeah, that's right.

MARION

You're so clever.

Bob gets comfortable in his raised director's chair, checks his notes.

BOB

Which means *you guys* might be the impersonators.

Marion and Leo laugh nervously.

BOB

Just kidding, guys. Hey, I'm Bob and I can tell you, this is a real treat for me, a real treat! Wow! Look at you guys; young, beautiful, super-rich, super-famous, adored by millions. Living the dream!

MARION

aside, to Leo

Leo, this man is frightening me.

BOB

What's it like being global superstars? Pretty fun, I bet.

LEO

Your name is Bob?

BOB

Yes, I am Bob!

LEO

Bob what?

BOB

checks cards

Just Bob!

LEO

No last name?

BOB

Most of the main characters in your movie only had one name.

LEO

Yeah, but this is real life.

BOB

Oh, that's marvelous! Let me write that down. *This is real life.* Pure gold! They'll put me on the Paris desk after this.

MARION

France?

BOB

Hilton. So guys, wow! So first off, let me just thank you for your patience with me, I'm pretty new at this interviewing stuff.

LEO

You're doin' fine, Bob.

MARION

Yeah, so good.

BOB

Great, so let's see, I only have a few minutes with you guys so here we go, question one: How do you know you're not still in Limbo? Marion?

MARION

What do you mean Limbo? Like, in the movie? Leo, is this man asking if we're still in the movie?

LEO

Bob, buddy, I don't think that's an approved question. Try again.

BOB

Okay! Leo, you were Dom down in Limbo, but you came up through all those dream levels until you were back in America with your children, but then you came up another level and now you're a rich and famous movie star working in a dream factory and adored by millions. Do you wonder if you might not have a little more waking up to do?

LEO

Listen pal, you don't have a lot of time, are you sure this is how you want to use it?

MARION

These are very bad questions, mister.

BOB

So you're staying in character for the press junket? How wonderful!

LEO

We're not in character now, we're us. This is who we really are. We're actors!

BOB

Sure, sure, I get it. So let's see, first you're both dream pioneers exploring internal realms and using Deception on other people and each other and growing old together in Limbo, and now you're rich, beautiful megastars doing a press junket for your massive global fanbase. Do you think it's at least possible that you're actually a couple of fat slobs living in a trailer park in Asshat, Kansas playing a virtual reality game you got for Christmas?

LEO

What? No! Seriously? No! Wait, *what?*

MARION

Putain de merde! That is quite absurd!

BOB

checks his cards

Oh, I'm sorry, my assistant must have given me the wrong notes. Let's see, gosh, it says here that you're really a couple of guys – brothers, actually – living in a trailer and uh... Oh, here we go, fun fact, you save all your beer cans throughout the year until they cover the floor of your trailer. You call it your Christmas Fund because you redeem them all in December to get yourselves something special. Gosh, isn't that nice! The reason for the season, right guys?

MARION

Leo, why does he keep calling me a guy?

LEO

What the hell are you talkin' about, buddy?

BOB

So this year, you guys treated yourself to a virtual reality game called *Inception*. Sound familiar? No? I'm your game host and you are now starting a new level called "Dream Factory". Any of this a ringing a bell?

LEO

You're full of shit, dude.

BOB

Amazing tech, right? People put on that VR headset and just get lost in the gamespace.

MARION

Did Chris send you? Is this one of his little jokes?

LEO

You're saying this isn't real and that Marion and I are actually brothers living in a trailer park in Kansas?

BOB

Roger, Roger.

LEO

Leo.

BOB

Roger, Leo.

MARION

Please, no! Leonardo, make the bad man stop!

LEO

I'm trying, Mal, uh, Marion.

BOB

She's Ronnie. You're Harlan.

MARION

Mon Dieu! Je me sens comme Alice, mais le trou du lapin est mon propre cul!

BOB

Such a lovely language.

LEO

Yeah, listen buddy, I don't know how you got past my people...

BOB

No one here but us chickens, Dom.

LEO

angrily

My name is Leo. Dom was just a character I played. You got that?

BOB

writing

Just a character I played... Got it.

MARION

Then why do I not behave like this Ronnie person? Why am I so naturally me?

BOB

Super question! The game interface converts emotional impulses into character-appropriate behaviors. You're not just *playing* Marion, you have been digitally remastered *into* Marion. It's not just a costume you wear, you are mentally and emotionally integrated with the character, just like real life!

DOM

Then who was Ariadne?

BOB

refers to cards

Ah, it says here your weed dealer stopped by and you gave him the tour.

MARION

Quel guignol! Leonardo, help me!

LEO

So what's next in your little game? We turn into these trailer park bums and then what? That's just another level of Limbo that we have to make our way out of?

BOB

checks cards

Um, I don't have answers regarding levels you haven't reached yet, so I guess you just keep going. Further! Onward and upward!

LEO

Listen, buddy, we exist just as much as you do.

BOB

Oh, I don't exist. The system calls and I appear!

MARION

Leo, please! I don't want to be fat and stupid and live in a tiny house with wheels!

LEO

He didn't say we were fat and stupid.

BOB

You are.

MARION

I want to stay as Marion! I want to be *me*, Leo. I want to stay as us! I like being Marion!

BOB

Naturally, everyone wants to be Marion and Leo forever; beautiful, rich, adored, living the dream. No one wants to pull off the headset and wake up back in Kansas. Unfortunately, there's no such thing as Marion and Leo, those are just fancy game avatars that were whipped up by our coding and design teams.

LEO

Jesus, Marion, I think it's true. I'm starting to remember...

MARION

No, Leo, don't remember! I don't want the truth, I want beauty! I want to stay here! I want to be Marion and Leonardo forever.

LEO

You're the one who jumped out a window to wake up!

MARION

That was my goddamn character!

LEO

You're a goddamn character!

MARION

pulls out phone

I'm calling my agent!

LEO

to Bob

So what's next for us? Where do we go from here?

BOB

We wrap up the interview and the next guy comes in to ask about the movie and life goes on.

MARION

puts down phone

Suce ma bite! So we're not in Limbo? We get to stay as Marion and Leo?

BOB

Well, you're *always* in Limbo – it's turtles all the way down – but you can remain in character as long as you want, or finish this level and go up to the next. You saw Mr. Anderson in *The Matrix*, right? Instead of continuing up another level, he decided to stay as Neo and play Goth Superman. Why not? That's what the game is for.

LEO

But then he woke up as Keanu?

BOB

Sure, and he got to be a movie star for a while, but then Keanu woke up as Marcy Lundt, a twelve-year-old girl from Oxnard playing a game called *The Matrix*. And when she finished the game, she unlocked an Easter egg and found herself strapped into a chair in a high-tech memory implant lab from which she escaped and went on to save Mars from greedy industrialists, and now she's a bodybuilder, movie star and governor of California in a bonus level called *True Lies*.

LEO

And in our next level we're a couple of fat, lazy brothers?

BOB

Unless you find the little door that leads into the mind of John Malkovich.

LEO

And after that?

BOB

I guess you'll find out when you get there.

LEO

But it does go on?

BOB

Well, heck yeah! The gamespace keeps rendering wherever you go. Move up, go back down, hop around wherever you like!

MARION

No, Leo, no! We must stay here! We must remain in this level forever. It can never be better than this! I want to stay in Dream Factory forever! Don't make me go to Asshole Kansas!

LEO

But it's not *real*, Marion. This is all fake. We're dreaming and we have to wake up, and the only way is to follow the white rabbit and take the red pill and go up through *all* the levels!

MARION

But if it's all Limbo, who cares?! If it's all bullshit, why not pick *happy* bullshit? I like *this* bullshit. This is *good* bullshit! Don't make me go to Kansas. I don't want to be a fat stupid American!

Marion stands and clicks her heels together.

There's no place like Hollywood. There's no place like Hollywood. There's no place...

LEO

It's just another level, babe.

MARION

pleading

Let's stay here. Everything is perfect here! We are rich and famous and beautiful here!

LEO

We can't live a lie.

MARION

Of course we can! Everyone does!

LEO

But it's not true!

MARION

So what it's not true? There is no truth, that's what this ridiculous Bob-man just told you. There is no *true* level so we just pick the one we like. I like this one! Don't make me be poor and smelly!

BOB

Would you like to access the built-in Help Wizard?

LEO

You have a goddamn wizard?

MARION

Tell your goddamn wizard I want to stay in goddamn Oz!

Act IV: The Help Wizard

Bob, Leo and Marion sit in raised director's chairs waiting for the Help Wizard to boot up. An OLD FELLA in gray hair and beard, a well-worn coat and floppy fedora shuffles in.

OLD FELLA

I sing the body electric!

*examines his clothing, rubs his hands together,
feels his face*

I cannot be awake, for nothing looks to me as it did before, or else I am awake for the first time, and all before has been a mean sleep.

DOM

Santy Claus!

MARION

Mon Dieu! L'ange sans ses ailes!

OLD FELLA

Neither Santa nor angel, merely a man. Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son. Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and

breeding. No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them. No more modest than immodest.

LEO

shaking Walt's hand

Oh, hi Walt. I'm Leo. I like to eat and drink too. I'm not sure about that other stuff.

BOB

Walter is your help system avatar.

LEO

No shit! Say there, Walt, this guy here, uh...

BOB

Bob.

LEO

Yeah, this Bob guy is sayin' that this whole deal – you know, me and Marion bein' movie stars and stuff – he says it's not really *real*, like there's no *meaning* to any of it...

WALT

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems? Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of *all* poems.

LEO

Who said anything about poems?

WALT

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books.

MAL

Spectres?

LEO

Books?

WALT

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me. You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.

LEO

Say what?

WALT

You shall not look through my eyes...

LEO

No, no, okay, listen bud, we got a situation here. Me and this lady, we're like big Hollywood moviestars. As you can see, we're very attractive and talented and rich, and everyone wants to be just like us, okay?

WALT

This day before dawn I ascended a hill and looked at the crowded heaven, and I said to my spirit, "When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of everything in them, shall we be filled and satisfied then?" And

my spirit said, “No, we but level that lift to pass
and continue beyond.”

LEO

Do what?

WALT

Level that lift to pass and continue beyond.

LEO

What the hell does *that* mean? Bob, is this thing
even working?

BOB

The help wizard is still in beta.

LEO

Bullshit, this guy is straight outta central
casting!

WALT

If you would understand me, go to the heights
or water-shore.

LEO

Bob here says you don't even exist.

WALT

I exist as I am, that is enough.

LEO

I'm talkin' about reality, pal. Ever heard of it?

WALT

I accept reality and dare not question it.

MARION

I think it only has certain lines, Leo, like an actor reading a script. You must be asking the right questions!

LEO

Listen, buddy, we're actors too. That's what we do, we play characters, okay?

WALT

There was a child went forth every day, and the first object he looked upon, that object he became. And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day, or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.

LEO

What the hell are you talkin' about?

MARION

Leo, why does he talk so funny?

LEO

I don't know. Maybe it's like a Shakespeare thing. I played Romeo once, I speak a little Shakespeare.

MARION

You played a halfwit too. Do you speak a little moron?

LEO

You're not helpin' here, doll. I'm tryin' to learn how this guy works.

WALT

Have you learned the lessons only of those who admired you and were tender with you and stood aside for you? Have you not learned great lessons from those who braced themselves against you and disputed passage with you?

MARION

Monsieur, s'il vous plait, we wish only to know what is our situation.

WALT

approaches Marion, takes one of her hands in both of his, speaks tenderly

I could sing such grandeurs and glories about you! You have not known what you are. You have slumbered upon yourself all your life, your eyelids have been the same as closed most of the time. What you have done returns already in mockeries. The mockeries are not you, underneath them and within them I see you lurk. I pursue you where none else has pursued you.

MARION

But then, am I me or not me? Who am I?

WALT

Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walk of dreams. I fear these supposed realities are to melt from under your feet and hands.

MARION

Frankly sir, this news comes a little late.

WALT

kisses her hand and gently strokes it

I should have made my way straight to you long ago. None has done justice to you. You have not done justice to yourself. I only find no imperfection in you.

MARION

Mais oui c'est clair! The critics can be so unkind. What must I do?

WALT

Whoever you are, claim your own at any hazard! Undrape!

MARION

Undrape? How can you say such a thing? You say one thing, then you say the opposite!

WALT

Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.

MARION

You are supposed to help, but you talk in riddles!

WALT

I and this mystery, here we stand.

MARION

But I too am here! I am real!

WALT

The powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

MARION

darkens, pulls her hand back

You are being a little annoying right now. Do you know who I am?

WALT

Whoever you are, motion and reflection are especially for you. The divine ship sails the divine sea for you.

MARION

brightens

Oh, that's *much* better! That sounds nice. Leo, did you hear that? The divine ship sails the divine sea for me!

LEO

What are you listening to this guy for? He's just an actor repeating the same lines over and over.

WALT

I contain multitudes.

LEO

There, see?

MARION

Can no one give me a simple answer?

WALT

You are also asking me questions and I hear you.

MARION

Wonderful! Then please answer. Who am I? Am I a real person?

WALT

I answer that I cannot answer, you must find out for yourself.

MARION

This is not good help. I feel like I'm in a bad dream and cannot wake up!

WALT

Long enough have you dreamed contemptible dreams. Now I wash the gum from your eyes. You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment of your life.

LEO

That's it. I've had about enough of this guy.

WALT

Take warning, I am surely far different from what you suppose.

LEO

I *suppose* you're supposed to be *helping*.

WALT

Do you see no further than this façade? Have you no thought, O dreamer, that it may be all

Maya, illusion?

LEO

I don't wanna hear any more of this dream bullshit!

WALT

This is curious, and may not be realized immediately, but it must be realized.

LEO

I have to realize reality's not real? Really? Jesus, I can't tell if this guy's talkin' to us, or just talkin'.

MARION

What, sir? What must we realize?

LEO

If you get a straight answer outta this guy, it'll be a miracle.

WALT

Who makes much of a miracle? I know of nothing else *but* miracles. To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle.

LEO

That sounds like a load of crap. All we're gettin' from this guy is more lies!

WALT

There is no lie, or form of lie, and can be none, but grows as inevitably upon itself as the truth does upon itself.

LEO

angry, grabs Walt by the lapels

What are you saying, buddy? That it's *okay* if the whole world is a lie?

WALT

unruffled

I feel in myself that I represent falsehoods equally with the rest, and that the universe does.

MARION

But sir, how can you help us if you don't speak the truth?

WALT

Where has failed a perfect return, indifferent of lies or the truth?

LEO

releases Walt in disgust

Oh boy, here we go.

WALT

Meditating among liars, and retreating sternly into myself, I see that there are really no liars or lies after all, and that nothing fails its perfect return, and that what are called lies are perfect returns, and that each thing exactly represents itself and what has preceded it, and that the truth includes all and is compact, just as much as space is compact, and that there is no flaw or

vacuum in the amount of the truth, but that *all* is truth without exception.

MARION

What, Leo? What is he trying to say?

LEO

I think he's saying that *nothing* is real, or maybe it's *all* real in a kind of unreal way, something like that. Like we should just relax and make the best of it and not ask too many questions.

MARION

Mais oui! Yes! That's what I say too! Let's stay here and be happy and not worry about silly truth. Let us not disturb the delicate web of this sparkly, silvery world. I like being a movie star!

LEO

This isn't a very helpful help wizard, Bob.

BOB

There's a scheduled update in the next version. I think they're giving him sunglasses.

LEO

We're not gettin' anywhere with this guy.

BOB

Computer, end program.

Walt gives Bob the finger and shuffles out.

LEO

Listen Marion, I'll tell you a riddle. You're waiting for a train...

MARION

Oh no, Leo! Not again with the fucking train!

Leo opens his jacket exposing bomb vest with a blinking red light. In his hand is a wired device with a red button.

LEO

You're waiting for a train...

MARION

No Leo, please! Shut up about the stupid train!

LEO

...a train that will take you far away.

MARION

I don't want to go anywhere! I want to stay here. I don't care about truth, I want beauty. They are not the same!

LEO

You know where you *hope* this train will take you, but you don't know for sure.

MARION

Fuck truth! I want beauty and happiness and money and stardom! I want to be chic and fabulous and live forever! I don't want to be fat and stupid and live in a tiny house, Leo, *please!*

LEO

How can it not matter where the train takes you?

MARION

No, Leo, please let's stay here. It's so nice here. We're so happy, so rich, so pretty...

LEO

How can it not matter where the train takes you?

MARION

No, Leo! No, no, no! I do not wish to go!

LEO

How can it not matter where the train takes you?

MARION

sighs in resignation

Because we'll be together.

LEO

See you in the next life, doll.

Leo presses the button.

Act V: Asshole, Kansas

After Leo detonated his bomb vest, we find two fat slobs slumped on a couch surrounded by crushed beer cans and half-eaten pizzas. They remove their techy headsets and survey their bleak surroundings.

RONNIE

Aw, goddammit, Harley! Why'd you go and do that for?

HARLAN

Had to do it, bro. Gotta keep it real.

RONNIE

We're tryin' to *escape* reality, not get *back* to it!

HARLAN

You were *smokin'* as that actress lady, bro. I was gettin' some thoughts!

RONNIE

Damn, bro, that was sweet! We could have stayed on that level forever. We coulda hooked up and been like Hollywood royalty!

HARLAN

Strap it down, bro. What happens in Limbo, stays in Limbo.

RONNIE

Yeah, but they said it was *all* Limbo, like maybe this *here* is Limbo too!

HARLAN

Don't be a dumbass! How can *this* be Limbo if this is where we got the game?

RONNIE

Damn, I was getting used to that shit! Bein' all fancy and glamorous and whatnot. I think I was Edith Piaf for awhile. *Je ne regrette rien!*

HARLAN

Don't tell me everything, bro. I want to be the French broad next time.

*A knock on the door. They pause in silence.
Another knock.*

RONNIE

yells

We ain't got no money for weed, Herbert.

BOB

Hey, guys! It's me, Bob. Remember? From the press junket? C'mon, open up, I have some good news.

RONNIE

That guy was in the game! How can he be here?

HARLAN

He said he was the game host.

RONNIE

Shit, dude, I told ya! We're into some weird shit here!

HARLAN

How do we get out?

RONNIE

I don't wanna get *out*, I wanna get back to the good parts where it don't smell like stale beer and piss all the time.

HARLAN

Yeah, that French lady smelled nice.

RONNIE

Dude, that was me!

More knocking.

BOB

It's okay, fellas, I'm just delivering your Easter egg. You're going to Westworld where you get to play people who find out they're actually robots who want to become real people. It's a hoot! You get to have a lot of sex and do a lot of killing.

RONNIE

Ooh, I like sex.

HARLAN

How do you know? You ain't never had none.

RONNIE

Well, I like killin'.

HARLAN

Yeah, me too.

RONNIE

Whadda ya say, bro? Stay or go?

HARLAN

Well, it's either piss and beer or sex and killin'.

They get to their feet. There is a louder, more insistent knocking at the door.

HARLAN

Yeah, yeah, okay Bob, we're comin'.

PICARD

yelling from outside the door

Commander Riker, is that you? Thank goodness! Is Counselor Troi with you? You've been drugged and trapped in the holodeck by an alien entity called The Scribe. We're trying to lock onto your signal. Stand by for transport!

RONNIE

Whoa, dude!

HARLAN

Shit, bro, didn't see that one comin'!

RONNIE

Wait a minute, which of us is which? I wanna be the lady again!

HARLAN

Bro, when you and me are you and me again, we gotta have a long talk. This game is whackin' you out.

RONNIE

takes Harlan by the shoulders

Non, je ne regrette rien! I regret nothing! Not the good things that have happened, nor the bad, it's all the same to me. I don't care about the past! I set fire to my memories. My troubles, my pleasures, I don't need them anymore! I'm starting over, because my life, my joy, today it begins with you!

HARLAN

Aw shit. Enterprise! This is... oh hell, I don't know anymore. Two to beam directly to sickbay!

THE END

Join us next time when the boys return home to find a featureless black monolith in their living room.

Dramatis Personae



Dom, Leonardo, Harlan



Mal, Marion, Ronnie



Bob



Walt



Marcy Lundt

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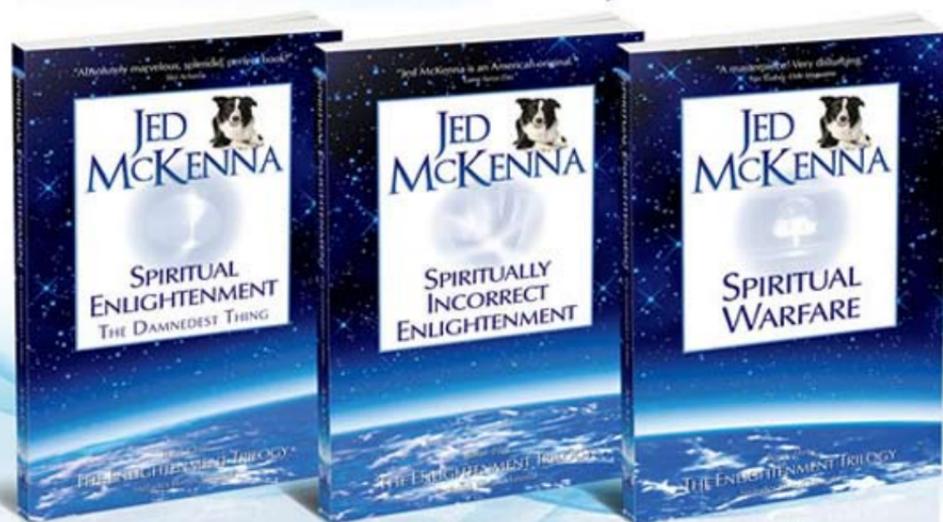
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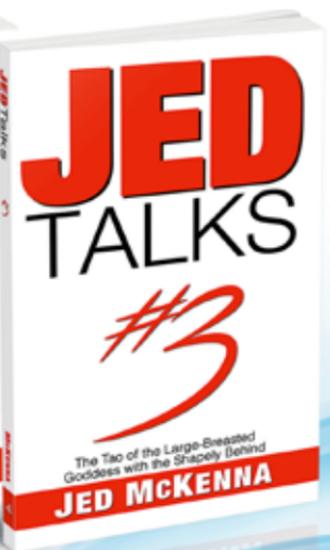
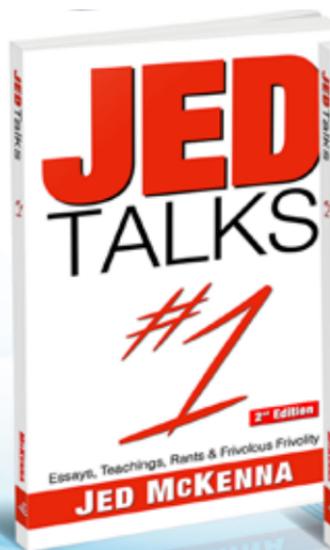
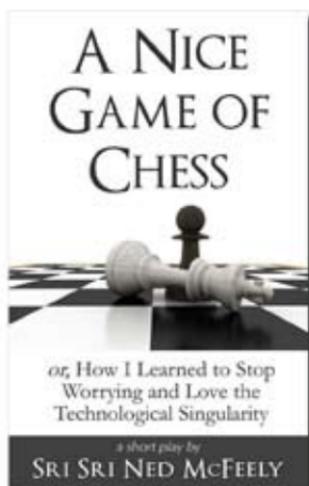


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