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Why compete? : a two-part philosophical and narrative rebuttal to competition

Jeffrey James Gorbski

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jeffrey James Gorbski entitled "Why compete? : a two-part philosophical and narrative rebuttal to competition." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Joy DeSensi, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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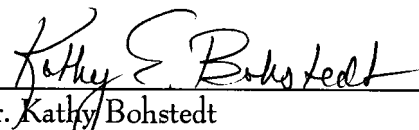
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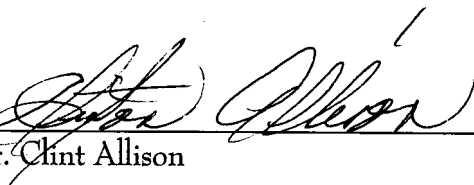
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Dr. Joy DeSensi, Major Professor

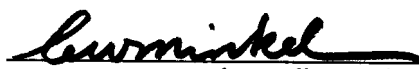
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WHY COMPETE?

A Two-Part Philosophical and Narrative Rebuttal to Competition

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jeffrey James Gorbski
May 1999

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To all those who believed in me ...

... and to all those who didn't.

Acknowledgements

To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism; to steal from many is research.

ANONYMOUS

Although it is cliché and trite to say that the creation of a large work of research, like this dissertation, could not have been completed without the aid of many people, it is also true. With this being the case, I would like to give thanks to these "many people."

Thanks is given to HarperCollins Children's Books for permission to use the poem "Hug o' War" from *Where the Sidewalk Ends* by Shel Silverstein, Copyright © 1974.

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A heart-felt thanks goes out to my advisor, friend, and now colleague, Dr. Joy DeSensi, who believed enough in my vision of the future of philosophic literature to permit me the opportunity to indulge my passion. I truly hope other prospective doctoral candidates are as fortunate; I also hope other advisors are as open-minded.

And, of course, no acknowledgement would be complete without thanking my wife, Lynn, and my son, Kyle, for maintained unwavering support while assuredly enduring as many ups and downs as I during the research and writing of the dissertation. Sustaining, nurturing, and raising a family is no small group effort — even without the burden of scholarship.

To the people above, and to the countless others whom I thoughtlessly forgot to include and from whom I will no doubt be begging forgiveness for years to come ... thanks.

Abstract

This dissertation presents two methods of critiquing the ideology of competition: one, philosophical; and the other, narrative. Using these different methods of presentation, the dissertation attempts to argue a compelling case for the notion that a society based on a cooperative ideology is an acceptable, livable, preferable, and attainable alternative to our society's present state.

In Part One, competition is examined from a philosophical perspective. The first five chapters of Part One focus on why the competitive ideology and the competitive society fail to live up to their benign reputation though completely fulfilling their negative aspects. These chapters discuss several competitivist arguments, including the view that competition is an evolutionary or innate psychological condition of humans, social Darwinism, the economics of competition, and the conception of competition as a mutual quest for excellence. Chapter 6 of the dissertation studies the conundrum of why many people, despite evidence to the contrary, continue to support the competitive ideology.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I offer one possibility as to what can be done to change this situation by attempting to answer the following question: If philosophy, along with voluminous sociological and psychological studies, has not provided the necessary contingencies to help people convince themselves of the obvious weaknesses of the competitive ideology, what will? Chapter 7 argues that literature (and utopian literature in particular) is an acceptable alternative for presenting sophisticated ideas and scholarship; it is a medium which appeals to a larger percentage of the population.

For the entirety of Part Two, therefore, I offer a quasi-utopian novel which contextualizes arguments for cooperation and against competition in order to demonstrate the literary medium's potential. Because of the scope of the novel, the arguments do not deal strictly with sports-related competition but with competition as it affects a greater

number of social institutions, including and especially education. The author hopes that the narrative style of presentation will make more accessible to more people the cooperativist position, thus stimulating pro-social changes.

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PART ONE:

*THE ANATOMY OF
COMPETITION*

Introduction

*Competition is the law of the jungle;
Cooperation is the law of civilization.*

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER¹

Competition.

Very few words in the English language conjure up more diverse symbols and images. Perhaps more diverse is competition's value to society. It has been claimed that competition taps and channels a human's innate aggressive passion into constructive release. Competition is also a way to maximize productivity and enhance efficiency. It is a way to express and motivate the drive for personal prowess and excellence. The experience of winning and losing toughens young minds building strong wills and self-esteem. And last, competition is just simply fun.

Cooperation, on the other hand, is a less flamboyant word, associated with more low key symbols. Working *with* someone, as opposed to working *against* someone, carries little of the fireworks and drama for which our culture has grown to yearn, grown to expect. Competition provides these needed sparks to life. It provides the spice to an otherwise drab existence.

For the next several hundred pages, I will make the case that competition offers little if any of the benefits specified above. And rather than alleviating the malaise of a mundane life, this dreary perspective on life may have resulted from competition itself. In fact, the more we compete for excitement, the less satisfied we become with competition and the excitement. There is something missing. That something is cooperation.

¹ From J. Stickney, *Streets, Actions, Alternatives, Raps* (New York: Putnam's, 1971), 76 [Quoted by Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 247].

Granted, it seems almost laughable to spend so much time and effort defending and promoting something that appears as self-explanatory and so obviously beneficial as cooperation. Very few pundits, if any, would openly suggest that we should not cooperate with our friends and neighbors. If given the choice, many would choose to be cooperative instead of competitive.

Yet this is what we do not do. For despite the wondrous nature of cooperation, competition grinds on in practically everything one does in this world. It drives business. It selects governments. It determines relationships; and it molds societies and cultures. For countless centuries, there endured this rivalry between two views of human reality — a seemingly never ending debate between competition and cooperation. Which is better? Is any one better than the other? Are they both susceptible to excess? Although the very existence of the struggle itself ironically appears to be the most convincing argument supporting the competitive ethic in society and nature, it is but merely the opening salvo in what is certainly one of the most crucial debates in history. Crucial, because there is a tremendous amount at stake in all there is to be gained and all there is to be lost. However, there is also a great deal to be examined and discussed before victory is assured by either position ... if victory is the final goal. It may rather be a debate no one wishes to see end. For what results in conclusion is a daunting responsibility: to the victor goes the spoils of designing the future of the human species — to the victor goes the creation of all our future civilizations and all our utopian dreams.

If one has ever watched an Olympic volleyball game or a professional tennis match or a competitive sport of any kind, one will notice many things. One will see sweat and strain, injuries and fatigue, concentration and grim determination. They will also see, if one is so inclined to look, two or more athletes pitted against each other engaged in a sophisticated version of the child's game, "King of the Hill." During the course of the contest (and during many a practice as well) one will rarely, if ever, see laughing a smile, or a grin on

the competitors, or hear a kind and sympathetic word uttered of or to the opponents. Humor and light spirits seem out of place in the midst of competition. It is an absolute rarity that a losing athlete radiates a smile as sincere as that of the victor. Instead, one is manufactured — demanded by the social conventions expected of losers, a product of the externally imposed behavioral code of Sportsmanship. It is possible to discern the difference.

But sportsmanship is valuable, especially to the spectators, in spite of it being something added to sport after the fact. Sportsmanship, though unnecessary for the action to continue or for the competition to persist, may be mandatory if sport is to exist in society. After all, if a civilized spectating population witnessed the unregulated ferocity of pure competition (as was the case when President Theodore Roosevelt threatened to ban football at the turn of the twentieth century), would there be any doubt that it would quickly cease?² Sportsmanship placates those who find sports, and competition in general, much too irrational and barbaric. Sportsmanship provides a patina of sensibility and moral enlightenment. Sportsmanship makes competition "rational." This allows the competitive practice to continue, benefitting those who originally benefitted from it, and those who currently succeed through competitive sports.

Times are changing, however. The latter half of the twentieth century is uncovering a nation increasingly uncomfortable to continue supporting unchallenged rationalism, whether it be scientific, political, or economic. The atom bomb, the Great Depression, and Watergate has made those possibilities much less likely as we enter the 21st century. Even since the Enlightenment, certain groups separated from the political will and persisted in their resistance to rationalism as somehow representing the cure-all for human problems as well as a justification for human progress. American transcendentalists like Emerson and

² Recalling the insatiable appetite for gore exhibited by the Roman citizenry at the Coliseum spectacles, however, may give one pause for concern.

William James, branded by some critics as Philistines and provincials, promoted the value of faith over rationalism, and the stabilizing effects of past traditions over an Enlightenment hubris which dangled the carrot of unrestrained and limitless social improvements while the stick of political coercion silenced those who questioned its moral implications. In the 1960s however, both politically active groups and those who rejected involvement witnessed their neighbors, brothers, and sons die at the cost of social obsequiousness. It became clear to them that rationalism is a hypocritical façade, a method of justifying that which could not be justified on more simple or emotional grounds. Rationalism seemed to circumvent human experience and replaced it with a moral high ground assured through cabalistic languages and intellectual chauvinism. Gut feelings and intuitions were rendered impotent.

Sportsmanship itself is just one of these masks of rationalism placed over the realm of competition to hide its inner ferocity and the cementing of social inequity, in much the same way Freud insisted that social regimentation casts its blanket controls over human instinct to preserve civilization.³ Unfortunately, as Marcuse elaborated, in *Eros and Civilization*, upon Freud's assertions, happiness has become (and needs to be) the search toward (psychological) 'regression,' a pure and naïve, child-like re-statement of the performance principle:

[The] reactivation of prehistoric and childhood wishes and attitudes is not necessarily regression; it may well be the opposite — proximity to a happiness that has always been the repressed promise of a better future. In one of the most advanced formulations, Freud once defined happiness as the "subsequent fulfillment of a prehistoric wish. That is why wealth brings so little happiness: money was not a wish in childhood."⁴

The problem, rather, occurs in the delayed satisfaction of needs for which humans strive; satisfactions are provided by the State (pittance though they may be) or commercial

³ "Our civilization is, generally speaking, founded on the suppression of instincts." "Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness," in *Collected Papers* (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), II, 82] Quoted in Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 81.

⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 203. Times have changed, though. Younger and younger individuals are demanding monetary remuneration as rewards for trivial acts or acts which should have offered intrinsic satisfaction.

enterprises and are not ones searched for or immediately gratified by the individual. Consequently, individuals must wait for their daily helpings of *soma*, but they will wait patiently and obediently until the state or commerce provides for their cravings. But social order doesn't just arise from a repression of the instincts, but also a repression of the 'desire' for these instincts. For example, the inescapable protocol of waiting in line orderly reflects the psychological controls that have ingrained themselves within the individual.

Marcuse explains why such methods are crucial to civilization:

The defence [of societal repression] consists chiefly in a strengthening of controls not so much over the instincts as over consciousness, which, if left free, might recognize the work of repression in the bigger and better satisfaction of needs. The manipulation of consciousness which has occurred throughout the orbit of contemporary industrial civilization has been described in various interpretations of totalitarian and "popular cultures": co-ordination of the private and public existence, of spontaneous and required reactions. The promotion of thoughtless leisure activities, the triumph of anti-intellectual ideologies, exemplify the trend.⁵

Alas, by curbing and controlling the Eros instincts of man, society is, wittingly or unwittingly in the end, aiding in the realization of the Thanatos instinct of man: turning animate, expressive, emotional individuals into couch-potatoes — "inanimate" objects who have died a social death.

Despite acknowledging that defense against aggression as necessary, Marcuse persisted that the Eros impulse be released from its societal repression, "for only a strong Eros can effectively 'bind' the destructive instincts," preventing the self-inflicted "death" of civilized humanity. However, this is the very thing that "the *developed civilization is incapable of doing* because it depends for its very existence on extended and intensified regimentation and control."⁶ There exists one avenue of freedom where this societal control can, at least, be loosened. As Marcuse argued, Eros is not only related to the Sexual instinct, but to the Play instinct as well.

Though less "perverse" than sexual freedom, Play is no less repressed in sexually restrictive societies. Joined with uninhibited expression of the Eros however, Play is

⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 94.

⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 80-1.

possibly the closest thing to an Utopian existence. Psychological security is assured by rules, but they are agreed to only so far as the participants accept such conditions. Consequently, there exists no unbreakable rules, yet security remains. Sports cannot provide this security because it is an outgrowth of an industrially-based society — where the laissez-faire marketplace sanctions competition; and competition, by its very nature, relies upon insecurity to coerce activity. A person may object to the outcome of competition, or suggest reforms of competition, but any rejection of competition itself is quickly squelched. Such a discussion does not fit within the ideology of competition.

One might suggest that, since Play is a component of sports and games, then sports and games can also be useful in the liberation of the Eros in society. However, Play existed long before social structures and the pressures of civilization were formalized — being a part of early mammalian evolution; sports and games arose in large part as a response to the required need for social control in homo sapiens. Accordingly, Play should not be innately associated with either games or sport. In fact, some sports philosophers have openly questioned the notion that sport must contain any remnant of Play. As one philosopher wrote, "I see no inherent or inexorable play aspect in sport."⁷ Furthermore, even if we assume that play is involved in sport and games to some extent, Play has an entirely different sociological and psychological purpose. Whereas sport and games partially fulfill society's demand for the sublimation of Eros, Play represents the free expression of Eros. And only in the free expression of Eros does one find the "manifold forms of regression [as] unconscious protest against the insufficiency of civilization: against the prevalence of toil over pleasure, performance over gratification."⁸

If Marcuse's argument holds merit, sportsmanship can not only be seen as a rationalist cover-up of competitive excesses but also as a foil for the continuation of social control.

⁷ Meier, "Triad Trickery," 34. See also Bernard Suits's essay "Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport."

⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 109.

Sportsmanship makes the instrumental orientation and performance-principle of sports and games acceptable by shielding from the public eye competition's inherent brutality which would quickly and publicly bring into question the societally-ordained notions of "toil over pleasure" and "performance over gratification."

Not only does sportsmanship shield the spectators from the reality of sport's innate nature, the combatants wear more obvious masks and uniforms to shield their identity and humanity from the opponent — masks which not only protect the body, but the psyche as well. Like soldiers who wear uniforms to know who to hate and shoot, athletes wear uniforms to know who to hate and defeat. Uniforms abstracts and converts the individual into an object, a sculpture, an obstacle which needs to be overcome. We know nothing of the other players except what their uniform represents. Masks, uniforms, insignia — all turn the individual into a walking billboard, different from a race car perhaps only in degrees of speed. What was once human becomes a thing. And with the right "coaching," *it* will represent the enemy — an enemy a bit less "human" than us. "Strip away their humanity," writes Alfie Kohn, "and they seem unworthy of being treated as humans."⁹ Perry Saidman was more blunt when he described competition as "an inhuman activity."¹⁰ Uniforms and masks are needed in order to label opponents as strangers, because strangers are easier to loathe.

We perceive our opponents as strangers, as things, as means to use to our own individualistic ends to allow us also to defeat them, to humiliate them, to prevent our enemy's aspirations for success to come true. We feel little remorse stepping on a spider; should we feel any less insensitive to the grumbles of an entity perhaps equally inhuman. Objects are easier to beat because they have no feelings to hurt, no nerves to feel pain, no egos to bruise, no self-esteem to crush. After a while, this becomes a self-reinforcing

⁹ Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*, p. 138.

¹⁰ Title of his paper given at the Conference for an Ethical Society on November 14, 1993, in Washington, D.C.

process; the more suffering we cause, the more we need to rationalize the suffering by alienating ourselves from the sufferer. "The farther one moves in the direction of stripping an individual or group of humanity, the more license one feels to do harm; the more violent one becomes, the more likely that one will dehumanize."¹¹ Athletes wear uniforms not only so we can tell apart the good guys from the bad, but so we can rest our consciences and sleep well at night.

This screen of dehumanization is all the more necessary in sports which necessarily require the infliction of pain and suffering. For example, boxing, where victory is determined by how effective one is in delivering concussions; or of football, where former Cleveland Browns defensive lineman Hanford Dixon said: "You always try to get the key player out of the game.... You want to do it legally."¹² Consequently, the only difference between boxing and football is the name. In these, and other sports as well, assault and battery, maiming, and manslaughter exist with the support and protection of the state.

The dehumanization doesn't end with the athletes; spectators are also involved in the psychological perversion. As necessarily part of the beast, spectators chose sides even before the contest has begun. Now, placed in the arena with thousands of people who share their passionate loyalty and inspired aversion to the opponent, they are emboldened to express their hatred — their behavior condoned and even encouraged within the confines of stadia walls.

Occasionally, an athlete will help another off the ground; the same ground into which only seconds before he was driven. But never will anyone ever see an athlete helping an opponent succeed during a game in which they are both involved. That is unheard of in sports. Sometimes it is even prevented by the rules.¹³ Friendships, cooperation, moral

¹¹ Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*, p. 139.

¹² LeFevre, *New Games for the Whole Family*, p. 27.

¹³ For example, in gymnastics, NCAA rules prohibit an athlete from not *accepting* points, for any reason — even if the athlete feels the points were awarded in error. In this case, the judges are never wrong, and the athlete has no say.

obligations — they all end once play begins, and starts again (perhaps) only when play is over. Yet during play, after all the pretenses and platitudes have been stripped away, only one objective clearly remains: *Mutually exclusive goal attainment* — success only through the failure of another. However,

it seems clear right away that something is drastically wrong with such an arrangement. How can we do our best when we are spending our energies trying to make others lose — and fearing that they will make us lose? Can this sort of struggle really be the best way to have a good time? What happens to our self-esteem when it becomes dependent on how much better we do than the next person? Most striking of all is the impact of this arrangement on human relationship: a structural incentive to see other people lose cannot help but drive a wedge between us and invite hostility.¹⁴

But perhaps the greatest failure of sports occurs in the children who are persuaded either through curiosity or peer pressure or the avoidance of social stigma to participate. And in all honesty, sport is probably quite entertaining in the beginning. To learn new skills and to try to master new equipment all require both an ability to concentrate and a sense of humor in the foibles which accompany acquisition. In learning racquetball, for example, it is challenge enough to simply try to hit the ball, and then to hit the ball against the wall. It is at this stage that the new athlete is lulled into a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment for the game. But once the basic set of skills is acquired, the only obstacle left is the opponent. Yet the recollection of pleasanter times haunts the athlete's psyche, convincing him or her, along with the encouragement of fans, associates, and public propaganda, that the sport is still enjoyable in spite of the overt aggression and psychological violence done to the opponent.¹⁵ Terry Orlick pleaded with us in his book, *The Cooperative Sports and Games Book*, to think twice about getting children involved in competitive sports:

Pitting children against one another in games where they frantically compete for what only a few can have guarantees failure and rejection for the many. Many children's games and programs are in fact designed for elimination. Many ensure that one wins and everyone else loses, leaving

¹⁴ Kohn, *No Contest*, p. 9.

¹⁵ It has been glibly remarked that athletes, when they "choke," are struggling with their internal moral conscience over whether it is right to beat someone; and that sports psychologists are successful when they are able to get athletes to ignore such moral distractions.

sport "rejects" and "dropouts" to form the vast majority of our North American population. To make things worse, the games are now beginning to destroy even the winners. Children are encouraged to delight in others' failures. They hope for it, they help it happen, because it enhances their own chances of victory.... As they grow older, they have been so conditioned to the importance of winning that they can no longer play for fun, for enjoyment. They don't know how to help one another, to be sensitive to another's feelings, or to compete in a friendly, fun-filled way, even when they want to. If failure ensues, and it often does, many children learn to avoid competition, to withdraw. Failure at games may also "teach" children totally unjustified "bad things" about themselves.¹⁶

* * *

We have all seen throughout our lives how competitive sports result in obvious deformities of social mores. Those who have played sports can relate tales of feeling hatred towards opponents, of being taunted and humiliated by better competitors, and taunting and ridiculing lesser foes. We have all noticed many instances where competition bred, inspired, or exacerbated animosity and divisions between people and groups. As George Orwell wrote in all sincerity, "Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules, and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words, it is war minus the shooting."¹⁷

Ironically, those who support and defend competition often find wrong in sport the very same list of miseries as described above. These apologists admit that there are excesses and abuses which destroy the essence of the game. Yet many claim that these problems are due to only a handful of notorious individuals; this in spite of the fact that over three million sports participants admit to having cheated in sports over the course of a year (plus those who may not have admitted to cheating), or that almost every single NCAA Division I sports program has violated the organization's rules at one time or another, some on a regular basis.

¹⁶ Terry Orlick, *The Cooperative Sports and Games Book*, 5. However, Orlick's argument is that through learning cooperative games, the individual will be more inclined to engage in friendly competitive in more traditional sports. The question, simply put, is if there are alternative sports and games for children, what justification is there to ever have competitive activities?

¹⁷ George Orwell, "The Shooting Spirit," from *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*, 153.

Other sports apologists respond that these abuses and infractions are addressable — that these problems can be cured with concerted effort to alter the mindset derived from the cultural biases of the participants. Eliminate external award structures which distort the objectives of the game and instead emphasize the internal intricacies of the sport, so intrinsic motivation towards competitive sports can be released. This justification, however, simplistically overlooks the psychology of competition and the fact that competitive sports have numerous internal goals with their own implicit reward structure. These internal rewards, including prestige and power, reflect the capitalist mentality which depends upon them for structural and ideological support. Another group of philosophers have argued that competitive sports are actually cooperative at heart — that the opponents are in reality working together to achieve higher levels of excellence.

In this dissertation, I explore competition without the mask of sportsmanship shielding it from critical examination, and attempt to expose it for what it actually is and does. Throughout the work, I evaluate the above positions supportive of competitive behaviors, but in the light of untempered competition. In the first five chapters of Part I, I look at why the competitive ideology and society fail to live up to their benign reputation, though completely fulfilling its negative aspects. In Chapter 6 of Part I, why most people, despite evidence to the contrary, continue to support the competitive ideology. Finally, in Chapter 7 of Part I and all of Part II of the dissertation, I offer one possibility as to what can be done to change this situation.

At this point, some may object to my uncompromising view that competition in all forms ought to be eliminated. The vast majority of individuals would probably prefer to support a middle of the road approach — a society with a mixture of competitive and cooperative elements. It seems the least controversial, being the mean between the extremes. Yet we know that in some cases the means can actually *be* the extremes. For example, is there any adequate mean to morally abhorrent activities like murder and rape?

Or to legal, though clearly unsafe activities, like smoking? In each case, there is no suitable mean other than the extreme of not participating at all. Obviously then, precedents exist for extremes to be considered means. Therefore, the notion that society must contain both competitive and cooperative elements can no longer be considered a certainty; nor can the hope of a totally cooperative society be considered absurd. To that end, this essay attempts to provide a compelling case for the idea that a totally cooperative society is not an extreme, but an acceptable, preferable, and hopefully attainable mean.

Chapter 1 of Part I begins the process of dismantling the arguments for competition by looking at the notion that competition is innate. And, if not innate, then competition is a necessary part of our psychological make-up — what Francis Dunlop refers to as "transcendent competition." In the former case, I demonstrate that competition is perceived in animals only through anthropomorphizing their behaviors. No one really knows what goes on in the mind of animals; so the animals may be competing, and then again, they may not be. Humans do compete — that we know. However, to prove that competition is innate to humans, it must be demonstrated that all humans and all cultures compete. But that is not the case. There are many cultures and countless individual humans which do not compete. Furthermore, humans and cultures are the creation of the environment in which both live. So it becomes incredibly difficult to determine whether or not competition is innate or taught.

In the latter case, Francis Dunlop argues that competition releases the natural urge to excel which springs from an amorphous human nature, or *psyche*. This subliminal and value-neutral version of competition taps the "vital" part of the human psyche which inspires a personal desire to achieve in a way intellectual and aesthetic values alone do not. Competition, properly conceived, directs the person through to the spiritual realm of the psyche, promoting positive moral values, eventually to "transcend" it. The difficulty with Dunlop's contention is the questionable possibility that competitive urges can be value-

neutral and whether it is truly possible to sublimate these urges in the face of a competitive moment to the point where they do not alter a person's emotional state.

Chapter 2 of Part I explores the similar, though far more insidious, notion of social Darwinism. Darwin argued that species come and go due to natural selection. Social Darwinists appropriate an altered version of Darwin's theory — survival of the fittest — and apply it to society. Humans within society survive and die necessarily depending on who are the fit and who are the unfit. This theory, however, was effectively discredited in the early 1900s. It was argued persuasively that humans, unlike animals which are at the mercy of their environment, construct their own environments, and as such can create a condition in which everyone can survive. Despite the spuriousness of the social Darwinistic argument, it still remains within the social framework and, consequently, determines much of the social behavior we see today. So, once again, I attempt to flesh out the arguments and discredit social Darwinism one more time.

To accentuate the uncivilized nature of social Darwinism and how it maintains its foothold in the contemporary psyche, I juxtapose it with the late French author George Perec's semi-autobiographical work, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*. In his own poetic way, Perec saw quite perceptively that all competition, especially that which is exemplified in sports, enthusiastically embraces the remnants of nineteenth century social Darwinism within its folds. Perec imagined a fictitious island where society is dominated by the philosophy of the Olympics — *Citius, Altius, Fortius*. Following Perec's narrative, this leads to unspeakable abuses and mindless cruelty which Perec links to the behavior of guards, administrators and prisoners in the Nazi death camps.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of Part I each deal with one specific viewpoint. Chapter 3 looks at the economic arguments for competition as developed by Antonio Jorge's *Competition, Cooperation, Efficiency, and Social Organization*. According to Jorge, competition not only assures the most efficient economic system available, but having such an efficient

system at our disposal preserves the identity of smaller social units, individuality, political freedom, and allows the individual free pursuit of the maximization of their own well-being. Furthermore, a diversity of cultures is assured through the diversity of production that will naturally exist within the variegated social milieu.

I chose to critique Jorge's brief book not because he added much to the neoclassical economic position (a position more thoroughly expressed by Milton Friedman and others), but because of his comparison between the ideal versions of competition and cooperation. If Jorge can successfully defend the unabashed claim that the ideal version of competition is, at the very least, economically superior to that of cooperation, which Jorge finds insipid and suppresses productivity, then market competition could be more easily defended, and competition elsewhere in society would find its support bolstered.

Although the chapter deals with the shortcomings of Jorge's arguments promoting the goal of an ideal competitive market — one of which is the tenuous neoclassical argument that economic competition arises from a human's natural competitive and acquisitive spirit — it could be reasonably argued that even if we grant Jorge's arguments as valid, and ideal markets will thrive better based on the competitive model, achieving that goal may still require a *lessening* of economic and social competition. As economist and social philosopher Amitai Etzioni suggested, social development towards ideal conditions need not be linear. "[When] an economy moves towards perfect competition, say as a result of deregulation in one industry, one cannot assume that such a step will yield some of the benefits of perfect competition."¹⁸ Rather, because economic (or other disciplines) assumptions are based on optimal conditions, incomplete accomplishment of optimal conditions may create situations that are highly undesirable. In fact, "the model of perfect

¹⁸ Etzioni, *The Moral Dimension*, 201.

competition does not deal with partial situations."¹⁹ The configuration of these "second best" systems are independent of ideal versions. Consequently,

it is not possible to derive the attributes of "second best" systems from the perfect competition model. They are not simply composed of "less" of the constituting elements that result in a perfect system; they have their own inner logic and states of equilibrium. It follows that "second best" models must be found or formulated in some other way.²⁰

Accepting this position would permit one to go far in explaining why certain premises made by Jorge lack verifiable evidence or are simply erroneous based on current research results.

However, much the same claim could be made against cooperation. If the ideal version of competition cannot be linearly defined, neither can the ideal version of cooperation. I agree, yet that doesn't diminish any argument for cooperation. In fact, arguments for second-best cooperative models have the benefit of a voluminous research record, whereas most arguments for second-best competitive models are often supported by common sense, anecdote, or assumptions. The question remains then: Which social structure ought society live under, either ideally or as a "second best" solution — cooperative or competitive? I would like to think that the following pages will make that question easily answerable, if it isn't already.

The first part of Chapter 4 (Part I) examines the relationship between sport and work, and challenges the view that sport is an expression of play. Instead, since the principles of the competitive marketplace are so pervasive, they have infused themselves into sport, teaching participants that competitive motivations and external goals are what play is all about. This leads to a discussion of the four major myths of competition as presented by Alfie Kohn in his book *No Contest*.

In the latter part of Chapter 4, I examine one of the major arguments germinating from an anecdotal misunderstanding of games and how competition can be misread as innocuous fun. The notion that unorganized sport is more playful than organized inspired the

¹⁹ Etzioni, *The Moral Dimension*, 202.

²⁰ Etzioni, *The Moral Dimension*, 202.

Canadian philosopher John McMurry to write the essay, "How Competition Goes Wrong." In it, he claims that the idealized version of sport (or game, as I would prefer to call it — see below) already exists in the form of "free hockey," from which lessons can be drawn for other games, and competition in general. McMurry, though not a major voice in sports philosophy, develops an intriguing viewpoint, made all the more compelling by using an actual existing model — a form of sandlot hockey played by youths in Canada.

The success of McMurry's endeavors is based on how he classifies the actions of these sandlot players and compares them with those of professional athletes. I argue, however, that his classifications and descriptions are unreliable, due to the fact that his appraisal of what he sees in this ideal version of competitive sports is highly speculative and questionable. Interpreting what a competitor is thinking simply by watching people act is much akin to mind reading. One doesn't really know unless one asks, and McMurry makes no mention of having asked the children about their feelings. Then again, even asking may elicit answers that are not completely honest. As any pollster will agree, what people say is influenced to a great extent on how they wish to appear to others.²¹ If children are told by parents, teachers, and other role models that they ought to be having fun while competing, one will be hard pressed to find any child who will not repeat these same statements, if only to be accepted by their peers and parents.

McMurry could argue in response that even though there may be underlying animosity between players of Free Hockey, their public behavior is all that really counts. McMurry would be in good company. Aristotle, more recently Richard Rorty, and many others in between have argued that moral behavior is strictly a public affair. As long as one follows the norms and ethical mandates of society and behaves appropriately, what one does in private, as long as no one is adversely affected, is inconsequential.

²¹ Such comments are viewed among pollsters as nonattitudes, and go a long way in making public opinion polls unreliable. See Herbert Asher's book *Polling and the Public* for an enlightening and frank overview of the problems in polling.

Critics complain, however, that this defense creates a condition of moral schizophrenia within the person — when one is moral in public but immoral in private. In addition, it would seem more reasonable to align activities with public morality rather than hoping participants act civil when their thoughts are uncivil (much the same could be said concerning Dunlop's position). Cooperative games, for example, would clearly conflict less with the social desire for cooperative behavior than competitive games.

Chapter 5 of Part I deals entirely with only one issue, Robert Simon's view (from his book *Sport and Social Values*) that competition can be defined as a mutual quest for excellence. Competition is an arena in which people voluntarily congregate, testing each others mettle, working together to maximize their performance, and mutually rising to higher and higher levels of excellence. Although other sports philosophers have rejected Simon's interpretation of sports in deference to their own, his definition of competition remained relatively untouched. After all, one may not agree that sports exemplifies a mutual quest for excellence, but one can argue that it is a reasonable definition of competition in sport.

There is no doubt that Simon constructs a strong position; yet even so, it is one that has dubious aspects which undermine its potency. There is the question as to whether or not sports are actually *mutual* quests considering each opponent, according to Simon, must strive for his or her own objectives and goals. It seems paradoxical that excellence is achieved only when each person's progress towards excellence is frustrated.

Furthermore, I also dispute the notion of *mutual quest*. Simon takes great effort in trying to depict competition as essentially a cooperative act, where people work together to achieve individual excellence. This contention, however, is hard to accept. It is also hard to defend. Tuomela describes competition as a noncooperative joint action; for at the actual moment of interaction, the opponents cannot — due to the internal logic of competition — help each other achieve the goal of winning. Each opponent must pursue their own self-

interested goals and try to prevent other people from achieving their goals. According to Luper-Foy this appears to be an act of aggression, making competition inherently immoral. Plus, if everyone must act in self-interested ways (selfish ways) so competition will function properly, we end up with a very disappointing ethical mandate for sport and society.

Finally, Simon admits that actual competition produces inferior results as opposed to when one is engaged in the activity while not competing or just practicing (a verity documented by research) makes the notion of excellence very confusing. After all, most see excellence as an example of the finest performance; yet Simon's excellence isn't the finest — only the finest when competing. It is highly unusual, therefore, that one ought to persist in or defend an activity that produces only second-rate performances when activities which produce first-rate performances already exist.

After addressing the arguments for competition and found them flawed, Chapter 6 of Part I poses the reader with the following situation. It is my contention that the above arguments against competition are stronger than the arguments supporting competition. If that is the case, why does competition continue not only to garner a following but flourish? For that matter, if competition has such an iron grip on social mores, is change to a cooperative society possible?

The answer to the first question is surprising. People become addicted to competition. It is necessary to compete to attain status, wealth, and power. But once people achieve these scarce "benefits", they are used to improve one's competitive edge in society and acquire more of these items. Competition becomes an unyielding spiral, with no one knowing how to get off.

I also claim that individuals use competition to prop up unstable high self-esteem. Previously, one might recall, it was argued that competition does not improve character, but self-esteem and character are not necessarily the same thing. Besides, self-esteem

through sport is only temporary and evaporates immediately upon failure. Unless these individuals developed other avenues to support their self-esteem, they are destined to crash psychologically, and more than likely will violently strike back to preserve what little self-esteem they have remaining.

As for the second question, I have little to say that is promising. Because of the addiction to competition, like all addictions, people will find it very difficult to break the addiction and pursue a cooperativist lifestyle. Also, our society, culture, and institutions have become so intricately laced with competition, extricating ourselves from competition might be perceived as a lost cause. I, however, still hope that there is at least one possibility remaining with which to turn ourselves around. Only if we can present these pro-cooperativist arguments to the wider public and put an end to the unsubstantiated myths which abound concerning competition will our society have a chance to pull back from the brink — if it hasn't already fallen in.

Chapter 7 of Part I develops a possible alternative which may make cooperative arguments more accessible to the general public and make the hope more attainable than at present. Except for a few notable exceptions, the vast majority of such cooperativist research is presented in journals geared to the interests of a small and select group of readers. Furthermore, because the research is presented incrementally, the audience only receives a piecemeal version of the widespread research. The public lacks the holistic view of cooperation, in the same way it lacks such a view of competition.

Granted, other writers have attempted to make the public aware of the flaws and myths of competition, Alfie Kohn's *No Contest* (1986) being the most significant. Kohn admits, however, that his message is not getting across. People seem to think of his book as "outrageously controversial" rather than a thorough and cogent piece of research. Even philosophers and other researchers — people who should know better — argued against the book, sometimes using the very same justifications for competition which Kohn shows

to be spurious. I heard one philosopher say that despite all the anti-competitive arguments, it just didn't sound right; Kohn's arguments seemed counter-intuitive. Since Kohn explicitly rejects any defense of competition on the grounds of common sense or intuition, both of which run counter to voluminous evidence, the professor's statement gives one pause to consider whether this person read the book. Apparently, the resistance to anti-competition knows no intellectual bias, is wide-spread, and runs deep through the cultural psyche of our society.

Therefore, in Chapter 7 (Part I), I maintain that logical arguments have very little power to instigate "personal change" — unless such logic is used to reinforce what one already believes emotionally and spiritually — much less spurring social change. What prompted Ionesco to proclaim, "There is no such thing as pure logic; it's all a hoax," was the determination that no meaningful logical statement is ever devoid of ideological content. Consequently, logic is only successful in gaining acceptance when it supports belief, rarely when it changes belief. If logic, therefore, cannot be accepted on its own merits, to have any effect in altering a belief the individual has to want to accept the logic, but that also means accepting the ideological baggage that comes with it. It is right at this point — the point when belief comes into play — when logic is successful or not. It is my suggestion, then, that the pro-cooperative message must be presented in a different medium — one less bound up with the abstraction of logic, one more suitable to the contextualization of arguments against competition and for cooperation. I contend that Literature must be this alternative medium of presentation — a medium that affects the very soul and the belief structure of the individual.

It has been suggested, and with some merit, that a novel allows the reader to disengage oneself from the text. In other words, any philosophical foundations within the text are not taken seriously, and need not be taken seriously. The reader is under no compulsion to examine the work or study it with any great effort; it is a leisure activity. I disagree. The

disconnectedness a reader might feel towards a work of literature is certainly not something peculiar to literature. Other more erudite subject matters (e.g., philosophy), have the same capacity to alienate and disengage the reader. Contrary to the objection then, it is not the work which affects the reader, but it is the reader who must decide whether or not to be affected by the work. The written word only affects the reader *with permission*. This holds true whether a person reads Koontz or Kant.

I has also been suggested that literature isn't serious enough to provide an avenue for social change. This may be true in many cases, but it has been repeatedly demonstrated that certain works of literature can provide and have provided great impetus for social and philosophical change. Dostoyevsky's "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor"²² did as much to shape the twentieth century's view of humanity as did Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*. Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* spawned hundreds of politically active Nationalist clubs throughout the US, and influenced government social policy well into the 1990s (exemplified by President Clinton's AmeriCorps). B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* — the book which made behaviorism both a dirty word and a household entity — provided the blueprint for numerous utopian communities.²³

So the notions that a work of literature cannot possibly engage the reader or stimulate social activism are not accurate. In many ways, a narrative expression of a philosophical premise may be more engaging and more stimulating. After all, it certainly appeals to a wider audience and be, invariably, read more. As Thomas More indicated to a friend, it may be of some merit to sugar-coat ideas so they will be swallowed more readily. As Stanley Fish argued as well, persuasion can take many forms. It need not have to come from flawless logic, which affects only the intellectual component of the individual. Persuasion can be emotion, and literature may persuade on this more intimate level; or

²² *The Brother's Karamazov*, Book V, Chapter V.

²³ Unfortunately, it also made legitimate the onerous uses of what Alfie Kohn terms "pop behaviorism" — a theory of behavior which essentially ritualizes the uses of power and oppression in society.

literature may be successful at persuasion with its appeal to experiential similitudes; or literature's persuasive power can be as simple as rewording what is usually wrapped in academese into the vernacular.

It is with these reasons that I insist that a novel, which makes up the entire second part of the dissertation, can be just as engaging a work as a philosophical tome. It all depends on the frame of mind and willingness of the reader to permit oneself to be engaged. It must be admitted, however, that there are at least two difficulties with using literature to impart scholarship. The first is that in order for the story to flow and continue to hold the interest of a wider scope of reader, scholarly rhetoric must be altered to work within the scope of the narrative. The problem this entails is that the philosophical or sociological arguments may not be as strong or as carefully formulated as they might be in a more traditional setting. This outcome is not always the case, though. There are occasional works which catch off-guard academics who decry consumer mediocrity. Jostein Gaarder's book *Sophie's World*, a fiction novel which also lays out a fairly detailed history of philosophy, became a best-seller in 1996.²⁴

The second condition arises because my novel, *There Are No Spectators*, is quasi-utopian in nature. The problem is that not all utopian works live the existence their authors hoped. Some works can be described as *entropic*, meaning that they encourage people *not* to institute social change, hoping instead that the voice of Reason will assure the safety of the future without disturbing the present. Although most readers can appreciate and all can appropriate the utopian message, many will be moved only enough to hope that someone else in a better position to institute change will deal with the problem before it is too late. Reading utopian literature may make people more angry with the *status quo*, but it makes them no stronger to effect change of the *status quo*. Some utopian works have that rare

²⁴ *Sophie's World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy*. Translated by Paulette Møller (New York: Berkeley Books), 1996 (1994).

combination to inspire hope and change and to frustrate both as well. Many who read such books leave the experience numbed by their acknowledged impotence but confident that Progress will come to the rescue.

This is a serious objection, perhaps more serious than the former. Unfortunately, I have no real answer except to hope that my work will not inspire entropic behavior; or if it does, though some may remain complacent, others will see the ideas presented as a rallying point with which galvanize support for social and global change. But utopias are built upon hope, hope for a better future, hope for a better person. If I am guilty of anything then, it is believing the idea that humans will always have the potential to change their environment for the better, if only they are given the opportunity and the resources. As Oscar Wilde once wrote:

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias.²⁵

If we fail to realize utopias along our way through history, then we have progressed nowhere.

I use utopian literature as my model in this case because it has the necessary mix of literary idiosyncrasies which allow for greater reader engagement with the story, along with an extensive presentation of anti-competitive theory. I understand some may object to my project. Utopian study, after all, has been frowned upon by academicians outside of the literary fields throughout the twentieth century. Deemed 'science fiction,' it has been the vogue to dismiss the visions and recommendations suggested within utopian works as ... well, utopian. But such an opinion is misguided, and we are the worse for it. As Ashis Nandy counsels us:

Perhaps a part of the power of our visions comes from their very unrealizability—from their impractical, 'utopian' scaffolding and from their implicit, unattainable, normative codes. It is a creative tension with which some persons and cultures prefer to live. The gap between reality and

²⁵ Source unknown.

hope which such a vision creates becomes a source of cultural criticism and a standing condemnation of the oppression of everyday life to which we otherwise tend to get reconciled.²⁶

Utopias are more than simple futuristic titillations, then; but they also provide more than an attack on the *status quo* ideologies. Utopias offer us a clue as to what we want our future to look like; not just what we want to leave behind, but what we want to take with us. Utopias make Progress less frightening, the future more familiar; for how can we progress anywhere — or for that matter, how can progress itself be defended — without knowing to where we are progressing? Utopias and the dreams spawned by utopian visions are the most recognizable signposts we have. It would behoove us then, if we truly wish to be striving for something better than exists now, to progress towards a fulfillment of utopia.

The utopia which Jesse, the protagonist of the novel, visits is the farming community of Vilmar. The choice of such a bucolic setting — farmland surrounded by forests — is not arbitrary. It is critical to the effective juxtaposition of competition and cooperation. As the philosopher Philip Slater writes:

Since [our] society rests on scarcity assumptions, involvement in it has always meant competitive involvement, and, curiously enough, the theme of bucolic withdrawal has often associated itself with that of cooperative, communal life. So consistently, in fact, have intentional communities established themselves in the wilderness that one can only infer that society as we know it makes cooperative life impossible.²⁷

For a different and more anthropological justification, Winifred Gallagher based understanding and appreciation for the outdoor wilderness on studies which seem to indicate a innate, almost evolutionary yearning for a pasture-like "restorative" setting — an environment "that helped to write [*Homo sapiens's*] genetic and behavioral script:"²⁸

During our long evolution as hunters and gatherers on the East African savannah, we developed a taste for the kind of terrain we continue to prefer in paintings, drawings, and photographs. We like natural scenes best.... A meandering creek, a thundering waterfall, or any other body of water makes a picture the hands-down first choice, which isn't surprising, considering water's importance to our survival.²⁹

²⁶ Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, 3.

²⁷ Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, 110.

²⁸ Gallagher, *The Power of Place*, 219.

²⁹ Gallagher, *The Power of Place*, 219.

Apparently, it may not be so much that competition is all-pervasive in contemporary society, though it doesn't help temper our desire to leave, but rather a long forgotten ideal setting which draws people to the country. Research has shown that a judicious combination of open space and trees — which provides shelter, shade, and entertainment for the curiosity of humans — emphasizing ecological cooperation has been found to be the most consistently preferred setting across cultures.

* * *

However, despite the scope of this dissertation, there are several topics which might have been discussed more thoroughly; yet due to the constraints imposed by the progression of argument in the paper, they had to be put aside or only cursorily examined. One such issue is the deeply-ingrained notion that competition is gender-based: that competition is an outgrowth of testosterone levels, and that cooperation is a part of the female experience. Alfie Kohn, in his seminal work on anti-competition *No Contest*, spends a great deal of time examining this very possibility. To discuss these possibilities would place me into the realms of evolution, genetics, and innate notions of competition, which I discuss in Chapter 1 (Part I).

I can appreciate the argument that men are more competitive because of the effects of testosterone, and that women are more cooperative because of the levels of estrogen (which in turn may help the preservation of the species). Still I resist incorporating this discussion in the dissertation for fear that confusion might occur. Because I argue that competition and cooperation are learned behaviors and not innate, if I suggest that women are innately nurturing and men are innately aggressive (which certain evidence suggests), some may make the erroneously assumption that innate nurturing behavior is the same as innate cooperative behavior, and innate aggressive behavior is the same as innate competition.

It should be obvious that humans can and have controlled their instincts and need not be unconditionally dictated by hormone levels.³⁰ I argue, therefore, that aggression, even if instinctual, need not lead to competition, which is a construct of the environment; nor does the instinctual desire of nurturing necessarily lead to cooperation. Moreover, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to tell the difference between the influences of instinct and environment.

The entire issue should be immaterial anyway, because discussing it deflects attention from what is really important about what and which beneficial social relations ought to exist. Take for example the beautifully illustrative description of gender-based learning written by Garrison Keillor in a 1992 *New York Times* editorial:

Girls had it better from the beginning. Boys can run around fighting for made-up reasons with toy guns going kksssh-kksshh and arguing about who was dead, while girls play in the house with their dolls, creating complex family groups and solving problems through negotiation and role-playing. Which gender is better equipped, on the whole, to live an adult life, would you guess?³¹

In the end, to argue that boys choose guns and girls choose dolls for reasons innate is impossible to verify. Second, even if the notion that humans are innately competitive is true, the position that humans must therefore compete is still not valid for it ignores all social influences, examples, and rhetoric to the contrary. Lastly, statements couched in such terms — by claiming that a supposedly male characteristic (competition) is representative of *Homo sapiens* in general, as when one claims that humans are competitive by nature — seems clearly an expression of male gender bias itself.

Also, throughout the dissertation I write with a clear distinction between play, games, and sport in mind. One of my underlying definitional presumptions is that sport grows out of competitive games and is, therefore, inherently competitive. To elaborate: from play,

³⁰ Those who are, however, are rare; and though often treatable, ought not to represent the generally normal condition of humans.

³¹ Olive, *GenderBabble*, 42. There is also the quote from John Fowles's book, *The Magnus*: "Men love war because it allows them to look serious. Because it is the one thing that stops women laughing at them [Olive, *GenderBabble*, 165]."

we derive games — cooperative, non-competitive, and competitive; from competitive games come sport. Although it seems uncontroversial that the concept of sport grew out of the larger concept of games, which in turn grew out of the even larger concept of play, many people still misconceive their relationship to each other. I will use skiing to demonstrate the evolution.

Someone who repeatedly takes a ski lift to the top of the slopes and skis down, having nothing more of an agenda than to enjoy the rush of adrenalin, is at play — albeit expensive play which uses the accouterments associated with the sport of downhill skiing. The next step is the game, which occurs when this person and an acquaintance agree to set up certain informal conditions to be maintained (constitutive rules) and/or accomplished (preludory goal) when descending the hill. For instance, a competitive game may be a basic race to the bottom — the fastest skier winning — but with the implied restraint of not cheating (lusory means and attitude). On the same token, a cooperative game could just as well exist if they agree to hold hands while skiing down hill, striving for both duration and distance (in other words, using only one pole per person to guide the duo), working together to achieve the goal.³²

Soon, these two friends notice other people on other slopes racing with each other. They challenge these other skiers to races, which now requires formalized rules and standardized playing conditions, so there are no misunderstandings; starting times, giving people opportunity to practice and prepare; referees, so there is a method for arbitrating disputes; and accommodations for spectators in order to validate the event and victory. At this point, we have a sport. As stated above, a sport arises only from the competitive side of games.³³

³² See Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 41 for the full definition of game.

³³ Cooperative games may evolve into sport, but they must pass through the competitive game stage first.

Yet, people still tend to use the term sport when they are actually referring to games or even play. For example, someone might say that a person engaged in recreational skiing is playing a sport. But that perceives the evolution of play to sport in reverse, mistaking the simple use of items that the sport of skiing utilizes as the complete exemplification of the sport itself. Making this error trivializes the roll of play and games in our lives, and demonstrated the profound impact of competition in our lives.

One may also argue, based loosely on ordinary language philosophy, that all aspects of skiing have become a sport through common language usage. Everyone describes the activity as a sport, so therefore it must be. There is a certain expediency with this method, but convenience doesn't assure correctness. Again, by calling what is clearly an enjoyable play activity a sport, society confuses the participant into thinking that it is sport which is enjoyable, not play. A linguistic misnomer becomes a major determinant in the social understanding of competition. For as Abraham Lincoln is quoted to have asked a heckler at a political rally, "How many legs does a horse have?" "Four," the man replied. "Good. Let us say we call the tail a leg. Now how many legs does the horse have?" "Five," said the man. "Wrong," said Lincoln. "Calling a tail a leg does not make it one."

As you read this work, you will find many examples of scholars and other intelligent people calling competition something other than what it is. In light of the fact the such myths of competition have been spouted repeatedly by a variety of sources, from politicians, educators, and media, it is little wonder why people continue perpetuating them. What we have is "a transformation in vocabulary," as Stanley Fish puts it, "a change in ways of talking that affects a change in what is being talked about." New languages, thus, introduce people to new ways of looking at the world, describing competition in certain ways.

But Fish's statement is a two-edged sword. I would like to think that cooperativists like myself can begin to reign in the loose and unsubstantiated talk, push aside the words

which shield competition from criticism, and get people to think more carefully about what they perceive as truth when it comes to competition. Too many times have I heard people tout the benefits of competition and cooperation in the same breath, saying lines like "Let's all work together so we can beat our opponents," little realizing that what they are saying makes no sense.

Cooperation and competition are clearly acquired traits based on what is the best way to survive in our society. However, if we are to achieve a better social structure founded on cooperation and mutual understandings — even a mutual quest for excellence — then competition should immediately be regarded as an also-ran. Cooperation should be the preferred course of action in a civilized society. What short-circuits such attempts at achieving this state of affairs are usually the self-interested desires of those who have succeeded, through competition, to stay on top and their unwillingness to relinquish these victories in order to help others succeed. Based on the competitive model, this attitude is not only to be expected but encouraged.

Of course, it may never be the case that there will be nothing for which to compete. In other words, people will compete simply because that's how they think life should be. Competition, as argued by some, may not be a thirst for winning at all, but rather a continuous exertion not to lose. As William Whyte first pointed out in *The Organization Man*, most people who compete in business have no knowledge of what they are competing for. But they all realize that if they do not compete, they will lose ... something.

The figures of speech younger executives use to describe the situation they now find themselves in are illuminating. The kind of words they use are "treadmill," "merry-go-round," "rat-race" — words that convey an absence of tangible goals, but plenty of activity to get there. The absence of fixed goals ... may make them seem less ambitious, less competitive than their forebears, but in the more seemingly co-operative climate of today lies a prod just as effective. They are competing; all but the fools know this — but for what, and against whom? They don't know, and there is the trap. To keep even, they must push ahead, and though they may like to do it only slightly, who is to say what slightly is. Their contemporaries are in precisely the same doubt, and thus they all end up competing against one another as rapaciously as if their hearts were set for the presidency itself.³⁴

³⁴ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 176.

People see no end to competition; yet they all hope it will. Alas, unless people begin to more fully scrutinize their actions and behaviors in relation to the beliefs they hold, competition will continue to flourish to our collective dismay, the "rat-race" will continue to exhaust our society, and we will never cease the hypocrisy and the irony and the foolhardiness of our own actions and decisions to which many have become blind. Take for our final example the following news clip:

The Saguaro High School (Scottsdale, Arizona) newspaper editor, Sam Claiborn, wrote an editorial critical of the culture of violence of football heroes, who he said often turn out to be drunks and spouse-abusers. An unnamed member of the school's football team took offense and beat Claiborn up, for which he was suspended.³⁵

³⁵ *Metro Pulse*, 9:7 (February 18, 1999), 43.

Chapter 1

Competition Is Innate

*I believe I've found the missing link between animal and civilized man.
It is us.*

KONRAD LORENZ

It has often been claimed that some, if not many, behavioral characteristics in humans are genetically determined. One of these genetically determined traits, it is argued, is the competitive nature of humans and other animals. The "aggressive" view of nature, popularized by T. H. Huxley, capitalizes on Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection for its justification. It is further suggested that in order for species to survive and perpetuate they must act and behave competitively. Animals are at each others throats, literally, and it would be silly to claim that they have somehow been "socialized" into acting competitively — especially in lower order species like insects, where ant colony battles are commonplace and bees and wasps are mortal enemies. One can plainly see, as depicted on television, nature is violently competitive. On screen is a constant and gruesomely choreographed dance of untimely deaths throughout nature. It is an unfortunate "fact of life."

Transplant the aggression theory into humans and one witnesses marked indications that violence, aggressiveness, and competition experienced in our daily lives have a direct link to our natural animal desires. Although opponents claim that humans can choose to act either in a civilized or barbaric way, it does not undermine the argument. In fact, if humans

act civilized by suppressing their aggressive tendencies, as remarked by Freud,¹ it admits explicitly that humans have aggressive tendencies to be suppressed.

We should not take this position lightly, for the view that human behavior (specifically human aggression) depends largely on man's animal nature is seriously advocated in the works of several well-respected students of Ethology, including Konrad Lorenz (*On Aggression* [1963]), Robert Ardrey (*The Territorial Imperative* [1966]), Desmond Morris (*The Naked Ape* [1967]), and Anthony Storr (*Human Aggression* [1968]). However, most contemporary behaviorists actively disagree with these gentlemen's arguments for three basic reasons, each of which reflects a lack of the necessary scientific justification involving innate competitiveness. The innate aggression argument, according to Berkowitz's brief but excellent essay on the subject "Simple Views of Aggression": 1) relies on casual anecdotes rather than well-delineated and carefully controlled studies; 2) uses ill-defined terms and gross analogies between humans and animals; and 3) inexcusably overlooks relevant, though conflicting, research.² More importantly, warns Berkowitz, popular books of this nature threaten us by downplaying the "important roles played by environmental stimuli and learning in aggressive behavior, and by blocking awareness of an important social principle: Aggression is all too likely to lead to still more aggression."³

Conversely, since the turn of the century, an impressively long list of biologists have readily endorsed the cooperationist perspective of the animal kingdom.⁴ In 1878, A. V. Espinas concluded in *Dés Sociétés Animales* that communal life was a biological necessity. It was the social theorists, beginning with Herbert Spencer — coiner the term "survival of

¹ "The inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man ... [and] constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization" [Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 69].

² Berkowitz, "Simple Views of Aggression," 22.

³ Berkowitz, "Simple Views of Aggression," 22.

⁴ Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902); Warder Allee, *Cooperation Among Animals* (1951); Ashley Montagu, *Darwin, Competition, and Cooperation* (1952), to name a few.

the fittest" — who later misinterpreted Darwin and perpetuated myth in the face of seemingly obvious refutation. In relation to the animal world, natural selection — the proper term when discussing the "struggle" involved in evolutionary theory — deals almost exclusively with intra-species competition (lions vs. lions) and not inter-species struggle (lions vs. gazelles). Inter-species interactions are primarily acts which maintain an individual's survival, not necessarily a species survival; and though appear competitive, are probably not. For example, ants have been accused of slave holding, by forcing other ants to do work. However, these "other ants" are of a different species, and are actually herded for food in a similar way we herd cattle for milk or beef. When a lion attacks a gazelle, there is no indication of any sort of aggression with the act.⁵ Although it could be suggested that humans act aggressively when slaughtering cattle, I doubt if the same argument can legitimately be made for insects or animals that presumably cannot possibly debate the relative merits of their actions, in spite of what television may display of animal violence.

What is true, however, is the reality that television ratings are just as vicious and competitive as the supposed action on television. Competition and violence sells air time. Also, this "Hollywood" version of competition, no matter how un-Darwinian it may be, can only help but reinforce the inculcated values of a capitalist social structure: the notion that competition, though maybe unhealthy, is natural, inevitable, and if utilized properly, necessary to the further development of a luxuriously modern society.⁶

The values we see (or rather "want" to see) in nature are often those very values we ourselves bring to the observation. If one truly understands natural selection, there can be little doubt that a cultural bias is at work — when "competitive" success is used as the measure of beneficial natural selection. As Marston Bates discusses in *The Nature of*

⁵ Lorenz, *On Aggression*, 22.

⁶ This line of argument leads to a discussion of social Darwinism, which will be reserved for the next chapter.

Natural Selection,⁷ competition is a superficial tag having been superimposed over a more widespread and fundamental agenda of cooperative behaviors. Natural selection and species success rests on the reproduction of offspring, and not necessarily on methods of procuring food. Species perpetuate and protect themselves in a variety of ways, some of which are exclusively cooperative. Chimpanzees, for example, hunt cooperatively and share the results, much like how early *Homo sapiens* probably behaved.

In the animal kingdom, as remarked above, competition appears to be an individualistic entity rather than a species or even group activity. It may be said that even though individual animals sometimes have to fight to maintain their own existence (fights, as mentioned above, which occur between members of different species), entire species must work together to perpetuate the genetic line. As O. W. Richards mused, "It seems probable that a species whose instinctive behavior led it to attack its own species would rapidly become extinct."⁸ This certainly separates humans from other animals.

This is not to say that intra-species (e.g., lion vs. lion) aggression does not exist. Yet, it has been demonstrated that when intra-species competition does occur, it seems to be more directly relatable to environmental and social living conditions than to instinct. Insect populations, for example, are spurred to become either aggressive or passive based on the availability of food supplies. The lower the food supplies, the more aggressive insects become, and vice versa. Based on mice studies, Richard Ardrey wrote of the link between overpopulation and aggression in environments where food and threats to mortality have been eliminated.⁹ Birds and other animals appear extremely territorial and will vigorously defend their area, which may be based on availability of food.¹⁰ This aggressive tendency is another way to maintain the species, for too many animals in a given area will overtax the

⁷ Alfie Kohn writes of "Marvin" Bates [*No Contest*, fn 32, 250].

⁸ Richards, 68.

⁹ Robert Ardrey's essay "The Violent Way" discusses overpopulation-induced aggression in monkey and mice populations.

¹⁰ K. E. Moyer remained unsatisfied with such an explanation of territoriality (see below).

food resources and bring on starvation. "Pecking orders" exist as well in many animal groups. It is argued, however, that these hierarchies are not based on competitive actions by members of the group but rather on a need for group stability. Higher members of the pecking order will often intervene in and end squabbles between lower level members. The higher members take on the role of peace-makers rather than dominator, a benevolent ruler rather than tyrant.

When one lion or one ram dominates, it is to guarantee exclusive access to the females of the group. This, according to basic natural selection, permits the species to be replenished by the offspring of the most physically capable animal. It has been proven time and again that the most successful progeny usually come from the healthiest parents. But to make that determination, what is to be done? Peacock females usually choose for themselves, and thus avert a fight, but many mammals on the higher end of the evolutionary chain seem to resort to a more violent competitive process of selection.

Although this process assures the continuation of the species, there appears to be no doubt that, in certain cases, the process is instinctively generated. Even in ideal climatic conditions producing years of ecological plenty, male lions fiercely guard their females from encroachment, even if the lionesses outnumber the males in the pride, and have been known to kill the newborn cubs of deposed males. Abundance apparently does nothing to alter the power struggle. From this competition for mating privileges, a social hierarchy emerges. At the top are those males vying for attention and sex. At the bottom are the also-rans who may never pass on genetic material — which may be for the best — for based on the ranking of suitors, it would likely be inferior genetic material. The perpetuation of the species is well ordered, highly structured, and effective. Lion prides operate in much the same way, where challengers to the dominant male's power often ends with the loser simply being chased away, and rarely in the death of either opponent. It is quickly understood who will be in what position of the hierarchy. The pecking order,

thus, arises not as a competitive construction but as a stabilizing component in a greater cooperative social interaction. Yet, and this is the argument competitivists would insist upon, no matter how far reaching the actions seem to support cooperation in the survival matrix of a species, it is still a result of competition instinctively generated and reinforced by social settings.

But is this truly the case? First, as said above, there is nothing in evolution which requires competition. If cooperation works well enough, as it seems to most of the time, then that will be the preferred method of procreation. From this, can we imply that mammals may be able to reject their cooperative instincts and learn to be competitive by watching the social interactions of other members of the group, which appears to be the case in primate groups? Does this also imply that animals need not have to be instinctively competitive, learning to be competitive as the situation demands?

Moreover, if we think back on Marston Bates's comments above (that the patina of competition is applied over a general cooperative environment), there may, in the end, be no solution possible to the question of human aggression that can ever be found through animal studies. Psychologist K. E. Moyer, in his book *Violence and Aggression*, describes numerous different territorial patterns of aggressive defense and passive non-defense. It cannot be demonstrated that all animals react with similar aggressive or defensive patterns, at least in the case of territoriality. Furthermore, Moyer complains that most depictions of aggressive acts in animals, no matter how they are eventually attributed, use,

terms which are descriptive of human motivational states. When these terms are applied to animals they are inferred from the behavior, and there can be no assurance that the animal has any mental process even remotely similar to those implied by such words ... It is really no more reasonable to suggest that an animal is *defending* its territory than it is to believe that the intruder is defending its God-given right to territorial expansion.¹¹

¹¹ Moyer, *Violence and Aggression*, 171.

When male peacocks unfurl their feathers, when rams butt their horns, and when only one male lion dominates a pride, all this and more occurs within the timeless expression of natural selection. On the other hand, when one writes that such-and-such animal is in *pursuit of a mate*, *maintains order* in a community, or is *staking out* territorial demesnes, we are simply anthropomorphizing motivations of which we have little understanding. Rather, as Berkowitz points out:

[It] is not very judicious, and actually is rash ... to assume that the mechanisms underlying two similar response characteristics are in any way identical, homologous, or even similar, merely because the actions of different species or entities seem to resemble each other (in the eyes of the writer, we might add).¹²

Aggressive and violent acts exist but aggression and violence may not, for such presupposes the knowledge that one's act is violent and aggressive. Only in humans does there exist a known premeditation towards competition and aggression, all of which makes any pro-competitive literature on humans founded on animal instinct much less clear.

* * *

COMPETITION AND COOPERATION ARE LEARNED

It should be simple, furthermore, to dismiss the idea that humans are innately competitive; one need only find a single culture in the world which is non-competitive, an anthropological technique known as 'negative instance.' In this case, there are many more than just one. The Inuits of Northern Canada, Aboriginal tribes in Australia, the Bushmen of southern Africa, pre-colonial and contemporary Native American tribes, Congo pygmies, and the Waoranis of the Amazon.¹³ All of these tribes and peoples are intensely cooperative, even in the midst of very different and difficult living conditions.

¹² Berkowitz, "Simple Views of Aggression, 16.

¹³ Kohn, *No Contest*, 35.

In the essay "The Origin and Nature of Social Life and the Biological Basis of Cooperation," Ashley Montagu proposes, with some merit, that competition in humans is antithetical to the instinct of mother/child attachment necessary for raising healthy offspring. The maternal bond, and the bonds gained through sociability, are intensely strong in animals as well as in humans. Dramatic (and sometimes shockingly cruel) experiments have demonstrated the power and benefit of this bonding. In one experiment, 100 rats were fed a perversely high saturated fat diet. Within a short time, 99 rats died. Yet one continued to survive. Researchers discovered that of all the rats, this one was the only one taken out of its cage and petted during feeding. In another, more demented experiment, Frederick the Great of Prussia had newborn babies placed in a sound-proofed room to see what language would result when exposed to no speech. All the children's caregivers were instructed not to utter a word while attending the infants. The result? All the infants died. Montagu writes:

Social, cooperative behavior is simply the continuation of the maternal-offspring relationship. Cooperative, social behavior is ... as old as life itself, and the direction of evolution has, in man, been increasingly directed toward the fuller development of cooperative behavior. When social behavior is not cooperative it is diseased behavior.¹⁴

The fact that a human child requires so much more intimate and intensive care to survive than other animals indicates that, in evolutionary terms, humans are the most dependent on cooperative ways of life and thinking for survival. To insinuate that it could be any other way is ludicrous and demonstrates a clear prejudice towards a competitive ideology — an ideology inspired and nurtured by, what feminists have claimed, a male-dominated philosophical climate justifying intra-species violence, aggression, and war.

Yet this is a deceptive argument; the implication being that humans must be inherently cooperative if they aren't innately competitive. Because non-competitive societies are so few and far between, perhaps *they* are the deviant ones? Anthropologists have discovered

¹⁴ Montagu, "The Origin and Nature of Social Life and the Biological Basis of Cooperation," 21.

that in some Aboriginal tribes, there are strong individual and group feelings about private property which all members of the tribe respect, and members of other tribes engage in potlatch rituals — where tribesmen compete in giving away their personal possessions. Human competitiveness, therefore, should not be dismissed so easily. On the other hand, though a convincing case can be made for the instinctual origins of a child/mother bond, instinctual bonds and social cooperation are not necessarily the same.

In the end, there seems to be little support for the idea that competition is somehow "natural;" yet the same may be said for cooperation. For just as much as humans could be socialized into acting more aggressively and competitively, so too could they be socialized in the other direction, thus masking instinct either way. Of course, this conclusion ought to come as no surprise. A 1937 study undertaken by Mark A. May and Leonard Doob, and sponsored by the Social Science Research Council, exhaustively examined the available research in the field of social science and came to the following conclusion: "Human beings strive for goals, but striving with others (co-operation) or against others (competition) are learned forms of behavior."¹⁵ The past half-dozen decades of research have produced nothing to contradict that conclusion. The irony within American society, according to David Riesman, is that the more one claims competition is innate, the more competition "is constantly re-created by artificial systems of social roles that direct energies into it."¹⁶

As we have seen, it is a very tricky and precarious process to intuit human behavior from animal behavior, despite the fact that we are animals, and despite numerous attempts to make such extrapolations. Culturization colors many, if not all, of the once innate (gene-based) behaviors, as Paul Bohanan writes:

¹⁵ Kohn, *No Contest*, 24-5.

¹⁶ Kohn, *No Contest*, 25, from Riesman's essay "Football in America: A Study in Culture Diffusion" from the book *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays* (1953).

Human society looks different from animal society because people have culturized their social behavior — as, indeed, they have culturized all of their animal behavior. They have used culture to create principles of social organization beyond those found in animal society. Moreover different peoples, each faced with its own environment and each working towards its own goals, have culturized it in different ways.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Bohanan goes on to make some rather sweeping judgments about human competitiveness and cooperativeness in spite of its culturized setting, often with little verification. First, he relates two "determinants of sociality," seemingly undeniable truths of social life. One is that since we are mortal, we must reproduce. Second, "since resources are scarce, competition and aggression are built in."¹⁸ The trap Bohanan falls into is accepting certain "common sense" ideas as factually true. Common sense in this case is a poor argument indeed. The economist Robert Heilbroner asserts exactly the opposite when it comes to the role of scarcity:

In primitive society, the struggle between aggression and cooperation is taken care of by the environment; when the specter of starvation looks a community in the face every day — as with the Eskimos or the African hunting tribes — the pure need for self-preservation pushes society to the cooperative completion of its daily tasks.¹⁹

Extending this line of inquiry, at least two forces exist which seem to frustrate cooperative social settings. As technology makes survival easier, the first force is the entropy of community, in which energy needed to sustain community becomes harder to generate. As Heilbroner's wit elaborates, "When men no longer work shoulder to shoulder in tasks directly related to survival ... the perpetuation of the human animal becomes a remarkable social feat."²⁰ The second force which exists comes from our society's inculturated insistence on an individualistic lifestyle, thus reinforcing the lack of "shoulder to shoulder" activity which may have solidified a more cooperative social environment. Rather, we have a situation ripe for and rife with a competitive struggle for survival.

Continue Heilbroner's line of reasoning and one might conclude that competition is at least partially a result of a plentiful environment. Only in times of abundance do humans

¹⁷ Bohanan, *How Culture Works*, 23.

¹⁸ Bohanan, *How Culture Works*, 12.

¹⁹ Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 6-7.

²⁰ Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 7.

have the luxury and the moral compunction (people are more willing to deprive other people of items that aren't really necessary for survival) to begin to hoard items, maximizing their comfort at the expense of others, and thereby creating scarcity (which, in turn, reinforces the need to hoard). What Bohanan refers to as scarcity may actually be this artificial version. Unfortunately, if this state of affairs gets out of control, items that are useful to prevent suffering and poverty (health care, welfare, food stamps) will soon become acceptable items for hoarding as well.

In any case, Bohanan would have us believe that competition is a natural off-shoot of both environmental scarcity and, as he later indicates, the genetic foundation for aggression in the form of dominance, common in the animal kingdom:

All living animals must, to one degree or another, exhibit aggressive behavior — which is to say that they have to assert themselves to find a place in and resources from the environment ... When people condemn aggression, they mean that they wish to change the cultural values that tell them which specific types of aggressive action to condemn and which to praise. They cannot actually get rid of aggression — the world would fall apart around them if they did.²¹

A cooperativist would find little here that is disputable, although one may want to emphasize the role culture plays in channeling aggression into socially appropriate venues. On this count, Bohanan would hardly disagree either. After all, it is not disputed that culture modifies gene-based behavior into alternative forms. However, Bohanan continues by claiming that "most Americans teach their children that they should not start a fight, but they also teach them to stand up and fight if somebody else starts it."²²

I see no where in his references or citations how he comes to the conclusion that "most" Americans teach their youth to stand up and fight, especially when most enlightened parents want to encourage their children that there may be other methods of conflict resolution available. Some of us teach our youth to make sure all avenues for discussion have been exhausted before aggression must be utilized, and even then only in self-

²¹ Bohanan, *How Culture Works*, 30.

²² Bohanan, *How Culture Works*, 30.

preservation — and self-preservation, though an aggressive act, hardly sounds like an act of aggression, as implied by Bohanan.

Bohanan goes on: "They tell them that aggressive competition in business is a good thing because it keeps prices down and deters businesses from fleecing the buying public."²³ Granted, most people probably do tell their children it is a "good" thing, but is this a legitimate argument to support aggression? For example, others can equally say it's a bad thing because competition, especially aggressive competition, makes quality dependent on price (the lower price, the less quality), increases producer/product alienation, and treats the consumer as just a thing which needs to be convinced into buying something it may not need based on reasons and emotions that have nothing to do with the product itself. Also, competition does nothing to prevent businesses from fleecing the consumer. If that were truly the case, we wouldn't have the mountains of legislation, numerous legal challenges, and an array public interest consumer groups which exist to prevent these competitors from ripping off the buyers.

In both cases, Bohanan relies on public myth to justify his argument for instinctual aggression. As said above, there is no dispute that animals need to survive and may need to use aggressive measures to maintain survival. However, linking survival aggression to business practices is unjustifiable, if not unconscionable. In fact, the more technologically savvy humans become and the more we satisfy our basic needs for survival, the necessity to be aggressive to each other (if Bohanan is correct in his tenuous position that competition results from scarcity) is slowly eliminated, which of course is not happening. We may still need to be aggressive towards other things (as in eating plants or animals for food), or in response to events (as during natural disasters), but we have no longer any need to be aggressive to fellow humans. As I have argued above, humans are one of the only species

²³ Bohanan, *How Culture Works*, 30.

which engages in premeditated aggression towards one another — even, perhaps especially, in times of relative plenty.

Anthropologists like Bohanan can unconsciously be manipulated by social and cultural biases in spite of their supposed awareness of them. This also demonstrates the depth of influence and inculcation the competitive ethos has in the American lifestyle — an influence not due to competition in the genes. Aggression maybe, but to then equate aggression with competition, as Bohanan does, is an unforgivable error.

The problem as I see it, however, is not that humans are either competitive or cooperative by nature. Rather, the argument, placed in an either/or construct, may not be correctly framed. Humans could be neither cooperative nor competitive by nature. In the essay "Biological Potentiality vs. Biological Determinism," Professor Stephen Jay Gould poses the question of whether humans are sociologically pre-determined because of instinct influencing personal interactions (sociobiology) or a product of biological potentiality, in which we are more influenced by things other than instinct.

Gould's major complaint against the sociobiological argument is that it "promises only absurdity by its refusal to consider immediate nongenetic factors" of behavior²⁴ based on "extended speculation on the genetic basis of supposedly universal patterns in human behavior."²⁵ Considering that the evidence for direct genetic control of human behavior — that there is a gene for specific traits of human behavior, including aggression, altruism, homosexuality, heterosexuality — is noticeably lacking, there seems to be no foundation on which to support such speculations. Thus, Gould speculates on a different possibility:

Why imagine that specific genes for aggression, dominance, or spite have any importance when we know that the brain's enormous flexibility permits us to be aggressive or peaceful, dominant or submissive, spiteful or generous? Violence, sexism, and general nastiness *are* biological since they represent one subset of a possible range of behaviors. But peacefulness, equality, and kindness are just as biological — and we may see their influence increase if we can create social structures that permit them to flourish. Thus, my criticism ... does not invoke a nonbiological "environmentalism"; it merely pits the concept of biological potentiality — a brain

²⁴ Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, 258.

²⁵ Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, 252.

capable of the full range of human behaviors and rigidly predisposed towards none — against the idea of biological determinism — specific genes for specific behavioral traits.²⁶

What Gould offers us is the idea that we have the capacity for both competition and cooperation based on the social structures created to enhance or discourage one or the other; for humans can be socialized either way based on which trait will perpetuate the species. Natural selection makes it clear that it is neither competition nor cooperation which sustains a species; it is adaptability. If it pays to compete in order to perpetuate a species, humans and other animals will compete; if it enhances survivability to cooperate, humans and other animals will cooperate. There is no significant preference one way or the other. Humans, like every other animal, adapt to environmental conditions to survive, because humans have the highest potential for reasoning, we have the highest capacity to adapt. Because of our adaptability, we also have the highest potential to be molded by the environment.

Unfortunately, the ideas of biological determinism, despite their spurious scientific bases, continue to dominate social constructions, at least on the practical level. Gould contends that this perpetuation of determinism "has always been used to defend existing social arrangements as biologically inevitable ... Why else would a set of ideas so devoid of factual support gain such a consistently good press from established media throughout the centuries?"²⁷ We must heed the warning. Unfounded belief in genetic determinism could lead to several unacceptable conclusions. The first is that the social distinctions between men and women and their disparate roles in society could be justified simply because they exist as they do. If these social distinctions must have a genetic origin, then they must be "right" the way they presently are. Second, the use of genetic determinism

²⁶ Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, 257-8.

²⁷ Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, 258. Noam Chomsky warns us in his book *Manufacturing Consent* that since the use of force has become more and more ill-suited for domestic social stability, the media has taken on the role of propagandist — to act as a passive innocuous vent for social frustrations, and as a tacit apologist and defender of a collection of values supported by conservative political and industrial interests. This is hardly far-fetched, considering that over fifty percent of the media in the U.S. are owned by only 25 companies (see more on Chomsky below). G. William Domhoff observes as well that, "By controlling every major opinion-molding institution in the country, members of the upper class play a predominant role in determining the framework within which decisions on important issues are reached" [*Who Rules America*, 83].

may relieve us of responsibility for our actions. If individuals have been genetically determined to act in a particular way, then it is meaningless, if not immoral, to punish them even if their actions inadvertently or purposely harm others. Conversely, someone predisposed and predetermined towards violence cannot be rehabilitated, leading to frightening possibilities.

* * *

DUNLOP AND TRANSCENDENT COMPETITION

Although there is no conclusive evidence of gene-based predispositions towards competition, in this section I look at the continuing efforts of some who hope to demonstrate that competition — no longer somehow an innate human characteristic — remains a psychological need in humans, and that there may be something cathartic and releasing about it. Ethologist Konrad Lorenz felt that "ritualized" activities, such as sport, offered this catharsis effect.²⁸ Along with Ardrey and Storr, Lorenz "believed that 'present-day civilized man suffers from insufficient discharge of his aggressive drive,' [and called] for more athletic competitions — bigger and better Olympic games."²⁹ Lorenz further argued that the "most important function of sport" is to provide a civilized substitution for "collective militant enthusiasm." One's hostility towards another is subsumed beneath a "sportsman's dedication to the international social norms of his sport, to the ideals of chivalry and fair play."³⁰ In the end, virtues once instilled through warfare can now be learned through less violent and destructive means.

Current research, however, has done much to discredit such views. Wars, for example, are products of states, not individuals. Consequently, we could agree that sports

²⁸ Lorenz, *On Aggression*, 271.

²⁹ Berkowitz, "Simple Views of Aggression," 19.

³⁰ Lorenz, *On Aggression*, 272.

may put an end to war and still insist that Lorenz's argument does not make it obvious that it will put an end to human aggression towards one another. Organized aggression may be redirected; individual aggression remains unaffected. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that spectators receive no cathartic effect from sports viewing. Individuals who watch violent sporting contests recorded higher levels of aggressiveness after than before watching despite who wins; while individuals who spectate low violence sports, like gymnastics, show little change in aggressive tendencies.³¹ Moyer quaintly sums up the research: "Competitive sports may have many values, but it seems likely that the general reduction of aggressive tendencies is not one of them."³² Moyer went on to further discredit the idea that pent-up aggression needs to be discharged through aggressive action. In his survey of the research, he noticed that there is no evidence that humans somehow store aggression. Aggressive acts are frequently spontaneous and unpredictable, can occur just as assuredly after long or short periods of frustration, or not occur at all after tremendous levels of frustrations. Moyer contends that aggression, as a response to aggressive acts,

is neither necessary nor inevitable. An individual will respond as a function of his past experiences. These results are encouraging because they show that it is quite possible to change the probability that people can respond in friendly rather than hostile ways.³³

Educational theorist Francis Dunlop, however, feels strongly that competition performed in legitimate situations releases the natural urge to excel which springs from an amorphous human nature, or *psyche*, without becoming corrupt in the process. In his essay "Competition in Education," Dunlop dismisses the idea that competition is selfish and somehow anti-educational, "[giving] children a completely false idea of what education is all about;"³⁴ or the notion that prizes or notoriety would necessarily "distort" educational

³¹ Goldstein and Arms, "Effects of Observing Athletic Contests on Hostility," *Sociometry*, 34 [1971], 83-90.

³² Moyer, *Violence and Aggression*, 103.

³³ Moyer, *Violence and Aggression*, 104.

³⁴ Dunlop, "Competition in Education," 128.

goals and objectives. Children who compete in spelling bees and mathematics contests really do know how to spell and do math, if not better, then no worse than their non-competitor friends. It is not the existence of grades or prizes but the "exaggerated" attention and encouragement given these tokens which causes the problems associated with competition.

This dichotomy, that the activity of competition must be separated from the passion to compete in order to avoid the problem of over-competitiveness, has been (according to Dunlop) the crux of the debate between competitivists and cooperativists. Dunlop insists it is an erroneous and impossible distinction, for competition has both active and passive elements:

We typically experience competition as itself *eliciting* our efforts. Sometimes we are consciously aware of a 'challenge'; at others this comes to us at a less than fully conscious level, and we *find ourselves* already involved in competitive situations without fully realising it ... A competitive structure somehow *supports* our efforts, making it possible for us to produce performances we never knew we were capable of; it makes it harder for us to give up, and yet it gives us the energy and power to carry on. On the other hand we are not *just* passive under all this. Even when we are least aware of the other competitors and most concentrated on the *object* of the competition ... *some part of us* is actively 'competing' and drawing energy and determination from this 'embracing and 'enfolding' situation.³⁵

A person must give oneself up to the competition at hand and relax so the object of the contest receives the utmost attention and concentration. Competitive urges and passions must be relegated to the subliminal levels of the human psyche, still continuing to fire up the competitor but at the same time subduing its more ostentatious displays which only distract from the performance. Instead of accepting the common notion that competition's excesses result from opponents treating each other as a collection of objects blocking attainment of some extrinsic objective rather than as a respectful contest between matched competitors, Dunlop claims that *any* concentration on the opponents *is* what causes competition to degenerate into a selfish battle of wills:

The art of competition is to think hard about the running, painting, designing, etc., in which you are engaged while leaving the essentially 'competitive' part proper (the giving oneself to the

³⁵ Dunlop, "Competition in Education," 129.

competitive situation and consequent tapping of energy) to a less than fully conscious layer of the person. Too much conscious attention to stopping the others winning ... is a *waste* of energy. The competitor whose mind is full of malicious or fearful thoughts is *abusing* competition.³⁶

This sublimation of the competitive passion into the subconscious realm of indescribable motivation and away from the competitors is "legitimate" competition. It is the only way to assure that the correct version of competition doesn't collapse into a contest of unbridled passion, where tempers flare and emotions heat up, often to irrational levels. Controlling the Dionysian urges, as Dunlop puts it, permits the more Apollonian intellect to latch on to the goal itself and perform unencumbered. Although the conditions in which competition takes place are socially determined, the underlying passion for competition is part of a "natural" process, and will exist whether or not competition actually exists:

Competition ... belongs to the 'vital' sphere of human life, and does not have to be taught ... Competitiveness is an expression of vitality, of the spontaneous forces of life in us, as well as being a source of additional energy to the person.³⁷

Since competition is inherent within the human psyche, Dunlop concludes, we would be doing students (and everyone else for that matter) a disservice by not encouraging them to compete or providing opportunities to compete — but only in the actual, "legitimate" version of competition. It is this version which taps the "vital" part of the human psyche which inspires a personal desire to achieve in a way intellectual and aesthetic values alone do not; yet at the same time avoids the animosities that arise when competitive emotions surface. Without the emotive component, value-neutral competition (since values are heaped on by society) directs the person through to the spiritual realm of the psyche, which promotes positive moral values, eventually to "transcend" it.

Dunlop's essay is intriguing. By relegating the passion of competition (which is a given) to the subconscious level, we retain motivation without extremes. However, how opponents could ignore each other during the competitive moment (his major thesis) in sports involving certain forms of intimate competition (like wrestling, where direct conflict

³⁶ Dunlop, "Competition in Education," 131.

³⁷ Dunlop, "Competition in Education," 129-30.

with an opponent is a necessary aspect in goal attainment) is never explained. Either one must ignore that which one must fight, or only parallel competitive activities (like bowling) apparently seem acceptable to Dunlop's theory (which may be one of his objectives). In addition, Dunlop's contention that prizes and rewards are detrimental only when their significance is exaggerated misses the point that prizes and awards are effective precisely because they *themselves* exaggerate the significance of the activity and accomplishment in hopes of encouraging greater achievement.

There are several other problems, some of which are brought out in Michael Fielding's stinging rebuttal to Dunlop, "Competition and Ideology." First, Fielding agrees with Dunlop that competition motivates; yet not in every case, and not in the way Dunlop imagines. Margaret Clifford's study reinforces Fielding's criticism — to the extent that it contradicts Dunlop's major assertion that competition produces higher quality students — when she created a competitive game to learn vocabulary words. Although she did notice that competition did create some interest (due perhaps more to the break in the routine of regular class work), it was an interest shared only among the winners.³⁸ Equally damaging to Dunlop's thesis because of its results was a 1983 German study which "found that the competitiveness of fourth graders (as measured in a 15-item picture test) correlated negatively with school achievement."³⁹ Dunlop gives a biased view of the contingencies of competition from the point of view of teachers rather than the student — teachers, Fielding remarks, whom are themselves "successes of the competitive educational system."⁴⁰ Second, he complains of the plethora of unsubstantiated ideological positions, such as competitive urges are natural. Dunlop says little more than it is self-evidently true. Third,

³⁸ Kohn, *No Contest*, 47 ["Effect of Competition as a Motivational Technique in the Classroom" *American Educational Research Journal*, v 9 (1972), 123-137].

³⁹ Kohn, *No Contest*, 50 [H. J. Lerch and M. Rubensal, "Eine Analyse des Zusammenhangs zwischen Schulleistungen und dem Wettfermotiv," *Psychologische Beitrage*, v 25 (1983), 521-531].

⁴⁰ Fielding, "Competition and Ideology," 137. Unfortunately, Fielding leaves the statement at that — an overstatement in its own right — and doesn't support his contention.

Fielding brings up an issue that is a common theme and apparent flaw throughout the competitivist literature:

My main objection is that in drawing our attention to the crucial importance of concentrating on the excellence of our performance rather than beating the opponent, Dr. Dunlop has hit upon what is centrally important to games, not what is central to competition. Imagination, skill, courage and any other laudable characteristics one might think of are only contingently connected with competition. In the last analysis winning/losing is what competition is about.⁴¹

To claim, as many writers do, that competition builds character or teaches sportsmanship overlooks Fielding's crucial observation that competition and achievement are not necessarily linked. Games may promote a sense of accomplishment, but games need not have to be competitive to do this.⁴² Character building, as the literature reveals, has never been demonstrably shown to occur in games, while sportsmanship is always added to a game by external forces. Thus, whether a person builds character or learns sportsmanship, it is not incumbent on competition; non-competitive games can do as much.⁴³ The question now becomes whether we want to learn these attributes in an environment where winning and losing are paramount or in a much less intimidating environment where working together is valued.

There is still, I think, another fault with Dunlop's arguments,⁴⁴ one concerning the idea of a competitive passion which must remain under the surface of the individual, otherwise it gets in the way of accomplishing the task at hand. Although it is true that competitive passion does interfere with performance, if we accept Dunlop's view that humans are competitive by nature, it seems odd that he would want to provide external forms of competition, especially when he requires the competitive urges to stay hidden.

⁴¹ Fielding, "Competition and Ideology," 136.

⁴² I refrain from using the term "excellence" because, as I argue below, defenders of competition actually distort the notion of excellence, overlooking the fact that excellence is an outgrowth of competition.

⁴³ However, sportsmanship seems to be a component exclusively of competitive games.

⁴⁴ Fielding assails Dunlop on his use of (unsupported) common sense as a defense of competitive ideology which is pawned off as a legitimate methodological approach — issues not of concern to us here, but should be kept in mind during the discussion in Chapter 4.

Hidden passion is of obvious concern to the moral or ethical concerns of society — most moral theory assumes a reasonable and rational individual with emotions under control. Thus, competition may be useful in that it allows people to learn how to control their urges. But why risk it? If legitimate competition requires the suppression of passion, then there seems to be no actual need to create external activities for this passion to be actively suppressed or threatened to be released. As Dunlop admits, passion unleashed would only lead to disaster. Artificially constructed competitive exercises expose participants to the reality of failing to remain calm and composed, leading to a form of meta-competition, i.e., who can remain the most calm. Such situations also seem not to allow people to learn how to deal with possibly innate *cooperative* urges — a possibility Dunlop ignores but Fielding mentions.

If the only thing people see are the external manifestations of one's drive to accomplish a task, can this be called competition? Of course not. There is no necessity, based on Dunlop's argument, to engage in competitive activities in order to inspire the "competitive" psyche. Individuals who exercise to improve a previous time, for example, may supposedly be using this competitive urge but are not engaging in a competitive activity. They are simply challenging themselves. Therefore, to reiterate Fielding's earlier argument, there is no way to determine the difference between a personal desire to achieve and a competitive desire to achieve except through the *method* of achievement, i.e., whether the activity is competitive (win/loss oriented) or not. Dunlop confuses the psychic need to achieve with the psychic need to compete to achieve.

Dunlop seems to be arguing obliquely that all competition is in some essence a "competing with oneself." However, competition must be an interaction between two antagonists working for the same reward that only one of the opponents can attain. This makes no sense in the context of the individual. One doesn't try to achieve and try to

prevent achievement at the same time.⁴⁵ Moreover, if one claims to be competing against oneself, then it would be possible to "cooperate with oneself" as well; but that is a meaningless statement. "To challenge oneself" is the proper description for the individual's action.

Finally, K. E. Moyer describes a variety of instances where people may behave in ways of which they have no control. Their actions have physiological causes, rather than social. Aggression is not only a learned behavior based on environmental and reward/punishment cues, but has physiological determinants as well. Testosterone, sugar, drugs, food allergies, brain tumors and electrical brain wave pattern irregularities have all been associated with increased aggression.

Fortunately, there are inhibiting factors which will prevent frustration from becoming overt aggression. Because of this realization, it has been argued that competition, in which frustration is a direct result of winning and losing, ought to be used to develop the necessary inhibitions. Competition may be valuable in a competitive society, then, because it provides individuals a well-organized and controlled environment in which they can learn to deal with the humiliation, the failures and defeats, and the incumbent anger of losing (all of which seem to exacerbate innate behavioral problems) without causing harm to themselves or others.

There are several problems with this proposal. First, inhibitions are specific to the activity being performed. Those who develop inhibitions in one activity more than likely will not have developed any inhibition to aggression in another. Second, inhibitions have a deleterious side effect. Becoming accustomed to frustrations may make individuals less apt to challenge authority or take action in social situations that cause frustration; a social resignation or ennui envelops the person. Third, studies have demonstrated that winners,

⁴⁵ This line of reasoning is useful, though, in encouraging the idea that competition is a "mutual" quest, that people, through some strange antinomy, work together to achieve a goal by working against one another.

as well as losers, demonstrate higher aggressiveness after a competitive contest — occasionally more aggression than the losers. According to the authors of one study on competition's link to frustration, "Whether successful or not, competition [itself] is considered a frustrating experience [for all competitors] because of the threat of defeat and the unpredictability of the outcome."⁴⁶ Fourth, studies have demonstrated that children taught in cooperative settings often are more resistant to frustrations than those brought up in traditional competitive settings. Perhaps those in cooperative environments see obstacles as eventually surmountable given enough support from others as they work together; whereas those in competitive environments think individualistically and see obstacles as much more imposing and difficult for themselves to handle alone. It is this mentality which often expresses itself in the comments of exasperated people who exclaim, "I'm only one person. What can I do?" Just as they have learned to compete, they have not learned how to think cooperatively and to see problems as assailable through joint efforts.

So in contrast to the arguments which insist that competition is either innate or a psychological necessity or both, Stephen Jay Gould offers us a wonderful alternative, an alternative not unlike what other authors have repeatedly claimed over the years.⁴⁷ If social constructions influence behavior by enhancing or suppressing particular tendencies, then we have nothing to blame for our indiscretions except the social institutions which currently exist. The beauty lies in that these very same social institutions are our own inventions and can be changed, something which biological determinism and its defenders cannot or would not accept.⁴⁸ Thus, if competition is not necessary, we are free to reject it if we

⁴⁶ Pauline Christy, Donna Gelfand, and Donald Hartmann, "Effects of Competition-Induced Frustration on Two Classes of Modeled Behavior," *Developmental Psychology* 5 (1971), 104-111 [Quoted in Kohn, *No Contest*, 148].

⁴⁷ The Utopian Socialist Robert Owen remarked, "Man is a creature of circumstances" [Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 96].

⁴⁸ Risking a very superficial discussion, it could be argued at this juncture that the idea of biological probability would remove all responsibility from the individual, a drastic and unpalatable conclusion to proffer. For how do we punish morally reprehensible actions? In both biological determinism and probability, there is no wrong for which the individual can be logically punished. But this is exactly what one might wish to claim. Once we realize that the way we act and react is based on the set of

wish, rejecting as well the institutions which promote it, and replacing them with institutions that encourage cooperation — or anything else we may desire. If this is the position in which we and society stand, the question before us — and the question the rest of Part One will now address — is whether or not competition is, in fact, socially desirable.

determinant influences which we experience and their interactions with each other, if society wishes to avoid rampant chaos it must start creating more humane and civilized social constructions. That is the only alternative left.

Chapter 2

Social Darwinism

The struggle for life is really the [competitive] struggle for success. What people fear when they engage in the struggle is not that they will fail to get their breakfast next morning, but that they will fail to outshine their neighbors.

BERTRAND RUSSELL¹

The previous chapter discussed the theory that competition is innate to the human species because it appears to be an innate aspect of the rest of the animal and insect populations. But as we have seen, such a statement presupposes that 1) an act that appears aggressive is actually an aggressive act, and 2) we accurately understand the motivations behind these particular acts — both tenuous statements at best. Nor does the concept of innate competitiveness explain why some species compete and others don't in similar circumstances (like the ambiguous expression of territoriality in animals), or why some cultures within our own species compete while others cooperate. In fact, by claiming that humans are innately competitive simply because the majority of humans compete, it should follow that clothing is innately human because practically all cultures have clothes. Behavioral manifestations arising from such an adaptive and malleable creature as humans risks totally erroneous interpretations.

Yet, as we will soon come to learn, insufficient, erroneous, and spurious evidence has not prevented all individuals from using myth to foster and perpetuate social and political advantages for certain groups which possess the power to assign myth "common sense" status. Probably the most dramatic instance of using scientific sleight-of-hand to sustain

¹ Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, 45.

social inequality occurred when social Darwinism dominated the political thinking of the United States in the fifty years that surrounded the turn of the twentieth century.

What is social Darwinism? Where did it come from? And why did it maintain such a influential hold on the American psyche? To begin to answer these questions, I turn to perhaps the definitive, yet very accessible, statement on the subject, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* by Richard Hofstadter. In it he writes:

Social Darwinism ... embodied a vision of life and ... expressed a kind of secular piety that commands our attention. [Supporters] were much concerned to face up to the hardness of life, to the impossibility of finding easy solutions for human ills, to the necessity of labor and self-denial and the inevitability of suffering ... Hard work and saving seemed to be called for, while leisure and waste were doubly suspect. The economic ethic engendered by these circumstances put a premium on those qualities that seemed necessary for the disciplining of a labor force and a force of small investors. [Social Darwinism] expressed an inherent conception of economic life ... *under which economic activity was considered to be above all a field for the development and encouragement of personal character*. Economic life was construed as a set of arrangements that offered inducements to men of good character, while it punished those who were ... "negligent, shiftless, inefficient, silly, and imprudent."²

Social Darwinism defined "fittest" not only as a person who was economically successful, but also as someone possessing a Protestant ethic or "piety" who exuded the most appropriate personal character for economic success, e.g., one ought not to be both wealthy and wasteful.³ The ideology preached that though a person may not have succeeded yet, there was the intimated possibility that success awaited those who at least maintained the proper personal characteristics. This created a built-in reinforcement system in which the vast majority of individuals who did not succeed economically would still buy into the capitalist belief system. This new twist to a relatively old economic theory (having been expressed in one form or another even before Adam Smith), was further enhanced by its application to all other aspects of society — education, politics, interpersonal relations ... and eventually sports, where a clear correlation seems to exist. When conservative con-

² Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 10-11 (My emphasis). Hofstadter quotes William Graham Sumner, the leading exponent of social Darwinism at the turn of this century.

³ "It assumed that the industrious, temperate, and frugal man of the Protestant ideal was the equivalent of the "strong" or the "fittest" in the struggle for existence" [Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 51].

ceptions of human nature dominated the ideological landscape, sports flourished; and when the progressive agenda dominated, sports suffered under vigorous attack.⁴

The belief in the character developing role of sport descends directly from this social Darwinian ideology. It wasn't so much that sport would build specific characteristics in the individual like perseverance, dedication, combatting adversity through stoic performance, team spirit and teamwork, and hard work, though that certainly was the implied message. Rather, sport *forces* these characteristics to the fore and upon the individual. This is not because sport inherently contains these elements, but rather in order to succeed in sport, to be the fittest — literally to exist in the eyes of your peers — one must take on the requisite accouterments and play the appropriate role as expected via the social conventions of sport.

These characteristics arise from social roles supposedly necessary in fostering individual self-esteem. But as Barrington Moore argued, self-esteem can be created just as easily through acts of self-repression. It becomes crucial (and possible, according to Moore) to inhibit the development of "dangerous forms" of self-esteem and replace them with something more amenable to the dominant elites. Perpetual renewal of the correct social hierarchy is to be attained by redirecting the desire for beneficial self-esteem into "more productive sentiments which sustain the dominant order."⁵ Pride in doing menial work, for instance, would fill a useful role in the social Darwinian ideology.

On the other hand, "dangerous forms" to the dominant order include cooperative enterprises (the only effective way of addressing the social causes of suffering, according to Moore) because they function more effectively without the supposedly vital role of the

⁴ The heyday of social Darwinism in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century saw a tremendous beginning for professional and college sports. The progressive agenda swept the country in the 1890s and early 1900s, and sport was under fire for being too violent. The economic boom years of the 1920s experienced the Golden age of sports. The Depression and New Deal years witnessed again a marked decline in sports that continued through the war years. The 1950s tremendous economic growth again paralleled a phenomenal rise in sports. The liberal 1960s and early 1970s fermented a third receding of sports. Lastly, we are currently in another upsurge in sports, once again mimicking a conservative social atmosphere.

⁵ Moore, *Injustice*, p. 78. Moore proffers etiquette as a mild example of such a method of socially approved self-repression; for etiquette teaches people "to know their place."

elites — a role ostensibly required to maintain social cohesion and order, but in reality is necessary to consolidate political power. In cooperative enterprises people join together to actually alleviate human suffering instead of waiting for the dominant ideologues to get around to it, usually only when their hegemony is in jeopardy. Moore dismisses individual solutions because they only help a few, and thus don't change incumbent social situations. Moreover, it is the idea of individuation which fuels several types of cultural pressures which inhibit collective action:

- Solidarity among oppressed groups forms *against protesters* because support of protesters risks retaliation from oppressors. Thus, a group's perceived self-defense actually serves to exacerbate submission;

- Destruction of prior social ties leads to the *atomization* of individuals — individuals without social support. This stifles change because social support is necessary for criticism or resistance to oppressors. As mentioned above, collective action is the only effective method for social change;

- *Fragmentation*, which implies the intensification of social bonds, occurs when a social group consisting of individuals in like situations of oppression is split into competing groups, each with their own social codes geared to perpetuate separation but not usurpation. Often, groups end up with inherited sets of social conditions, constructions, and codes preventing individuals of similar suffering from associating — essentially, the atomization of groups.

Even teamwork, often used interchangeably with notions of cooperative action, when associated with a competitive environment benefits at most only those individuals who quickly conform to, and are the most obedient to, the demands of the coach or other task-masters. Many people placed in group settings, however, find it very natural to cooperate to solve problems if given the opportunity not to have to compete. Alfie Kohn explains that "people will typically be more enthusiastic where they feel a sense of belonging and see

themselves as part of a community,"⁶ rather than having their cooperation fabricated into existence through incentives, bonuses, or managerially-designed teams. Individuals do not need the spur of competition to build team spirit; they just need a challenging project where they can find reward simply in solving a problem together.⁷

When people are thrust into competitive teams in the working world, intrinsic desire to cooperate is quickly lost. Finding themselves coerced into cooperation, the incentive is now to not lose one's job on the team, or to not be noticed when blundering. Fear soon stifles risk-taking. Competitive sports work similarly, as when an individual athlete fears losing their position on the starting line-up more than losing to the other team. After all, when losing to another team, the group loses face, the individual remains anonymous in the group, and loss is blamed on a ready scapegoat. Losing a place on the team, on the other hand, affects the individual directly, in turn diminishing self-esteem among peers and in the community. As a recent study has demonstrated, many people with high self-esteem will do whatever is necessary to counter ego threats — even resort to violence — to prevent losing self esteem; the higher the self-esteem, the more one fights to keep it.⁸ This condition worsens the more self-esteem is viewed as a scarce resource. In this case, the demand for self-esteem is key to the encompassing power of capitalist and competitive ideology.

In our society, the quest for possessions equates with the quest for self-esteem, or so the competitive cultural apparatus would have us believe. And, at least for the majority of citizens, they do believe. According to Moore they have been "co-opted" — the continued

⁶ Kohn, *Punished by Rewards*, 188.

⁷ Of course, just putting people together without being adequately trained in the ability to freely work together is not the answer either. "Considerable effort and organizational commitment are required to make that happen" [*Punished by Rewards*, 188]. Instead, managers take the easy way out, like teachers and parents also do, and bribe the participants into joint effort, which, of course, places the motivation on the bribe rather than the joint effort.

⁸ Roy F. Baumeister, et al, in the essay "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem," discusses the effects of unstable high self-esteem.

acceptance of "social codes held by those in control." Co-opting through social learning establishes formulae that create belief systems in which collective action is discouraged, for example, the ethos of individualism. Co-opting is probably the most important cultural pressure to disable collective action and is accomplished through a variety of what Moore terms "social coping formulae."⁹ These "formulae" refer to items such as cultural definitions, social lore, and social practices — anything which defines and delineates the following three conditions for successful self-repression to occur: 1) socially acceptable and unacceptable needs; 2) meaning and causes of human suffering; and 3) what, if anything, an individual can or should do about it. Certain formulae, if crafted properly and carefully around these three conditions, can turn aggression instigated by suffering against one's self.¹⁰

Cultural definitions of social reality, then, limit responses to reality (if it is not *the* reality itself). The agenda has already been set. If the social coping formulae are effective, the individual will not be able to object to the social realities of his existence. Self-esteem will then be achieved by doing well those items of behavior prescribed within the formulae — formulae which can easily put in place parameters for a self-repressive social structure. All told, we get the picture that pain and suffering not only come with moral authority but can even be morally desirable if, based on social formulae, submission enhances self-esteem. In the end, self-esteem comes from doing that which is socially desirable; yet that which is socially desirable is determined by and benefits those in positions of social power.¹¹ As long as submission continually generates power for the social elites, what fosters self-esteem may not be in any way beneficial to the individuals themselves (or

⁹ These "formulae" must exist because society would be impossible to sustain if coping strategies had to be re-formed after each crisis. Social continuity would be lost, and we would be left with a "quantum culture," reinvented practically every moment.

¹⁰ Moore reminds the reader of the Hindu caste system grounded on the idea of Karma, in which we have a cosmologically defined mode of behavior.

¹¹ Dan Lyons in his essay "Action, Excellence, and Achievement," says much the same thing.

society as a whole), though they may be convinced to the contrary. This obsession with self-esteem may lead to downright harmful pursuits.¹²

People throughout the millennia have invented innumerable ways to justify their elite positions within the population. They manufactured repressive (though supposedly emotionally fulfilling) cultural conditions to secure and perpetuate superior social standings for themselves and their off-spring, and foisted their rationales on underlings and the lower classes as factual statements of reality. In America it began with the Calvinist/Puritan spin on the doctrine of predestination. This variation states that the rewards and riches one may have garnered, though not a definite sign of salvation, is indicative that God is blessing his chosen people and, thus, religiously justifying economic gain and social inequality.¹³ However, with the rise in Enlightenment humanism, there was a need to justify elitism with a different, more naturalistic and humanistic version; for as Will Durant aphoristically stated, "As long as there is poverty there will be gods"¹⁴ — whether they be theological or corporate.

Social Darwinism works exactly in this capacity. Survival of the fittest requires, and receives, tacit approval from those under the spell of the "formulae," submitting to the understanding that only a few individuals will succeed. However, as the social myth continues to tap Calvinist tenets, no one supposedly knows who these few will be. Work hard, and the rewards await — if not to you, then to your family; and the population accepts this.¹⁵ So the average persons persist in their never-ending struggle within an agenda constantly reproduced by their own passive acceptance. It is amazing, paraphrasing

¹² Just think of athletes who often perform in agony, risking serious injury, permanent disability, and perhaps death, for the self-esteem garnered from parents, peers, and coaches by "playing through the pain." We must seriously question any practice in which self-esteem is gained at the expense of an individual's health. Might we not lump sports with smoking, drinking, and drug use on this level?

¹³ In *Inequality* Barrington Moore explains how and why religious justifications of inequality are still with us today in various caste systems existing around the world.

¹⁴ Durant, *The Lessons of History*, 51. Durant quotes his own work *The Mansions of Philosophy*.

¹⁵ As the saying goes: People would rather live with the hope of becoming rich, than with the reality of forever being poor.

Michael Ghiselin's ironic view of social Darwinism, how "nature [human nature, as well?] runs according to the precepts of laissez-faire capitalism."¹⁶

As I intuited earlier, the dominant elite's agendas are sometimes based on faulty (though wonderfully agreeable) scientific theory. In the case of social Darwinism, the dependence on Lamark's notion of the transmission of acquired characteristics as the method of species evolution (1809) was one of the major flaws of social Darwinism: the misrepresentation of luck *as* dessert. The idea that people who were born rich deserved it because of acquired characteristics of wealth and learning quickly collapsed when Lamark's theories collapsed. Once that happened, some critics suggested that, in keeping with the essence of true Darwinism, one ought to place wealthy children in the same schools and homes as all other children. Only in this way will the "fittest" ever be properly determined. Of course, this proposal was ignored, which condemned the arch-conservative perspective of Darwinistic dessert to inconsistency and eventual obscurity.¹⁷

To extend the argument of social Darwinism a step further, an insidious undercurrent percolates beneath its surface. For as with most interpretations of biological forces of nature, the not-so-tacit subtext is the inevitability of social Darwinism. To deny this foolishly resists the forces of Nature. "The competitive order was now supplied with a cosmic rationale. Competition was glorious ... It is a law of nature which 'can no more be done away with than gravitation,' and which men ignore only to their own sorrow."¹⁸ In the end, Calvinistic determinism runs throughout the theory, especially when interpreted by

¹⁶ Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*, 24.

¹⁷ Though not dead. It will always be with us in sports. We often speak of dessert when it comes to athletes who receive exorbitant salaries due mostly on the luck of being born with "natural" talents, and having an environment where those talents can be maximized, usually at the expense of other abilities. Recent studies have shown that nearly half of the players in the NBA never graduated from college. In the 1980s, the UNLV men's basketball team had a senior graduation rate which reached a low of zero percent!

¹⁸ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 57. Hofstadter quotes from William Graham Sumner's *The Challenge of Facts*.

certain American scholars's misreadings of Herbert Spencer, the leading proponent of social Darwinism in the English speaking world.

Spencer argued, with the help of the flawed Lamarkian theory of acquired characteristics which he championed, that society will perpetually grow and improve as the acquired knowledge and intelligence of the population increases. As those who are too incompetent and too stubborn to learn die out, the quality level of civilization climbs upward, soon ending in an utopian world of supreme civilization and comraderie — a time when perfection is reached and competition is no longer needed.

However, the American social Darwinist William Graham Sumner and his many disciples read into Spencer's dubious optimism a more stoic pessimism, claiming that there can be no end of the evolutionary struggle, and that competition will never cease. Luck now moves beyond mere dessert to ineluctability, fostering a resigned impotence. This rationale justified conservative inaction when it came to progressive plans to alleviate the conditions faced by the poor and indigent. Tinkering with the unavoidable only prolongs the agony of the poor and retards social and economic progress.

Yet, this fear was turned against the social Darwinists; for if the end were inevitable, what is there to fear from the tinkering? In fact, the idea that tinkering can exist at all means that society is not necessarily doomed to the pessimistic predestination ascribed to it. We *can* change the social structure because, as Lester Frank Ward and other progressives indicated, we can construct environments in which we can escape competition derived from both material and spatial shortages — shortages predicted by the grandfather of social Darwinism, Thomas Robert Malthus.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Malthus claimed that the human population, as with other species, will soon outstrip food production and living space. To avoid these consequences, the poor, sick, and indigent must be left to their own devices, hopefully decreasing the "surplus population," to coin a phrase. Ward and fellow progressives

rejected Malthus's arguments; they were extrapolated from animal population studies, populations which had limited abilities to adjust their environment and their behavior to the crisis. Humans, however, can do both and are therefore more able to avoid supposed disaster.

In addition, one of the major excuses for the existence of inequality and the necessity of competition, the notion of material shortages, has two flaws. First, there is no adequate and irrefutable proof that shortages need to exist. Many have argued that the problem lies instead in the free market desire to curb unlimited distribution, creating artificial shortages, thereby raising prices and profits.¹⁹ According to estimates, enough food is produced by the world's farmers to provide at least 4.3 pounds of food per person a day worldwide: 2 pounds of grain, beans and nuts, about a pound of fruits and vegetables, and nearly another pound of meat, milk and eggs — enough to make most people fat; yet over 13 million people die each year due to starvation and more than 800 million people are malnourished because they are poor. Clearly, what exists is not a problem of shortages; it is a problem of distribution.²⁰ Second, if we accept the premise

¹⁹ The fittest in this case, as some critics have been quick to point out, are those who are willing to lie, cheat, steal, and otherwise be moral wretches to fellow human beings. Even current "get rich quick" schemes promote dubious, unethical, and possibly illegal methods of making money. One of the more popular today is Brad Richdale's *Secrets to Making Money NOW*. In it, he describes a method of getting a \$5000 interest-free loan. "By setting up two or more checking accounts, the over-draft credit limit could go as high as \$5,000 each. Every few days the individual would have to write a check from one bank to the other covering the amount of the over-draft. By covering each withdrawal with another deposit, he won't be charged interest since it would take two or three days for the records to catch up. By that time he has made another deposit which covered the amount of the original loan. With the right banks, a person can keep the money interest free for quite a long while." At least until, if you're anything like the gentleman in New York, you're arrested for fraud. And how about the "several publishing companies that wholesale reports that you can sell to college students."

²⁰ Dying from starvation is just part of the problem. According to the The World Game Institute (<http://www.worldgame.org/wwwproject/index.html>), over 17 million people die each year from curable infectious and parasitic diseases; over 9 million children die each year from preventable causes, mostly from dehydration. All told, roughly 40 million people die each year from poverty related causes — which means more people needlessly died in the last three years of relative peace, than in the previous century from war.

To end these horrific statistics, The World Game Institute has developed programs for solving the major human needs and environmental problems facing humanity. The estimated combined total cost of these programs is approximately 30% of the world's total annual military expenditures. The question now is whether governments are willing to spend a little more on saving human lives, and a little less on methods for taking human lives.

that shortages must exist, it does not necessarily follow that we must compete for these materials, nor that some individuals or companies have an unquestioned need to accumulate such vast possessions. There is no *a priori* necessity for economic inequality.

But there were other problems with Malthus's theory, as well as social Darwinism in general. One is the assumption that man has a definite and unalterable set of attributes, whereas true Darwinism holds that man is pliable and that circumstance and mutation determine the enhancement of certain characteristics.²¹ Another is that social Darwinism ignores what actually happens in natural environments. Simon Patten wrote in a lengthy essay published in 1896 titled *The Theory of Social Forces*, "A progressive evolution depends upon the power of moving from one environment to another and thus avoiding the stress of competition."²²

Considering the faulty science which supplied the foundation, social Darwinism's attraction and significance was due more to an elitist worldview rather than to facts. Thorstein Veblen, in his classic work *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), saw society as perpetually changing and no possible follower of some final law or solution;²³ however, very little of what Veblen argues was really new. George Savile, the First Marquis of Halifax (by which his is commonly referred), wrote centuries prior to Veblen of the transitional nature of political institutions:

Nothing is more certain than that every human institution will change and the so-called fundamentals of government with them. The divine right of kings, the indefeasible rights of property or persons, and laws which may not be repealed or modified are all attempts to bind the future; they neither can nor ought to be effective. Laws and constitutions, he says, are made not once but a hundred times. In themselves they can do little and in the end they mean just what those who interpret and administer and enforce them intend them to mean.²⁴

We might say as well that social Darwinism was an attempt to "bind the future."

²¹ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 147.

²² Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 149.

²³ Is, therefore, a totally cooperative society possible? If it is assumed that any introduction of competition within such a society will destroy it, is it possible considering the fact that society changes? Perhaps, if we assume that cooperation is the organizing structure of society in which social forces interact and adjust. They constantly are in flux trying to reach homeostasis.

²⁴ Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 480.

Also, the Eighteenth Century political theorist Helvetius warned his age that individuals are not immune to institutional practice. People are much more perceptive and much more impressionable than is often thought of them. "It is idle to tell men to honor virtue and leave them under institutions that put a premium on vice."²⁵

But Veblen goes the necessary step beyond what was already known with an unique twist which made him one of America's premier social scientists. He postulated that at the dawn of the twentieth century, any application of any law of social order must have originated from a pre-Darwinian social perspective. In fact, economists and social theorists, according to Veblen, had tried to use Darwinism to justify a preconceived conception of social structure — that of an ideal competitive and "frictionless" economy, which formerly began with Adam Smith. Conveniently, this conservative social structure defended the position of those who were most advantaged by the theory. The wealthy saw their place in society as ordained, and those who were poor deserved their indigence. Inaction was justified, social progressiveness was meaningless, and the money necessary for reform remained untapped. As Leslie Dunbar quipped, "All modern democracies tend towards conservatism; more people have status to protect."²⁶

Furthermore, if Veblen's withering attack on conservative orthodoxy wasn't enough to nail the coffin shut on social Darwinism, Hofstadter points out one additional flaw. Social Darwinism contained within its argumentation an inherent illogic of circularity, "in which power and strength are defined in terms of survival, and survival is in turn explained by strength and power [198]." With all this in mind, perhaps we ought to pay better heed to the comments of Ralph Gabriel, one of the leaders of Roosevelt's New Deal, who said:

²⁵ Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 519. Helvetius also mimics Stephen Jay Gould's notion of competition when Helvetius wrote that "men, though concerned about themselves and indifferent to others, are born neither good nor bad but are capable of being the one or the other according as a common interest unites or divides them" [519]. Attempts to justify inequality are almost invariably theories which utilize arguments based on common interest or universality.

²⁶ Dunbar, *Reclaiming Liberalism*, 66.

The religious keynote, the economic keynote, the scientific keynote of the new age must be the overwhelming realization that mankind has such mental and spiritual powers and such control over nature that the doctrine of the struggle for existence is definitely outmoded and replaced by the higher law of coöperation.²⁷

* * *

THE ISLAND OF W

When we combine Moore's conception of social formulae with the remnants of social Darwinism, we add a great deal more to the notion of social survival — the belief in "victory at any price" — because now, there is a sense in which this price is not only necessary, but acceptable and required. To explore this merging of worldviews, I turn to a contemporary writer who addressed and displayed the very possibility of a totally competitive world. The late French author George Perec, in his own poetic way, saw quite perceptively that all competition, exemplified especially in sports, enthusiastically embraces the remnants of nineteenth century social Darwinism within its folds. Perec does this in his semi-autobiographical work *W and the Memoirs of Childhood* by imagining a fictitious island at the southern-most tip of South America founded by a man named Wilson,

a champion (some say a trainer) excited by the idea of the Olympics: but as the difficulties which Pierre de Coubertin had to face at that time depressed him and left him convinced that the Olympic ideal could only be thwarted, sullied and distorted by sordid trade-offs and compromised unacceptably by the very people who claimed to serve it, Wilson decided to do all that was humanly possible to found a new Olympia far removed from nationalistic squabbles and ideological manoeuvres.²⁸

A fanatical believer in the Olympic Code — *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, Wilson (an allusion to the Wilson sporting goods company?) determined that the entire population would structure its existence around competitive sports, and that their lives would be regulated by

²⁷ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 122.

²⁸ Perec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 66. Coubertin believed that patriotism was an important element in the modern Olympics; a Games which tried to squelch these sentiments would be doomed to failure. Unfortunately for Coubertin and the history of the modern Games, patriotism was soon confused with nationalistic and imperialistic fervor, at its peak in the late nineteenth century and never disappeared.

the Olympic code. It is a place where life "is lived for the greater glory of the Body."²⁹ Not only is the community dedicated to the numerous local challenges and various national contests that take place throughout the year — Atlantiads occur monthly, always involving 176 participants; Spartakiads every three months, always involving 1056 participants; and Olympiads scheduled once every year, always involving 264 participants — but their way of life outside the games is equally structured on the principles of the Olympics. And through it all, the law of the land is 'survival of the fittest.' "Yet the struggle itself is nothing, for it is not Sport of Sport's sake, achievement for the sake of achievement, which motivates the men of W, but thirst for victory, victory at any price."³⁰ On the island of W, survival meant winning; only the winners were the fittest.

Athletes on W are brutally trained in hopes of maximizing their performance. Various deprivations and rewards "encourage" them to strive harder. The most common method eliminates all carbohydrates from the diet; victory guarantees a banquet of carbohydrates at the celebration. Their opponents are savagely punished for not working hard enough. Next time, they will try harder — not just to avoid the torment of loss, but for victory's sake.

People's real names are lost as their reputations grow in society, replaced by official names garnered from winning certain events. The reason why is quite logical. "Athletes' identities were soon indistinguishable from the catalogue of their performances ... An athlete is no more and no less than his victories."³¹ Thus, athletes face perhaps the most malicious coercion for competition — the prevention of their own demise. People who have not won anything are nameless and worthless. They shrivel up, becoming thugs and grunts who lackey around champion athletes as body guards or assassins, grovelling for attention, special favors, and assorted gratuities ... like food. These no-names represent

²⁹ Percec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 67.

³⁰ Percec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 89.

³¹ Percec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 98.

the failures of the Olympic dream — failures which, since they have no names, do not really exist. They obviously didn't work hard enough. They are not fit to survive. Without names, they slowly die.

On the island of W, there is organized, strictly implemented, institutionalized inequity in all sports. For example, the races are not always to the swiftest. Victories are sometimes awarded to the last person who crosses the finish line. The whims of the Games Administrators determine the way the race will be run on any particular day:

If the dominant impression made by the sight of a race is one of total injustice, that is because the Officials are not opposed to injustice. On the contrary, they believe it to be the most effective stimulus, that an Athlete who is sickened by arbitrary decisions, by aberrant umpiring, by abuses of power, by the liberties taken and the almost outrageous partiality constantly displayed by the Judges, will be a hundred times more aggressive than an Athlete who is convinced that he deserves to lose ... It is necessary that even the best be uncertain of winning; it is necessary that even the feeblest be uncertain of losing. Both must take an equal risk and must entertain the same insane hope of winning, the same unspeakable terror of losing.³²

In the end, an athlete soon comes to the harsh realization that "it is more important to be lucky than to be deserving,"³³ while the agenda allowing this to persist remains untouched. Society is so thoroughly fragmented by internalized competition that collective action is non-existent and individual action is impotent to alter the inequality. Thus, social frustration redirects itself as aggression towards other competitors and as permissible self-destruction to themselves — the Freudian Thanatos. As Perec writes, "There are two worlds, the world of Masters and the world of slaves. The Masters are unreachable, and the slaves tear at each other. But an Athlete of W does not even know that."³⁴

We have seen how social Darwinism could not ostensibly survive in light of overwhelming scientific and sociological evidence. But what conclusion does Perec derive from the his perspective of social Darwinism and the totalizing effects of competition? In the last chapter of *W*, Perec cites a passage from psychologist and survivor David Rousset's *L'Univers concentrationnaire* [*The Universe of the Concentration Camp* (Pavois,

³² Perec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 112.

³³ Perec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 118.

³⁴ Perec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 160.

1946)] describing life in the death camps of World War II as being structured on one fundamental policy — the inmates are not engaged in work but in 'sport' for the guards:

Even the least job has to be done at top speed ... One of the games consists of making the prisoners dress and undress several times a day, very fast and beneath the cosh; or again, making them run in and out of the Block whilst two SS stand at the door and hit the Haeflinge on the head with their Gummi truncheons. In the small rectangular yard, anything can be turned to sport: making men turn round very fast, under the whip, for hours on end; organizing a bunny-hop race, with the slowest to be thrown in the pond beneath the Homeric guffaws of the SS: having them repeat endlessly the exercise that consists of squatting on your heels, and then standing again, very fast, with both arms held out horizontally; forcing them to do press-ups fast (always fast, fast, Schnell, los Mensch), in the mud, up and down again a hundred times in a row, and then making them run to drench themselves in water to get clean, and keeping them in wet clothes for twenty-four hours.³⁵

These lowly Nazi guards are written into the sporting administration of W as the petty race officials who are "all-powerful before the athlete:"

And they impose respect for the harsh Laws of Sport with a savagery that is magnified ten times over by terror. For though they are better fed and better clothed, though they sleep better and are more relaxed, their fate nonetheless forever hangs on a Manager's cross glance, on a shadow crossing a referee's brow, on a Judge's mood or prank.³⁶

They perform their jobs of enforcement supremely well, perhaps too well and too gleefully, invariably due to the fear they hold of their superiors' witnessing any lack of enthusiasm on their part. In the end, they cannot be accused of not following orders.

So the whole construction of the island of W can be viewed as a parable on the Nazi concentration camps — camps much like the one in which his mother died. But it is also much more than that. By definition, all sports require spectators;³⁷ both on the island and in the camps, the spectators are not just the officials or Administrators or the SS. Perec has something else in mind, something much more bitter and disturbing. In this excerpt from W depicting the life of athletes, not only read but listen to the passion and the obsessive thirst for tyranny:

Run. Run on cinders, run through the marshes, run in the mud. Run, jump, put the shot. Crawl. Bend your knees, up again. Up again, bend your knees. Do it very fast now, get the speed up. Run in a circle, lie down flat, crawl, get up, start running. Stand still, to attention, for

³⁵ Perec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 163-4.

³⁶ Perec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 155.

³⁷ Bernard Suits's essay, "The Elements of Sport," proposes that one of the main distinguishing characteristics between a simple competitive game and a sport is "a wide following."

hours, for days, for days and nights. Flat on your stomach! On your feet! Get dressed! Get undressed! Get dressed! Get undressed! Run! Jump! Crawl! On your knees!³⁸

The spectators Percec refers to include all those individuals watching the spectacle from the stands, listening to it on the radio, and hearing from their friends all the agony and lunacy that the athlete/prisoners experienced — and yet did nothing to stop the slaughter. Some of the spectators actually participated; perhaps they all participated by not ending the carnage. Apparently they didn't think highly enough of the humiliation and the misery of the Athletes — athletes who might as well be Jews — to warrant any action. As Alfie Kohn suggests, people frustrated with the inability to help others may encourage complete inaction:

This creates a tension between desire and behavior that must be reconciled. If a human being is suffering, I want to intervene; since I am not intervening (or since my intervention is ineffective), I decide that this must not be a suffering human being after all ... It is because our inclination to help has been frustrated that some of us respond, in self-defense, by denying the reality before us ... This vicious cycle often rolls past mere inaction and towards acts of outright violence. The farther one moves in the direction of stripping an individual or group of humanity, the more likely that one will dehumanize.³⁹

Kohn explains how research involving social workers perpetually exposed to suffering individuals, as well as research concerning the brutality of the Nazi experience, dramatically demonstrate the validity of such a position — that helplessness leads to self-centeredness and passivity, with the result being "the absence of connection to victims [being both] the cause and effect of dehumanization."⁴⁰

Percec continues his excoriation:

Submerged in a world unchecked, with no knowledge of the Laws that crush him, a torturer or a victim of his co-villagers, under the scornful and sarcastic eyes of the Judges, the W Athlete does not know where his real enemies are, does not know that he could beat them or that such a win would be the only true Victory he could score, the only one which would liberate him. But his own life and death seem to him ineluctable, inscribed once and for all in an inescapable fate.

No one came to the aid of the helpless victims made dizzy with the impossibility of understanding why they were victims. With no rhyme or reason to guide them, they were

³⁸ Percec, *W and the Memoirs of Childhood*, 160.

³⁹ Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*, 139.

⁴⁰ Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*, 139.

doomed to plead forgiveness for crimes they never committed. Helplessly dazed, unable to conceive of the possibility of saving themselves, they and their spirits were crushed and molded into a meek acceptance of the new order of things — of the methodical caprice of the Rules.

Orwell wrote of the same effect in his 1949 classic, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The power of the state, in the form of having his face chewed out by rats, forces Winston to betray the only true love he ever had. By betraying Julia, he emptied himself of the last vestiges of his own mind, leaving the way clear for the party to complete its 're-education' which allows Winston to finally and completely love Big Brother. Sports (not only on W, but anywhere) saps the mind almost as effectively, so much so that we betray our own instincts. The incessant nature of sport and its innate competitive edict makes victory the only justification for our own and its existence, not because victory expresses excellence, but because it puts an end to the grueling and inhuman conflict endured. Perce writes:

Victory is so rare and so often a mockery! The life of an Athlete of W is but a single, endless, furious striving, a pointless, debilitating pursuit of that unreal instant when triumph can bring rest. How many hundreds, how many thousands of hours of crushing effort for one second's serenity, one second of calm? How many weeks, how many months of exhaustion for one hour's relaxation?

If suffering is the norm, then there is no amount of misery one will not live through to achieve even a brief taste of what life could be. There is incredible incentive to reconstruct life in such a way as to reverse the situations; yet feeling the futility, there are no conceivable thoughts of creating anything better and the world will always be diseased, crawling with maggots living off the dead. The vocabulary has been written, the agenda has been set. Most of the contemporary US population is convinced that competition is and will always be the normal way of the world, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary — evidence that rarely visits the front pages or other media accessible to the mass mind.

So one more time, the parable grows. In order to ignore our own needs and feelings (and perhaps instincts), in order to live by rules written and enforced by nameless entities

of the past and present that are rarely fair or consistent, we quickly dehumanize our own existence to mitigate the frustrations which abound in contemporary society. In the vast arena of competition for instance, winning becomes the only avenue to any sort of rest, and we endlessly struggle for the peace of which we dream. Individuals often think only of themselves (having learned to do so), and will gladly betray their closest friends for just a glimpse of tranquility. This condition exists because individuals are unable or unwilling to break out of the ideology which encloses them in a vocabulary of aggression and self-interest — the ideology of competition.

It might be objected that the analogy being made is based on an extreme situation — the horrors of Nazism. But the infamous experiment by Stanley Milgram in the early 1960s demonstrated that ordinary people in middle class Connecticut have the same characteristic tendencies to obey authority figures, even to inflicting pain and suffering on strangers if certain situations and people in authority demand it. The experiment, in a nutshell, was to determine at what point an individual would stop giving a stranger increasingly painful electric shocks when under the supervision of a respectable-looking scientific authority. Even the agonized pleas of the stranger (all staged) and the possibility of a heart attack failed to deter a substantial majority from ending the experiment before reaching the maximum voltage. Although critics argue that some obedience is necessary for the proper functioning of society, and people cannot spend their time constantly dealing with the moral ramifications of all social conventions, Milgram was unimpressed. He felt that people ought to be, or at least feel, some responsibility for their actions. "I have no doubt," he insisted, "that to disobey is the proper thing to do in this [the laboratory] situation. It is the only reasonable value judgement to make."⁴¹ The results Milgram found were shocking in its possible ramifications to society at large:

⁴¹ Meyer, "If Hitler Asked You to Electrocute a Stranger, Would You? Probably?" 139.

The results, as seen and felt in the laboratory ... are disturbing. They raise the possibility that human nature, or more specifically the kind of character produced in American democratic society, cannot be counted on to insulate its citizens from brutality and inhuman treatment at the direction of malevolent authority. A substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority. If, in this study, an anonymous experimenter can successfully command adults to subdue a fifty-year-old man and force on him painful electric shocks against his protest, one can only wonder what government, with its vastly greater authority and prestige can command of its subjects.⁴²

Milgram speculated that people may not know how to disengage themselves from situations they may believe are morally objectionable, because they were likely never taught how to do so.

What we do learn quite rapidly, however, is that we are all at the whims and caprices of other people while, at the same time, are the puppeteers of still others; we are both the product and producers of our society. So, on one hand, we have no responsibility but to do as we are told; yet on the other hand, we have an unrelinquishable responsibility to those whom we do control. It is a shame that more often than not we succumb to the ease of teaching that which was taught to us by others, and of not seeing the falsehoods in ideologies that self-reflective educating may reveal. For if we were to do that and take our responsibility towards others seriously, we would know what to prevent. But in any case, as any good existentialist might remind us, knowing what we know now we have no excuse for the future we create. We are condemned to be responsible for whatever befalls. Only when we begin to examine more closely our teachers, which could mean our leaders, our ideologies, our beliefs, etc., will we ever come to the conclusion that maybe, just maybe, we are being molding into people we don't wish to be. Otherwise, we will forget

⁴² Meyer, "If Hitler Asked You to Electrocute a Stranger, Would You? Probably?" 138. In one of the test variations, the victim was seated in the same room as the subject, and the victim's hand was not strapped down. The script was re-written "so that at 150 volts the [victim] took his hand off the shock plate and declared that he wanted out of the experiment. [Milgram] re-wrote the script more so that the experimenter then told the [subject] to grasp the [victim's] hand and physically force it down on the plate to give ... the unwanted electric shock." Even with such close contact to the suffering victim, thirty percent obeyed the experimenter to the very end.

what Bertrand Russell warned: "By diet and training, people can be made ferocious or meek, masterful or slavish, as may suit the educator."⁴³

⁴³ Russell, "An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish," *Unpopular Essays*, 93.

Chapter 3

The Economics of Competition

If competition is contrasted with energetic cooperation in unselfish work for the public good, then even the best forms of competition are relatively evil; while its harsher and meaner forms are hateful.

ALFRED MARSHALL¹

In Chapter 2, I attempted to show that a foundation to the ideology of competition can be based, at least partially, on the theory that competition is primarily a method useful in sustaining and strengthening the hegemony of dominant elites. This can be achieved using at least two arguments. The first alludes to the inevitability of competition, and the notion that those individuals who compete better were meant to *be* better individuals. The second argument claims that dominant elites create social conditions which foster the above myths of inevitability. They manufacture the illusion that competition promotes the self-esteem of those who compete, and also configure self-esteem as a scarce resource, thus making the pursuit of *that* a competition as well. All this goes on in spite of the possibility that competition might be a self-repressing activity.

As social Darwinism faded into memory,² however, the viewpoint that an unfettered capitalist market system was the ultimate solution to progress (despite what Marx, Lenin,

¹ Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (London: MacMillan and Co.), 1930. Quoted by Jorge, *Competition, Cooperation, Efficiency, and Social Organization*, 70.

² However, it did not fade in practice. Social Darwinism, as well as the Hegelian philosophical foundations which allowed it to flourish, were a vital component in the designing of schools at the turn of the century. William T. Harris was the U. S. Commissioner of Education (1889-1906) and also a devout Hegelian. His influence, as well as his leadership in the National Education councils, helped standardize American education. "Using a Hegelian structure which framed his perceptions of the world, Harris built into that structure a conservative content which justified nationalism, industrial capitalism, social stratification, imperialism, and Christianity. [Karier, *The Individual, Society, and Education*, 99]. Clearly Harris was an innovator, but one which pursued and instituted conservative rather than progressive goals in education.

Keynes, and scores of others have written to the contrary) was as strong as ever. Since social inequality could no longer be rationally justified through some sort of deterministic and natural evolution, justification would have to originate elsewhere. That elsewhere lay in both the prosperity of capitalism — a prosperity which raised peoples' standard of living many fold and which alleviated a certain amount of pain and suffering — and the apparently ubiquitous natural human tendencies towards laziness and greed. Humans constantly yearn for more of the necessities and vices in life (more food, more warmth, more sex, more drinks), yet they are unwilling to work for them. The Land of Cockayne lived in the hearts and minds of men throughout the ages; it is not something unique to capitalism or Darwin.

Scholars have insisted that because individuals are flawed by their human nature, capitalism is necessary to get people to work to perpetuate industrial and social progress.³ Can it not be stated, after all, that competition is more efficient and effective in producing the necessary comforts of society than any other system? Would we ever have had all the wealth and high living standards without economic competition? Was it not competition which took us from a static agrarian-based economy to an industrial powerhouse in the span of only fifteen decades?⁴

The representative author I will be discussing in this chapter is Antonio Jorge, who wrote a small, yet insightful analysis of the possibility of a completely competitive economic world, *Competition, Cooperation, Efficiency, and Social Organization: Introduction to a Political Economy* (1978). In the book, he argues that a cooperative

³ What are rarely discussed are both the possibility of redesigning work so that employees would have more autonomy and control over the work environment (people often find enjoyment in the toughest mental and physical labors, like gardening), and any defined notion of progress itself, such as: To what and where are we progressing? What are the aims of progress? Is progress a means or an end in itself?

⁴ It takes little ingenuity to move to the next logical assumption that if competition can do this much for the economy, think of what it could do if competition were allowed to permeate every other aspect of our society, something the social Darwinists promoted; for even though social Darwinism has been thoroughly discredited, to make such grand claims about economic competition without moving the theory out of economics into other spheres of human endeavors seems to conceive of the human mind as able to compartmentalize separate views of the world into distinct unrelated spheres.

economy is inherently impossible, whereas a completely competitive economy is eminently practical and desirable. What makes his work relevant to my study is his juxtaposed examination of the ideal versions of cooperative and competitive lifestyles, eventually siding with competition.

To begin, Jorge claims there are two forms of competition, "competition for" and "competition with," which he wishes to equate with the distinction between "economic and non-economic goals." In other words, "competition for" — even though always implying competing *with* someone — distinctly refers to the rewards garnered by individuals. These are the economic and social goals of people, e.g., salary, incentives, rewards, prestige, self-esteem. Jorge agrees that this mentality, if it dominates culture, is counterproductive to a healthy social climate.⁵ The alternative, "competition with," redirects the goal away from the individual to the social, for if "attention is directed at the goal to be reached competitively, the element of personal antagonism is mollified."⁶ In essence, moving beyond what seems to be a restatement of Dunlop's perspective, the benefits of success as well as the goal are shared by all competitors, thereby making the population at large the true beneficiary — the losing opponents being no less benefited than the victors.

But what of cooperation? Although Jorge nods gently towards the possibility of a mix of competition and cooperation in society (much like what exists today),⁷ when he writes that the "cooperative trait is a necessary condition of efficiency,"⁸ he clearly believes that cooperation is valuable only when it allows individuals to work together in the pursuit of competitive ends. Jorge bristles at any suggestion of a cooperative society, claiming that "cooperation in and of itself would, most probably, be insufficient for a healthy socio-

⁵ Jorge even writes: "This is fortunate, insofar as it is not possible to organize and run society as a paradigm of the Olympic games" [CCESO, 27]. It is almost as if Jorge had in mind Perce's novel.

⁶ Jorge, *CCESO*, 22.

⁷ "Competitive and cooperative motivations transcend and transform formal organizational structures ... Human forces emerge ... as the shaping force of history and human life" [CCESO, 15].

⁸ Jorge, *CCESO*, 50.

political and economic order."⁹ Perhaps the primary reason for his aversion is "the great difficulty of arriving at an efficient price system for goods and services in the *necessarily* centralized decision-making milieu that noncompetitive forms of organization would bring about."¹⁰ Cooperation, then, may be useful in tempering the excesses and improving the efficiency of competition, but certainly not as a foundation of economics, much less society. In fact, the main question he poses in his concluding chapter is whether or not a completely *competitive* economic system can be created without the obvious difficulties of a "competition for" (i.e., external rewards) mentality?¹¹

But why is total competition important? According to Jorge, competition not only assures the most efficient economic system available, but by having such an efficient system at our disposal (which in turn will be necessary to motivate each individual to maximize his or her economic gains), it preserves,

the identity of the smaller social units (individuals, family, voluntary association); to allow them to express their preferences and individuality; to permit them to strive for the maximization of their well-being; to help preserve their political freedom; and, last, to allow these organizations to lead a less-than-ideal (perfect and irenic brotherhood) arcadian life, but one closer to the characteristics of average human behavior.¹²

Clearly indebted to Milton Friedman's economic theories (detailed in Friedman's book *Capitalism and Freedom* [1962]), Jorge declares that competition not only guarantees but creates our individualism.¹³ Without competition as a foundation of culture (and Jorge often parallels his discussion with an on-going critique of a pure cooperative or communitarian society), any item of individuality would be meaningless. Jorge goes on to allay fears of imperialism, arguing that cultural disintegration will not result from a

⁹ Jorge, *CCESO*, 36.

¹⁰ Jorge, *CCESO*, 36.

¹¹ "Is it possible to obtain the maximizing results of the purely competitive model with an organizational pattern that would embody the content or substance but not its form?" [*CCESO*, 46].

¹² Jorge, *CCESO*, 36.

¹³ Jorge, *CCESO*, 63.

competitive market world. Rather, a diversity of production will naturally exist based on the diversity of cultures.¹⁴

It is the "spirit" of competition which drives the internal engine of Jorge's market capitalism to its industrious heights; yet it is also a spirit of uncertain origin. Jorge is not sure whether competition results from the institutional conditions and requirements necessary for the development of economic efficiency, or from some human "spirit."¹⁵ This is an important question, for most of the book revolves around the human nature of self-interest, even though Jorge spends little time on its derivation. Though this "spirit" seems to be the foundation of capitalist economies, its origin is seemingly less important than its actual existence:

[We] need not claim more specific scientific knowledge of human nature than that resulting from perceiving or grasping the meaning of human actions as behaviorally observed and as interpreted within the framework of some intermediate-level, theoretical notions about man *qua* individual *qua* social being.¹⁶

It is hard to determine whether or not Jorge understands the masking power of culture and society over human instinct, thus avoiding the sociobiological mantra that actions in society are manifestations of innate propensities. As said previously, of all creatures humans have the most malleable behavioral structure. Our behavior is so thoroughly meshed with social and cultural patterns of expected behavior, separating the instinct from the learned is virtually impossible. And even if instinct does play a part in our behaviors, it is certainly within human capacity to shape such innate behaviors to any number of different social expressions. Equally unclear is Jorge's contention that behavioral meanings can be gleaned from astute observation guided by a "theoretical framework." This may mean that Jorge is only concerned with how people usually behave in society

¹⁴ Jorge, *CCESO*, 66-7.

¹⁵ Jorge, *CCESO*, 59.

¹⁶ Jorge, *CCESO*, 27.

(human "social" behavior); yet there is an uncomfortable allusion to a guiding framework which must predetermine and fit in motivations and actions before they occur.

Be that as it may, there are clear indications that Jorge does, at least implicitly if not explicitly, acknowledge competition as part of "human nature" — Jorge's "spirit." As indicated above however, in the pursuit of economic efficiency Jorge asserts that cooperative societies cannot function. If institutions originated first, then innate cooperativeness remains possible, only shunted aside by demands for economic efficiency. If the present conception of economic efficiency came under fire, however, the necessary existence of competitive institutions becomes suspect. It could then be argued that the now equally viable cooperative institutions can be just as defensible as competitive ones — unless the "human nature" of individuals works against it. Such a stance appears obvious when Jorge writes of the "unshackled acquisitive spirit" which manifests into economic aggressiveness,¹⁷ or in the following passage concerning the costs of eliminating the "natural" competitiveness of humans:

The elimination of competition *with* in society would not, by any means, even in the quasi-limited case of the altruistic-disinterested society, eliminate the potentially dangerous motivational nub inspiring competitive behavior, namely; *the self-directed, maximizing syndrome in the individual*. On the contrary, the suppression of that outlet would only channel such forces as the desire for distinction, possessions, or power, along with the aggressive behavior propelling them, into definitely more baneful directions for society and the individual.¹⁸

Of course, this interpretation of human nature is nothing new. Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, asserted that the growth of civilization created neuroses because of civilization's incapacity to permit instinctual tendencies to surface in pure form. Furthermore, the notion of the cathartic experiences in competition and aggression may extend in one form or another back to the Greeks, though it is discredited today.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jorge, *CCESO*, 58.

¹⁸ Jorge, *CCESO*, 26 [my emphasis].

¹⁹ In the modern day utopian novel *Ecotopia*, Ernest Callenbach wrote how the Ecotopian culture tries to channel "innate" human aggressiveness into the ritual war games — but just for men. Women are merely spectators, cheerleaders, and occasionally the "prizes" for the victors. Women channel their aggressiveness into political activism. Jorge, on the other hand, remains unconvinced of the idea of using sports as a social release, arguing that "not everyone has the requisite abilities or inclination" [26].

Unfortunately, Jorge seemingly had no knowledge of contemporary psychological studies which have demonstrated that maximizing is not instinctual. As Michael Slote wrote, "There is no reason to insist or assume that such [self-optimizing] factors are always present when an individual asks for less than that which he can obtain."²⁰ In fact, it may even be irrational to optimize. Economists created the term "satisficing (a meshing of "satisfying" and "sufficing") moderation" — the "non-optimizing rationality ... of individual moderation"²¹ — to counter the psychological hedonism/egoism/self-optimizing philosophy and to describe the human tendency to willingly give up some of one's possessions or food if they have more than they need and to be satisfied with "good enough."²²

Maximizing, or rather the maximizing philosophy, seemingly only occurs in societies which promote material wealth and then restricts its possession to only a select few (artificial shortage), making materialism a mark of excellence and respect. If I understand Jorge when he says that social and individual goals are dependent on market forces,²³ this is certainly to be expected. One might as well say goals *are determined* by market forces, for how can someone achieve a goal if it is not offered by the market. One cannot play with a certain toy or work a certain job unless it is available. More insidiously, by praying on the sociability of people, advertisers warn naïve consumers that if they haven't purchased product X, not only will they find themselves losing social status (status being

²⁰ Slote, "On Seeking Less Than the Best, 69." It is a behavior economic theorists spend a great deal of time trying to debunk, using highly inventive and elaborate systems to turn altruism into hedonism, stretching Occam's Razor to the breaking point.

²¹ Slote, "On Seeking Less Than the Best," 64.

²² This is a tendency certain cultural propaganda intends to suppress. After all, welfare recipients, the most politically disenfranchised group in America, is excoriated for wasting government money. The general population, consequently, is made to feel guilty or shameful about helping the poor — which may explain why public displays of private individuals (not as part of organizations but on their own) aiding the indigent has practically disappeared. All this exists even while companies receive many times more money in "corporate welfare." So, as John Kenneth Galbraith describes in his book *The Culture of Contentment*, a double standard exists: The poor need their poverty to spur them out of dependence, whereas the wealthy need more money to spur growth and investment.

²³ Jorge, *CCESO*, 54.

determined by the display of one's ability to purchase goods and services), they will be isolated from their friends (who people associate with determines status as well). Oddly enough, neither result should be so catastrophic in an individualistic society,²⁴ but such isn't the case. Most people despise being alone and fear being individualistic; they aren't 'appropriate' behaviors, especially in schools or in business — a lesson learned very early in life. Thus exists the paradox of a society claiming individualism as one of its cultural premises, yet also teaching people to dress and work and play and live like everyone else. Even the expressions "competitive benefits" or "competitive pricing" simply mean prices and benefits which are for the most part the same as everyone else's.

Furthermore, one might question the rationality of self-maximization itself, especially when it involves group interactions. In her essay "Norms of Cooperation," Christina Bicchieri writes: "The presence of a social norm [like the self-maximizing philosophy] does not justify inferring that it is there to accomplish some social function ... Many social norms are also inefficient."²⁵ Bicchieri asserts that "cooperation can result when the players [participants] have slight doubts about each other's rationality."²⁶ In other words, if we know that person X will be rational and will always perform the rational act A, then cooperation is moot. On the other hand, if we do not know that X will be rational and perform the rational act A, then cooperation becomes absolutely crucial in establishing rational choices and outcomes. Unless everyone acts rationally then, cooperation ought to be the preferred *qua* rational method of social interaction.

For example, Robert Axelrod and associates determined conclusively, using analyses of Prisoner Dilemma studies, that in all cases straightforward cooperation was more beneficial to both parties by reducing the negative consequences of decisions to the lowest

²⁴ Any Ayn Rand novel is demonstrative of that, where "the sacred word is EGO;" and God, "this one word — 'I'. [Rand, *Anthem*, 123,113]"

²⁵ Bicchieri, "Norms of Cooperation," 838.

²⁶ Bicchieri, "Norms of Cooperation," 847.

possible level.²⁷ However, in an interesting corollary to Axelrod's work, Fred Feldman argues in his essay "On the Advantages of Cooperativeness," that cooperation within the Prisoner's Dilemma scenario loses its advantage if we limit the interactions between the prisoners to only one occasion. In this case, cooperation is no better (and perhaps worse) than straightforward self-maximization. One could conclude, though Feldman does not, that cooperation is more successful in long-term continuous interactions, while competition is more successful in short term interactions (at least for the winner). Again these are all based on the Prisoner's Dilemma format.

Combining these observations, Bicchieri would likely insist that norms of cooperation builds trust, and norms of competition builds distrust. Elaborating on Feldman's implied distinction between long-term and short-term interactions and assuming that not everyone will act rationally all the time, it becomes clear that if society as a whole is to function solely on competition and rationally pursue self-maximization, society must make sure that interpersonal and other interactions are reduced to the minimum number of contacts; multiple contacts, after all, would require cooperation as the rational choice. Furthermore, once self-maximized competition becomes the standard the duration of personal relationships may shrink and slowly disappear. One-night stands and passing acquaintances will then become *de rigueur*. Business partnerships soon become unreliable, while cut-throat competition reigns. Families will collapse; violence will increase. Third World exploitation will run rampant as civil unrest at home and abroad swells. What is shocking is that some may see these events currently playing themselves out.

Jorge's passion for individuality is betrayed by his vehement insistence on maximizing efficiency:

²⁷ Straightforward cooperation is simply making the exact same decision as the partner in the PD scenario. *The Evolution of Cooperation* describes the research protocol and results.

Only the purely competitive model succeeds in defining structural and institutional, including behavioral, conditions and relations such that every individual participant will end up maximizing his gains, subject to the constraint consisting in everybody else's doing the same thing.²⁸

But this maximization of gains can only occur when "every agent can and does act in pursuit of its own welfare."²⁹ If this is the case, not only are individuals free and should act with that freedom to achieve their own ends, but all must "freely" act *the same way* — which, of course, makes cooperation no more difficult to achieve than competition. As stated above, it may even make the situation moot, since everyone needs to act rationally to achieve this competitivist end.

Again, Jorge offers a statement on human behavior and human nature. He clearly implies in this case that individuals — *all* individuals — are naturally self-interested. But nowhere does he provide the proof for such an assumption. Jorge then claims that a pure competitive economy, which is the more feasible of the two (competition or cooperation), will occur when homogeneous environmental conditions are reached — the same conditions Jorge earlier rejected as "unfree" in a cooperative community.

Jorge continues, stressing that an ideal competitive community would require certain conditions for its attainment, including "perfect mobility for the units along a continuum of open alternatives for action at their disposal."³⁰ But this presupposes goals and achievements which need to exist outside the realm of individual maximization for individuals to have at their disposal. This requires an infrastructure of community-based attributes (i.e., parks, playgrounds, libraries), which may or may not be the result of individual maximization but instead *group* maximization. In fact, there are a vast number of community-based structures that need to be in place for the individual to even have the opportunity to maximize one's own best interests. Such a list would especially include legislation to prevent the emergence of monopolistic tendencies and the over-accumulation

²⁸ Jorge, *CCESO*, 37-8.

²⁹ Jorge, *CCESO*, 39.

³⁰ Jorge, *CCESO*, 39.

of wealth, which Jorge admits.³¹ This kind of government intervention necessary for the distribution of corporate handicaps circumvents, if not explicitly restricts and frustrates, the individual's "innate desire" for self-interest, which seems to belie the implicit reliance on an "acquisitive" human nature and the individual's need to pursue his or her own interests. Apparently there is more at stake than simple maximization or self-interest, something more innately fundamental to human nature.

Jorge offers a possible solution to this problem. He states that "the individual is the only substantive maximizing unit recognized in the field of economic analysis."³² Although this may highlight a substantial weakness in current economic analysis rather than a rule, it may also indicate that government is designed to permit the maximization of individual self-interest by preventing industrial collusion. Are not businesses, however, manifestations of individually maximized self-expression? What logically justifies such interference, and at what point during a company's political development will the interference take place? This government intrusion hardly seems problematic, considering the view that unrestrained self-interest is demonstrably unsafe. In the following statement, however, Jorge expresses his skepticism:

It would seem that anthropological and modern historical evidence would tend to confirm that socially enforced pseudo-harmonious institutions that unduly constrain individual expression, or do not allow for it in relatively harmless forms and areas, will force such expression into finding outlets in the most diverse manners and fields, ranging from external aggression at one extreme to savage intra-party politics and an unresponsive and domineering bureaucracy at the other.³³

Jorge seemed to deny the possibility that any institution (including government?) ought to enforce relationships that constrain individual expressions despite his willingness to prevent monopolistic tendencies, over-accumulation of wealth, and other individual expressions of self-interest.

³¹ Jorge, *CCESO*, 41.

³² Jorge, *CCESO*, 37.

³³ Jorge, *CCESO*, 26.

What we seem to have, then, is a political structure which needs to curtail independent individual expressions in order to prevent corporate collusion which may also be the natural culmination of competitive individual self-interests. Even Jorge admits that "the purely competitive case robs competition of its reality."³⁴ At this juncture, it may have been prudent for him to reconsider the cooperative enterprise in light of the inevitable self-destructive outcome of competitive self-interest.

But Jorge, in order to pursue the goal of maximizing *efficiency*, would much rather have a competitive society that is supported by a paradox and less than ideal than a cooperative society which fails at efficiency. Efficiency is the key word in Jorge's political economy. Everything that he proposed has as its sole objective, efficiency. To make economic productivity as efficient as possible, however, it is necessary to construct a political economy which functions on a double standard. For example, an employee's notion of cooperation, according to Jorge, ought to be basically 'do as you're told.'³⁵ As he describes it, the relationship between employer and employee — defined as the "twin principles of authority and participation in cooperation"³⁶ — may coexist but with some restrictions:

(1) Deliberations are circumscribed within managerial ranks and do not extend to workers, (2) management is essentially hierarchically organized and therefore can ultimately adopt and enforce decisions, and (3) participation does not override, as a matter of right, specific technical competences and responsibilities of the firm's officials.³⁷

The only possible inclusionary idea he suggests is that of bringing management and owners/stockholders together. Workers have little, if any, empowerment.

Jorge promotes equal opportunity but also admits that a corporate and political hierarchy must be sustained. This acknowledges that a difference in power needs to persist

³⁴ Jorge, *CCESO*, 62.

³⁵ A "team player" is one that obeys the coach, even to the extent that being fired is best for the team — a team of which the employee is no longer a member.

³⁶ Jorge, *CCESO*, 51.

³⁷ Jorge, *CCESO*, 51.

in society, a difference which greatly restricts certain individuals from the acquisition of self-interested goals and/or enhances others achievement of them. Since there is no end to the list of self-interested goals that could be achieved, those in positions of power are in no hurry to relinquish their position, or help those who may interfere with their acquisitiveness anytime soon. Although Jorge flaccidly comments that freedom is preserved when industrial collusion is prevented (what *kind* of freedom, whether political freedom or free market, is never made clear³⁸), in the end, legitimate socio-political freedom will be perpetually at odds with hierarchical structures of corporations — all for the sake of efficiency.

It becomes apparent that Jorge's interpretation of freedom is different from standard versions. He does believe that "the important thing ... is for man to be able to exercise his freedom and develop his personality,"³⁹ but as we've seen above, this cannot happen at work. It must, therefore, take place during leisure time. One government official wrote years ago, with a tinge of caution, that "the future of democracy depends to a great extent on how we enjoy our leisure time."⁴⁰ Yet as John Wilson deftly describes the Marxist perspective on sport and free-time (the Marxist perspective being a suitable contrast to the capitalist economics espoused by Jorge), leisure time activities are dependent upon the efficiency of the economy and the "logic of the commodity form," because "market forces, beneath their appeal to 'choice' and 'consumer sovereignty,' dictate how and how often sport can be enjoyed."⁴¹ Since industrialists need constant production to sustain capitalist enterprises, the "morality of consumption" is interlaced into the conceptions of work and

³⁸ Maybe impossible. Noam Chomsky glibly explains, "In fact, in acceptable [political] usage, just about any phrase containing the word 'free' is likely to mean something like the opposite of its actual meaning" [*What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, 87].

³⁹ Jorge, *CCESO*, 65.

⁴⁰ Tunis, *Democracy and Sport*, 4.

⁴¹ Wilson, *Playing by the Rules*, 17.

leisure and spending. In addition, to maintain this consumerist mindset in the proletariat, leisure must be constructed as a preparation for work:

While leisure is regarded as the quintessence of "freedom," it finds its best expression when accommodated to work and civic responsibilities. When leisure is neither "free" in this sense (e.g., people slavishly seek mere entertainment) nor equips people for work (e.g., gambling destroys commitment to the work ethic), it becomes a social problem.⁴²

All of this means (as I mentioned above) that the only activities available are ones which are profitable, "where production is associated with compulsion and freedom is found only in consumption."⁴³ Individuals soon become dependent on these activities, and their lives quickly become attached to the *divertissements* which are constructed for them. This socio-political structure makes complete sense under any politically hegemonic social order if one accepts the comments of anthropologist Lionel Tiger when he wrote:

How a community deals with pleasure is an important revelation of its political nature.... Power over pleasure, over what people are able to enjoy, is a central feature of human societies.... Control people's pleasures and you'll control them.⁴⁴

This leads to two possibilities. First, to insure maximized efficiency, encourage consumers to purchase particular products in ever increasing quantities at an ever faster pace, even if they are not necessarily products which offer the greatest opportunity for freedom and expression or social welfare and benefit, nor may they be the products people really want.⁴⁵ They only have to be products that give people pleasure, or products that people have been convinced (through advertising primarily) will give them pleasure. Or second, claim — as James Keating does — that competition is an "intensely pleasurable" activity, "a highly cooperative endeavor to maximize the immediate pleasure or joy to be found in the activity itself."⁴⁶ The more competitive the activity, the more pleasurable it

⁴² Wilson, *Playing by the Rules*, 17.

⁴³ Wilson, *Playing by the Rules*, 17.

⁴⁴ Tiger, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, 12, 240, 17. This principle operates in full force on Perec's Island of W. For example, by stifling sexual release and inflaming sexual drives, the individual's repressed urges are then channeled into other activities — and on the island that activity is sport, which the rulers control.

⁴⁵ Bero Rigauer's book *Sport and Work* (1981) recounts more extensively Marxist interpretation of sport and leisure in society.

⁴⁶ Keating, "The Ethics of Competition and its Relation to Some Moral Problems in Athletics," 14.

becomes. Despite the noticeable lack of logical or psychological justification, convincing people that competitive activities are themselves pleasurable guarantees popular support for an ideology which in turn sustains hegemonic hierarchies.

Jorge states that the "internal and external effects of competition are extremely important in fostering efficiency."⁴⁷ The existing empirical evidence gathered concerning efficiency and competition has not been supportive of Jorge's claims, clearly because coercive "incentives" force individuals to work more efficiently; people rarely perform forced labor enthusiastically, if they work at all. In studies by Margaret Mead and Roderic Gorney (among others),⁴⁸ competition is extremely inefficient and less productive when compared to cooperative enterprises. How can everyone maximize their goals, for instance, in a competitive atmosphere? With everyone competing, there exists a tremendous waste of energies — a massive duplication of effort in secretive corporate R&D, and resources wasted in preventing others from reaching maximal goal attainment, to name just two instances. With everyone working together in a cooperative setting, goal attainment is much more promising and much less inefficient. Jorge agrees in a limited sense when he writes that "the cooperative trait is a necessary condition of efficiency,"⁴⁹ though he refuses to apply that idea over the entire economic structure because of certain flaws in a cooperative society. I will now examine some of those flaws more closely.

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⁴⁷ Jorge, *CCESO*, 56.

⁴⁸ Mead, *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples* (1961); Gorney, "Cultural Determinants of Achievement, Aggression, and Psychological Distress," *Archives of General Psychiatry* (37: 1980), 452-59.

⁴⁹ Jorge, *CCESO*, 50.

THE "FLAWS" OF COOPERATION

Jorge addresses Ashley Montagu's view of innate human nature (from Montagu's book *On Being Human*), and the notion that "human *nature* is good" and that "human *nurture* is bad":

This reflects a partial view of man in society rather than a complex and holistic one based on the weighing and meshing of man's various needs and aspirations and their translation into roles and structures ... Moreover, the anthropological evidence does not seem to indicate the existence of any Golden Age in either nonliterate cultures or rural life in Western Civilization. Mental disorders and psychosomatic illness, as well as warfare and crime, are universal.⁵⁰

One can question whether Ashley Montagu's position is tenable if one recalls the difficulty of examining human nature through the impenetrably thick haze of human nurture; or if one considers Stephen Jay Gould's perspective that humans are naturally adaptable and will be either competitive or cooperative based on environmental factors. In either case, the solution is to create an environment where there is no need to compete to survive. However, Montagu's argument is more compelling when he describes the human infant as being the most vulnerable of all the mammals when born, requiring the most time to wean and the most time to learn about and survive in the environment. For the success of the species this requires a major commitment of human resources into stable families or community structures, and that requires cooperation — a cooperation that must be instinctual.

Jorge, though, didn't appeal to the above arguments for his disagreement. Instead, he points to social factors that evidently indicate a lack of cooperative instinct in humans. However, "mental disorders and psychosomatic illness" may be due more to genetic flaws or to environmental pressures — including but not limited to the following list of causes and substances all linked to violence: male androgen levels, PMS⁵¹ and other hormonal

⁵⁰ Jorge, *CCESO*, 32.

⁵¹ However, in spite of anecdotes to the contrary, several studies using the self-reports of women have shown no correlation between menstruation and mood changes. "The more a woman *believed* menstruation had a negative effect on her moods, the more negatively she described her symptoms in retrospect — even though her actual self-reports showed no such effects" [Kohn, *You Know What They Say ...*, 43 (Author's emphasis)].

imbalances, allergies, hypoglycemia, drugs and alcohol, chronic poisoning (like lead), viral infections (like rabies), trauma to the brain, brain tumors, abnormal EEGs — than any innate lack of cooperation. Nor can one conclude that either mental disorders or psychosomatic illness (both aberrant conditions) indicates a lack of cooperation in the human species on the whole.

Warfare is not even an individual construction but a conflict between states and other political institutions. Crime is also a social development often linked to overcrowding and other social ills, and is hardly universal; if it were, it would not explain the vast proportion of the population that is law-abiding — which, if anything, demonstrates the power of nurture over nature. Neither point really addresses Montagu's contention anyway. Finally, the universal does not necessarily equate to the biological. As mentioned above, tools and clothing are universal, yet few would reasonably contend that they are innate characteristics of mankind.

Jorge's search for a "Golden Age," however, could indeed reflect a problem with Montagu's assessment of cooperation. After all, if humans were basically good, whence did evil arise? To claim that evil originated from social institutions merely begs the question: Why were social institutions evil if innately good humans created them? We've already discussed Gould's possible answer, that humans are not innately good, but adaptable. Another reply could be suggested, that social institutions, once realized, create unforeseen influences on the population which alter the individuals, society, and culture. Social institutions are perhaps as much, if not more, to blame for the ills of humanity.⁵²

On the other hand, the missing "Golden Age" could also involve more a researcher's social biases than a lack of evidence. Jorge's "Golden Age" might just as easily be defined as being economically efficient as well as cooperative; by not uncovering a society which

⁵² For example, bureaucracies and committees function in ways to prevent the origins of a particular policy from being discovered, securing policy stability and stifling change by anyone other than the overseeing elite.

was both cooperative and efficient, the "Golden Age" never existed. Of course, one of Jorge's major criticisms of cooperative enterprises is just that — they are not efficient, instantly dooming any search for a "Golden Age." Not only are they not efficient, any pursuit of efficiency in a cooperative environment will result in a collectivist totalitarianism:

The reality is that — even in the extreme theoretical case of an altruistic-disinterested utopia, where people would be actively predisposed not only toward cooperation, but even toward love and sacrifice — the fundamental problem raised by Frederick Hayek for nonindividualistically organized economies, that of the impossibility of concentrating in centralizing bodies the amount and kinds of knowledge necessary to make the right economic decision at every instant for every possible situation, would remain with us.⁵³

Jorge writes later on that cooperation "gradually glides into the various shades of collectivist and communist anarchism ... In practice, these ideas of course lead straightforwardly to political violence."⁵⁴ Thus stated, Jorge offers no additional comment as if it were too obvious to argue the point.

Such a political situation need not have to be the case, however. It should seem logically apparent that societies engaged in cooperative ventures could readily come to a consensus to allow certain selected and well-designed sub-groups to make collective decisions for the community. And, naturally, these decisions will not just be in the interests of the business or the decision makers, but in the interest of the employees and the consumer of the product. If there is a dilemma, any group in the process will not hesitate to ask for assistance or seek and acquire additional information from any other group.⁵⁵

Jorge continues:

Notice that this is inevitable insofar as the absence of competition *with* forces economic functions into one large cooperative whole or unit for each type or kind of function. That is, to the extent that people are unwilling to compete *with* one another, they must then discharge the function in question in a purely cooperative fashion. It follows that a very high degree of control and planning will eventuate from such a situation.⁵⁶

⁵³ Jorge, *CCESO*, 24.

⁵⁴ Jorge, *CCESO*, 32-3.

⁵⁵ Something rarely done in competitive market places, so as not to let on that managers may be unsure of what to do. The last thing managers wish to appear is unable to solve all corporate problems. If a problem can't be solved, it must not be *their* fault.

⁵⁶ Jorge, *CCESO*, 24-5.

If economic efficiency is the goal of a cooperative society, then collectivization may be the end result (an unfortunate by-product of Marxist economic thinking). But the word "must" is indicative of Jorge's bias to the supposed human nature of competition — that humans 'must' be forced to behave cooperatively, since it is intuitively unnatural. Jorge brings back this idea later in a different way:

In reality, the difficulty raised by different forms of cooperation is of another nature, namely, that posed by the likelihood of some relationship existing between efficiency and the *direct* participation of owners (stockholders), in various conceivable forms, in the actual production and managerial functions of a cooperative venture ... It would seem on the face of it that the greater the direct and immediate or detailed participative and decision-making power of those other than the purely functional and organizational managerial cadres in charge of the technical and operational direction of the firm, the greater the overall inefficiency of the process.⁵⁷

However, in the end, the idea of economic efficiency is perhaps not the primary goal, or may even be foreign to a cooperative utopian condition. Economic resources will not be competed for, so there is no need for internal prodding for efficiency's sake, nor will the consumer have any desire to maximize consumption. In addition, the social relationships and friendliness that will abound in a cooperative society may more than make up for any loss in consumerism. In the book *The Affluent Society* (1958), John Kenneth Galbraith succinctly remarks on the role of inefficiency in society:

If the modern corporation must manufacture not only goods but the desire for the goods it manufactures, the efficiency of the first part of this activity ceases to be decisive. One could indeed argue that human happiness would be as effectively advanced by inefficiency in want creation as efficiency in production. Under these circumstances, the relation of the modern corporation to the people who comprise it — their chance for dignity, individuality, and full development of personality — may be at least as important as its efficiency. These may be worth having even at higher cost of production. Evidently the unions, in seeking to make life tolerable on the job, were being governed by a sound instinct. Why should life be intolerable to make things of small urgency?⁵⁸

It has also been suggested elsewhere that rampant consumerism is necessary to make up for a paucity of social interaction.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Jorge, *CCESO*, 50-1.

⁵⁸ Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 288. These things are of "small urgency" because without being convinced of their need, consumers would have no interest in them.

⁵⁹ Marcuse, *The One-Dimensional Man* (1964).

Much of Jorge's arguments rests on the assumption that individualism is a necessary aspect of human existence, and that any talk of individuality would be meaningless in a cooperative society where communitarianism flourished. This is, surprisingly, not an uncommon point of view. Paul Bohanan, in his book *How Culture Works* expresses his general antipathy towards cooperation:

Cooperation may indeed be one of the bases of harmony, but complete harmony is a state of utopia; all aggressive action disappears. The human urge to reduce tension may lead to the error of enshrining cooperation as the key to a "nicer" society. This can be dangerous, leading to erosion of individual rights.⁶⁰

What Bohanan and Jorge fear, I assume, is that cooperation may "force" people to give up individual rights for the sake of community harmony, even though such worries about cooperation are unfounded. First of all, complete harmony does not necessitate the elimination of aggression. There is, after all, a natural world apart from fellow human beings full of unpredictability with which needs to be dealt. Second, cooperation does not mean conforming nor obedience, both of which Bohanan implies. A harmonious community need not relinquish individual rights. Simply because people cooperate with each other, it does not mean an end to "individuation." For a community to function (efficiently?), it would behoove its members to learn about and utilize those with special talents and individual abilities. In the end, individualism is perhaps an over-rated and over-blown position that neglects much of what makes us who we are, a product of our community. By forgetting community we condemn ourselves to fighting for survival, struggling to become known, famous, wealthy, independent, against all others who are struggling for the same goals, just for some justification for existence. The community will then soon die. What happens next, Dorothy Sayer eloquently, albeit bluntly, points out:

Futility; lack of a living faith; the drift into loose morality, greedy consumption, financial irresponsibility, and uncontrolled bad temper; a self-opinionated and obstinate individualism; violence, sterility, and a lack of reverence for life and property including one's own; the exploitation of sex, the debasing of language by advertisement and propaganda, the conditioning of people's minds by mass hysteria and "spell-binding" of all kinds, venality and string-pulling in

⁶⁰ Bohanan, *How Culture Works*, 201.

public affairs, hypocrisy, dishonesty in material things, intellectual dishonesty, the fomenting of discord (class against class, nation against nation) for what one can get out of it, the falsification and destruction of all the means of communication; the exploitation of the lowest and stupidest mass-emotions; treachery even to the fundamentals of kinship, country, the chosen friend, and the sworn allegiance: these are all-too-recognisable stages that lead to the cold death of society and the extinguishing of all civilized relations.⁶¹

We should examine a further possibility. Imagine, for a moment, what would happen if competition is given free reign. The competitive pursuit of individuality will gradually reach a level of complete social relativism and moral anarchy as individuals claim moral authority and fight for the moral high-ground. This will lead some individuals and groups to desire the elimination of all competing sets of individual rights in favor of their own "right" set as the only way to guarantee a safe society.⁶² Eventually, certain moral forces will stomp on lesser forces, squelching opposing individual rights in order to dominate with its own set of rights. The competition for one all-encompassing moral dogmatism will instigate a fight for the total control of social policy. This whittling-away process will leave the future competitive society with only one set of individual rights available, which will be sustained tooth-and-nail. There are no anti-trust laws when it comes to morality. Whether this morality is the right set or not is irrelevant. Moral righteousness will go to the stronger. The world of Thrasymachus and Callicles will be realized. Bohanan's and Jorge's fears seem to be misplaced then, for I doubt there is any more, and perhaps less, to fear from a cooperative society as opposed to a competitive one, unless one is benefitting from that competition.⁶³

True cooperation bases itself on the free exchange and discussion of ideas. In this sense, individual rights can be augmented, deleted, or changed only through the

⁶¹ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante* (London, 1954), 114 [Quoted from Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, 137-8].

⁶² The Moral Majority would fit into this category as a less militant example.

⁶³ And there is much profit to be made in the fight for moral control and righteousness. Evangelists, politicians, academicians, and other people in positions of power and influence often turn to moral justifications to validate their views. The fact that there are so many moral views simply adds to the competitive mix, inspiring invectives and damnations from all sides against all other sides. Fame and fortune quickly follow those whose castigations alienate unpopular cultures and values. Scapegoats breed loyalty as much as worthy causes. See Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer* for more on the power of hate mongering.

interactions of the people involved. On the other hand, we may be losing rights in a competitively-based social construction, since competition impedes the free exchange of ideas. Bohanan's opinion is quite similar to that of Jorge when he wrote that competitive corporate structures depend upon the very same unquestioned devotion and obedience and obsequiousness that both Bohanan and Jorge fear from cooperation.

Bohanan also seems to imply that competition is necessary for the perpetuation of individual rights, while Jorge argued that competition makes people individualistic.⁶⁴ Consequently, individuality seems more a product of external forces than some internal drive. Individuality may be necessary for a competitive environment to thrive, but it doesn't necessarily follow that individuality is an innate property of humans (unless competition is considered an innate trait of humans). On the same line of argument, cooperation and communitarianism can be just as much a part of human "instinct" as individuality. Only in our case, individuality/competition won and was able to set the agenda for debate.

But cannot competition and cooperation exist together?⁶⁵ Granted, cooperation and competition exist side-by-side in contemporary society, yet we should not necessarily consider our present condition as the best possible or ideal version. If our society is to advance towards a more utopian existence — one arguably more benign, nicer, and 'user-friendly' — it must find a way of reducing, if not eliminating, the power of the competitive ethic for several reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, competition does not like competition, and works hard to eliminate any challenger. If left to its own devices, competition will inevitably come to an end, but the competitive ethic requires that that never happens. If it does, the only method in widespread use to structure the hierarchy of the

⁶⁴ Jorge, *CCESO*, 63.

⁶⁵ If cooperation is to exist to temper the excesses of competition, the question is begged again: Why have competition at all?

best and worst of society would be gone, and the elites would lose their vise grip on cultural power.⁶⁶

Second, as mentioned in the previous chapter, competition is a necessary element in perpetuating inequality; for one of competition's purposes is to determine differences of excellence between objects and between persons. But in addition to Darwinistic justifications that competition is somehow unavoidable, William Ryan states that "the apologists [for competition] are genuinely making a *moral* case for inequality of outcome, contending they are completely congruent with principles of justice."⁶⁷ Essentially, the existence of haves and have-nots is just, based on market theory including the incorporation of the miraculous "invisible hand" — in which everyone's pursuit of self-interest transforms itself into social harmony; if every person pursues their own self-interest, everyone's well-being will rise. But Ryan points out a paradoxical, and overlooked, result that in a highly competitive, individualistic society,

one might easily imagine that we would encounter straightforward, bald assertions about the desirability and social usefulness of such valuable internal traits as avarice, duplicity, selfishness, and ruthless disregard of the welfare of others. It would certainly seem logical to expect that these character traits would at least be allotted some substantial significance in explaining individual differential success in acquiring wealth and position. The opposite characteristics — lack of acquisitiveness, honesty, altruism, and empathy with others — would presumably lead to lack of success, if not outright poverty.⁶⁸

These assertions don't occur. Granted, people may vigorously claim the superiority of one breed of dog to another, or one sport's team over another, or one car over another; yet the idea that one person, class, or race being superior to another is anathema in our culture, even though it is wholly possible that the resulting socio-psychological situation leaves us in a moral quandary. "That we remain reticent about flaunting such sentiments and yet devote ourselves to striving for superiority signals the clash of intensely contradictory

⁶⁶ Recall William Graham Sumner's argument for perpetual competition for the fittest to survive and claim the reigns of society.

⁶⁷ Ryan, *Equality*, 61.

⁶⁸ Ryan, *Equality*, 60.

beliefs about equality and inequality."⁶⁹ In the end, we achieve a society which operates both competitively and cooperatively, but at the cost of ethical and moral indecision.

People at this point have to deal with the incumbent neuroses of this social schizophrenia, where morality is no longer a deeply personal decision residing inside an individual constructed from his or her unique and private collection of experiences. Instead, morality and ethics have become situational, greatly dependent upon the role in which the person is "playing" during the decision-making moment. Although there is much in common with Fletcher's "situational ethics," it needs to be made clear that there is a distinct difference between the two. In Fletcher's situational ethics, a person brings their moral know-how to the situation at hand, and makes the best decision relying on principles, but not necessarily being slavish to them. It is a "principled relativism," as Fletcher terms it. "Situation ethics ... calls upon us to keep law in a subservient place, so that *only* love and reason really count when the chips are down."⁷⁰

In the situational ethics extracted from social schizophrenia, every instant of a person's waking moment places that person in a 'role,' whereupon he or she must act in certain, externally prescribed ways. At a classical music concert, one must dress accordingly, remain dutifully silent during the performance, and applaud at appropriate times.⁷¹ At a business meeting, one must again dress accordingly, speak with an vocabulary idiosyncratic to corporate life, respect the business hierarchy, etc. One can point to practically no time during the day when one is not subjected to the overriding imposition of certain ethical behavioral requirements. In this case, however, rather than tempering our general moral understandings with love and reason as Fletcher recommends, we

⁶⁹ Ryan, *Equality*, 4.

⁷⁰ Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 31.

⁷¹ This, of course, does not always hold true. When a piece is played that places one's expectations of musicality in question and challenges the pre-established norms of behavior, a discomfiture stirs the audience — sometimes to violence. One need only recall the premier of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* and the subsequent riot to understand.

continuously replace one particular ethical code with another, yet not necessarily tempering any of them.

Although we may pay lip service to more abstract and globalized moral ideas, the social condemnation, the isolation, and the possible financial or criminal penalties we face when committing a social "faux pas" chain us to pre-ordained actions, in spite of perhaps drastic consequences. We too often hear of stories like Kitty Genovese's and Andrew Mormille's where witnesses stand and watch as individuals are violently assaulted, raped, murdered. The on-lookers weren't really indifferent or apathetic; as discussed in Chapter 1, their behavioral and moral inculcations failed in preparing them to handle deviations of the norm. Their moral expectations taught them to ignore strangers. When faced with a morally strident situation, the choice to either help or ignore the stranger paralyzes the individual into merely watching, while feelings of personal responsibility which may have instigated a response in another situation is diffused among all the on-lookers, making on less likely to intervene.⁷²

Since moral choices are conceivably situational in our society, it becomes an easy matter to defend inequality. Barrington Moore demonstrated how virtues could be constructed to benefit the ideological premises of the ruling class. William Ryan gives us two other possible methods through the manipulation of language and vocabulary. First, virtues are redefined as vices, and vices redefined as virtues through an incremental developmental process:

Avarice must become drive and ambition and ultimately renamed something like "need for achievement"; ruthlessness can be euphemized as single-mindedness and then transformed into perseverance; duplicity can charitably be altered to shrewdness and foresight and then scientifically labeled "intelligence" or "talent." On the other side ... honesty is gradually changed into naïveté, which is not far removed from stupidity; lack of avarice ... can emerge as something like lack of interest, and it is not a long journey from lack of interest to laziness.⁷³

⁷² Darley and Latané, "When Will People Help in a Crisis?" 133-4.

⁷³ Ryan, *Equality*, 61. Competition itself undergoes a transformations in definition. As we will see later, Robert Simon redefines competition as a "mutual quest for excellence."

The alternative and complementary method is to redefine the "underlying economic process ... to de-emphasize the raw and savage image of merciless, individualistic competition."⁷⁴ Arguments of this sort invariably down play the social, psychological and physical brutality of competition, opting instead for a "more passive process by which society ... maximizes its own efficiency."⁷⁵ The idea of the passivity of competition is critical; it reinforces the misguided belief that competition *is*, inevitably and unavoidably defining who we are. In other words, competition is seen as a natural part of our environment. This belief, however, ignores the reality that we can construct the environment which determines our futures, allowing us the ability choose between a competitive or cooperative way of life.

In terms of sport (or anything else for that matter), competition supposedly maximizes the efficiency of determining who is better than someone else at a given task. I say "supposedly" because there is ample evidence that competition causes a marked deterioration of performance.⁷⁶ Consequently, competition only determines who will perform a given task better *when placed into a competitive environment*, which may not determine who can perform the task itself better. For Ryan, this result of competition raises two questions. The first is whether or not the best individuals actually do rise to the top (certainly they are the best at competing for the top); and second, if the competitive model is the method of choice for making such determinations, how can one ever tell if the best are selected?⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ryan, *Equality*, 61.

⁷⁵ Ryan, *Equality*, 61.

⁷⁶ David and Roger Johnson (along with Geoffrey Maruyama, Deborah Nelson, and Linda Skon), in their 1981 study "Effects of Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic Goal Structures in Achievement: A Meta-Analysis" (*Psychological Bulletin*, 89 (1981), 47-62), examined 122 studies published between 1924 to 1980 "including every North American study they could find that considered achievement or performance data in competitive, cooperative, and/or individualistic structures. The remarkable results: 65 studies found that cooperation promotes higher achievement than competition, 8 found the reverse, and 36 found no statistically significant difference. Cooperation promoted higher achievement than independent work in 108 studies, while 6 found the reverse, and 42 found no difference. The superiority of cooperation held for all subject areas and all age groups" [Kohn, *No Contest*, 47-8].

⁷⁷ Ryan, *Equality*, 62.

Jorge, whether knowingly or not, provides a third alternative perspective to the competitive ethos when he describes his "divergence principle," which states that "identical courses of action or behavior modes inspired by different motivations must eventually diverge if their respective goals are to be actualized."⁷⁸ Consequently, if competition has the same 'courses of action', i.e., achieving the same outcome of an activity, as cooperation, either they have the same motivational component (unlikely) or they will eventually diverge, out of necessity, because the motivations are essentially different (exclusive group achievement versus mutual group achievement). They are to forever remain dissimilar and opposed.⁷⁹ If we accept this, then one realizes that competition and cooperation will find it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to work together to achieve a better society. The competitive group works for a better society for themselves, and if other people benefit, all the better. The cooperative group works for a better society for everyone; social benefits occur by design, not by chance.

However, a more immediate threat to society's long-term survival — one which Jorge candidly points out — is the virtually uncontrollable nature of competition. He quotes from William Fellner's book *Modern Economic Analysis* (1960):

One could ask if the familiar historical instances of cutthroat competition and expansionist leadership in large industries in American economic history were not a reflection, partly at least, of deeply ingrained competitive attitudes. It would probably have been impossible, in the light of such a *Weltanschauung*, for the warring parties to have recognized a mutuality of interests logically leading to cooperation.⁸⁰

It seems to be clear from Fellner's comments that the "ideology" of competition frames the discussion and restricts alternatives and alternate thinking. He further implies that

⁷⁸ *CCESO*, 17, 68.

⁷⁹ An example of an ideological difference is the notion of respect. In competition, respect needs to be "earned," usually after the successful completion of a competitive activity. This constant challenging and testing of one's self-appraisal continuously places one's respect in jeopardy while scoffing at any respect an opponent might assert. For cooperation to be effective, on the other hand, respect must exist before the event, to assure smooth interactions and performance. To cooperate, one must have faith and confidence in one's collaborators. Consequently, one's self-appraisal and respect are not challenged or doubted but reaffirmed. To put it tersely, in competition, respect is fought over; in cooperation, respect is granted.

⁸⁰ Jorge, *CCESO*, 61.

competition has a built-in self-interest ethic to reject or, at the very least, to view with suspicion cooperative alternatives. Earlier on, Jorge himself remarks on the *Weltanschauung* of competition:

If such an attitude on the part of individuals becomes deeply ingrained and pervasive, coloring their *Weltanschauung* and/or idea of society ... it would serve to influence the tone of that society, even with marked independence of the nature of the economic institutions that characterize it at a moment in time. The inclinations and behavior of the members of society will help to shape the community in a distinctive form, even if a wide chasm such as that existing between market and nonmarket organizational forms were to separate two societies.⁸¹

Sustaining competition, however, is counterproductive to community, institutions, and social cohesion. No matter where or how competition is structured, it will innately color and adversely affect these institutions; and when implemented, divisions must be created between and within institutions, otherwise competition cannot take place. This turns "Community" into communities, and old friends into new enemies; it makes social cohesion some "Golden Age" myth, and destroys, in the long run, any passion for or any knowledge of the cooperative spirit.

Perhaps what we ought to examine of Jorge's description of competition is what the goal of competition is, for this goal would make a great difference in the social climate. In this case, Jorge mistakes a secondary goal (benefitting others) for the primary motivation. The primary objective of competition is in reality to succeed at a task by making sure someone else does not — essentially, to emerge victorious. If that success benefits others, fine, but it was never the main objective, especially not during the competitive moment itself. Considering that social goals are not directly linked to competition, there is no necessity that achieving these goals requires a competitive framework; and no matter what the tone or spirit, the goal of competition is, in the final analysis, invariably the same — to determine a winner and loser. Everything that follows from that is secondary. Cooperation, however, does not demarcate the goal of success in a task distinct from the social goal. Cooperative success, by its very nature, equals social achievement, for no

⁸¹ Jorge, *CCESO*, 22.

person is ever left out of the victory (unlike competition). It should be pointed out that cooperation is at least one step more efficient than competition; considering all the benefits that supposedly accrue from competition, cooperation achieves all the same minus having to grant success based on someone else's failure.

What of the social costs of achieving a certain standard of living that Jorge thinks is the appropriate goal of efficiency? Surely there must be more to life than being able to afford a Mercedes-Benz that really does not move people from point A to point B any more efficiently than a Geo Metro, especially with traffic the way it is. Actually, a Metro gets three times better gas mileage, produces less carbon monoxide and CO₂ exhaust while conserving energy resources. This is just one example among thousands in a world dominated by inefficiencies created by a supposedly efficient system which promotes selecting purchases that increase personal status and prestige. In addition, we are not only trading off the corruption of competition for a higher standard of living; the market system demands that we pay an admission fee (our subservience to efficiency) to compete for that higher standard of living available only to a few. No matter how apologetic economic theorists talk, they must admit that not everyone will achieve or succeed in a competitive-based system. In fact, at least half must fail.

Jorge, however, finds all of this less dangerous than a cooperative society. As long as competition doesn't become collusive, everything will work out; yet this is an odd position. Competition must be as a result of cooperative intentions to compete, though cooperation can never be the result of competition's drive to eliminate competition. But Jorge is not finished yet:

In the end, the substratum of competition and the root that nourishes its varied manifestations reside in the phenomenon of power. Even if one succeeds in molding people to accept the practice of competition *for*, making them more goal- and society-conscious, more mindful of the need for cooperation, the fact is that the better qualified are going to compete for the right to grant the medals, that is, for the positions of prestige, power, and leadership.⁸²

⁸² Jorge, *CCESO*, 31.

Alfie Kohn continues the above argument in his book *Punished by Rewards*: Those who receive rewards, he suggests, are automatically placed — or have automatically placed themselves — in a subservient position to those granting the awards. Thus, a power hierarchy is maintained throughout society with the use of awards and rewards. How ironic to use positive reinforcements — and competition requires both positive and negative reinforcers — to sustain obsequiousness and construct a society of sheep. Perec's island will no longer have to be occupied only by athletes; businessmen full of incentive plans and students full of scholarships and academic awards will swell the ranks, but with the same results in the end. Cooperation cannot fight competition; it will be subsumed within the competitive ethos. There seemingly is no way to avoid it.

Even if we look to other cultures to provide answers to help us out of our quagmire, there are at least two reasons why, as these cultures continue to be molded into the competitive worldview, there is less and less hope they will provide any protection or any alternative. First, within the current condition of global economics we find that as multinationals disseminate throughout the world, diverse cultures are more and more forced to make less diverse products to satisfy the demands for the specific social tastes of a few economically powerful and dominant nations.

Second, though Jorge claims that cultural disintegration will not result from a world competitive market, if efficiency and monopolistic restraint is the model and individuals are to be taught that they are to value certain motivations, then foreign cultures and *Weltanschauung* will undoubtedly change simply because of the differing interpretations of human nature and desires. The situation in contemporary India clearly demonstrates the global dilemma. Recently, the Miss World contest was held there amidst a storm of protest from both Indian liberals and conservatives claiming that Indian society is being forced into

Westernization.⁸³ In the introduction to Ashis Nandy's book *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias* — a book that describes vividly the Indian and Asian experiences and conflicts with an encroaching Western technology-driven ideology, and in which Nandy attempts to show that 'share' (as in "sharing" technologies) ought to be replaced by 'forced' — Mr. Garaudy writes:

The post-Enlightenment modern world, innocent of the new forces of oppression and totalism released by modernity itself, has consistently promoted a set of secular theories of salvation which would have the oppressed share the oppressors' utopia -- conservative, liberal or radical.⁸⁴

The Western ideology built around competitive individualism is certainly not the world-view of all cultures. However, if competition is the backbone of the future world economy, then those cultures which currently resist Westernization must either voluntarily relinquish their differing notions of human nature and switch, or be crushed.

⁸³ The swimsuit competition, with its "inappropriate" display of the female physique, was so controversial, it was held in a totally different country!

⁸⁴ Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, xv-xvi.

Chapter 4

Sport, Work, and Free Hockey

All the arguments which are brought to represent competition as no evil, show it to be evidently a great evil. You never find people laboring to convince you that you may live very happily with cooperation.¹

Chapters 1 and 2 looked at competition as a natural component of nature, evolution, or psychology and found those arguments wanting and insufficient. Arguments and justifications such as those often based themselves on erroneous and biased interpretations of Darwin and other scientists, guided by pre-Darwinian notions of market capitalism, while selectively excluding views of scholars who have demonstrated the role of cooperation in nature. "What sort of evolutionary laws, " mused one historian, "might have been discovered if Malthus, Spencer, and Darwin had lived in a world which emphasized cooperation instead of competition. Selective perceptions, no doubt, play a large role in what is 'discovered.'"² Also briefly examined was the position that competition inevitably develops and fosters a vocabulary for self-dehumanization necessary to handle the uncertainties and insanities of life. Chapter 3 explored the possibility that competition exists as a *de facto* demonstration of economic excellence and therefore necessary for economic growth. If my analyses were effective, however, those arguments relied upon faulty understandings of human nature (especially the idea that humans are innately competitive, selfish, and lazy), and were heavily biased in favor of economic efficiency, as if nothing else mattered to the population living within the competitive marketplace.

¹ An adaptation of a quote by Samuel Johnson.

² Karier, *The Individual, Society, and Education*, 105.

In the above cases, cooperation fared well by comparison, if not pointed the way to a more palatable alternative to the harshness of competition. Having looked at perspectives dealing with all-competitive and partial-competitive social climates, an all-cooperative based society would seem to be the logical next step in our examination. The notion is certainly not a new one; for example, it has been a preoccupation with a variety of world religions for millennia. Even the social philosopher Thomas Hobbes, as uncompromisingly frank about the brutishness of human nature as he was, understood clearly that the future of humanity rested on cooperation. As George Sabine sums up Hobbes's *Leviathan*, all his laws of nature lead to the following conclusion: "Peace and cooperation have a greater utility for self-preservation than violence and general competition, and peace requires mutual confidence."³

But a society which bases all its institutions on the cooperative philosophy is an alternative Jorge, as well as many others, have constantly dismissed as being ... well, utopian. William Bennett, one of today's leading conservative thinkers, sees cooperative games (and possibly by extension, a cooperative society) as mindless activity played by hippies and X-generation dropouts. He describes it as "a laughing generation playing football in bell bottom trousers ... one of sheer aimlessness, of distraction pure and simple, doing nothing."⁴

Aside from his glaring and questionable use of loaded descriptions, Bennett misapprehends games when he views them as "doing nothing." Recent philosophers, beginning perhaps most notably with Huizinga, have argued extensively that there is something very serious and formalized to the actions of game-playing participants; they are definitely not doing nothing. Play and games, for those who are participating, are taken

³ Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 431. This mutual confidence requires a mutual respect that needs to be given on faith. It cannot be earned in competition, because competition structurally places opponents in antagonistic positions often fostering a sense of suspicion.

⁴ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 31.

very seriously in the sense that in order to get the most out of the play experience, one must be immersed into the spirit of the activity.

Second, though the above comment by Bennett was uttered during the 1960s and may demonstrate a personal aversion of the hippie subculture, it might also reflect something I alluded to in the previous chapter — a clear distaste by political and corporate elites (of which Bennett is representative) for non-instrumental leisure activities, i.e., activities that neither produce nor consume goods and/or services. This aversion to non-instrumental leisure — present in the American psyche in inchoate form since the earliest American colonies — has become increasingly prevalent since the Civil War stimulated by the rise in American industrialism, and especially obvious since the 1950s when the Cold War demanded swift determined action while the beat generation of the 1950s and the Civil Rights movement and the hippies of the 1960s resisted war and violence.⁵ The American worker, never having been given the option to choose increased time off instead of increased pay, has come to unwillingly accept the corporate opinion that unstructured leisure, being a drain on the economy, hurts productivity and personal income. Juliet Schor poignantly described the plight of the American worker:

Workers, both as individuals and through their unions, have been virtually powerless to stop the onslaught of work. Amidst the high unemployment and economic insecurity of recent years, there have been few solid impediments to long hours. And the problem is not only economic. The nation no longer possesses a culture of resistance to long hours or a political movement to press for government reforms. There have been few ideological vantage points from which to stake a claim to leisure.⁶

In the late twentieth century, due in large part to the powerlessness of the workers and the gradual habitualization to an improving standard of living, "[the] struggle for free time has thus been diverted to the struggle for more money to spend on goods to be used in that

⁵ In 1965, Tom Lehrer satirized the plight of these counter-culture groups with the quip, "It takes a great deal of courage to stand up for the things everyone else is against — like peace, love, and brotherhood."

⁶ Schor, *The Overworked American*, 81.

free time. Freedom is defined as the freedom to consume, for which work is necessary."⁷

This increased consumerism has had a devastating effect upon us:

[We] increasingly looked to consumption to give satisfaction, even meaning, to [our] lives. In both the workplace and the home, progress has repeatedly translated into more goods and services, rather than more free time. Employers channel productivity increases into additional income; housewives are led to use their labor-saving appliances to produce more goods and services. Consumerism traps us as we become habituated to the good life, emulate our neighbors, or just get caught up in the social pressures created by everyone else's choices. Work-and-spend has become a mutually reinforcing and powerful syndrome — a seamless web we somehow keep choosing, without even meaning to.⁸

Schor calculates that there has been a precipitous shrinkage of leisure time for the American Middle Class. She estimates that Americans have lost over one month of free time a year when compared to the early 1970s.⁹

In light of this disappearing free time and increasing instrumentalist leisure, a reasonable question one might pose Bennett is: Shouldn't distraction be the point of games? Is it not more shameful *not* to view games as a diversion? To insist that play or games requires some instrumental value sadly misunderstands the point of games. As G. K. Chesterton quipped, "If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing badly."¹⁰ In other words, it doesn't matter how well or how poorly one does something; the very fact that one wants to do something at all is what counts. Results have little significance to individuals who love what they do for its own sake.

⁷ Wilson, *Playing by the Rules*, 66.

⁸ Schor, *The Overworked American*, 112.

⁹ See Juliet Schor's *The Overworked American*. The decline in leisure time may explain — if only partially — why the New Games Foundation (begun in the middle 1970s and famous for its non-competitivist philosophy) quickly floundered and failed in the mid-Eighties. As leisure time evaporated, especially during the Reagan Administration, New Games — a strictly autotelic pursuit — eventually lost its participants.

Granted, it lives in mutated forms in recreation classes, but not as an organized attempt to achieve the goal of mass participation in semi-structured autotelic leisure activities once envisioned by the founders of New Games. Also, current variants used in elementary school gym classes — a distant memory of the Play Express program started in 1976 to introduce New Games into schools — are slowly disappearing as well, due in part to the declining inclusion of any physical activity component in elementary education. Where instruction remains included in the curriculum, the lessons revolve mostly around motor skills relevant to sports development. Even Dale Lefevre, who continues the New Games philosophy in Mendicino, California, earns the bulk of his income as a management consultant in team building and conflict resolution. Again, instrumental leisure.

¹⁰ Quoted in Kohn, *No Contest*, 81.

If sport is to take on the role of purposeful activity in the sense of being productive, we then fall into the trap exposed in the book *Sport and Work* (1981), written by the European scholar Bero Rigauer. In it, he writes that "sport and work are structurally analogous schemes of behavior."¹¹ When a capitalist economy becomes the dominating social character of a nation of culture, it infuses its values into all aspects of life. Individuals inculcated with what Rigauer terms the "Achievement Principle" begin to see it as the only legitimate human social function. The Achievement Principle signifies the final stage in the capitalist teleology of work — when formerly extrinsic motivation for work (e.g., money and security) evolve to replace intrinsic motivations (e.g., knowledge and enjoyment). Sport then begins to look frighteningly similar to corporate structures, taking on many of the attributes that shape and define the workplace, including rationalization and specialization of work, division of labor, and hierarchical management.

John Buell's analysis of corporate American, developed in his book *Democracy by Other Means* (1995), could just as well be applied to the contemporary sport scene when he writes of the present necessity that firms and corporations must be democratized to allow effective adaptations to economic and social changes in global and local markets and societies, and to permit more humanistic treatment of workers. Sport operates not only as the corporate model he criticizes when it comes to management — a management above the jurisdiction of anti-trust legislation (as in baseball) and, for the longest time, above labor laws as well — but the corporate model operates within the basic structure of sport on the the player level. Here, the athletes's hierarchical position in relation to coaches and referees make them relatively weak in challenging authority figures; they cannot negotiate for different rules nor opt for different playing conditions. The athlete is at the mercy of the rule-makers. It almost appears that industry workers have more rights and opportunities

¹¹ Rigauer, *Sport and Work*, 9.

for redressing grievances and unfairness than weekend athletes who supposedly engage in non-worklike activities that claim to encourage freedom.

If we recall Chapter 3's critical interpretation of Jorge, it should be acknowledged that a person's freedom, if indeed found at work, needs to be redefined to mean that which is beneficial in increasing the Gross National Product. One might furthermore consider the alternative conclusion that if an individual is discouraged from finding freedom in leisure activities or finding leisure itself from participating in play, games or sport, leisure (or the notion that leisure is productive pseudo-work) will be pursued with vigor (or vengeance as the case may be) through more extreme, more hedonistic, and more escapist human pursuits. This combination of social factors goes a great extent towards explaining why sexual desires and sexual assaults are increasing in our society; why Americans, despite increases in exercise facilities, are getting fatter; and why there is a well-documented rise in alcohol consumption and drug abuse. As the distinction continues to move from a life based on the juxtaposition between play/work to a model of existence based on death/work (because life has become all work), death-defying activities become the only venue for people to escape from the notion of work; death provides a welcome relief.

On the other hand, we could reject from the outset the idea that we must compete; and not everyone needs to utilize Schor's argument that leisure time was and still is a blight on the ideology of capitalism (and perhaps competition) to do so.¹² Alfie Kohn either did not know about or did not think the cultural history of leisure and work crucial when making his points on competition. Instead, in an almost direct response to Bennett, Kohn writes:

Many people take the absence of competition to mean that one must be wandering aimlessly, without any goals. But competing simply means that one is working towards a goal in such a way as to prevent others from reaching *their* goals. This is one approach to getting something

¹² "Once we realize that capitalism entailed an expansion of working time, the mid-nineteenth-century turn toward leisure no longer appears as a structural imperative of the market system, as proponents of the conventional wisdom believe. It occurred because workers struggled mightily against the normal processes that determined the length of working hours. In this sense, leisure exists *in spite of* rather than as a result of capitalism" [Schor, *The Overworked American*, 6-7].

done, but (happily) not the only one. Competition need never enter the picture in order for skills to be mastered and displayed, goals set and met.¹³

As far as Alfie Kohn is concerned, competition is only one choice of at least two available on how one ought to organize society. Nevertheless, Jorge was so disturbed by the possibility of a cooperative society, his bias failed to imagine any more than just two possible situations which would result in the end of competition, both of which he considered unacceptable:

(1) that in which all but one individual would renounce pursuing their well-being by subjecting themselves to a socio-political and economic minimalization at the hands of the sole unconstrained maximizer in these fields, possibly because of compensation in another sphere of being, and (2) a community of identically minded individuals, in which there would be no disagreements concerning the operation of production, distribution, and consumption activities.¹⁴

As mentioned in Chapter 3, if one of the goals of a cooperative society is the pursuit of economic efficiency, then these results would be of serious concern. Yet, Jorge alludes to the possibility that such a situation may occur if a consensus were to arise among the population based on "highly valued" shared ends — a possibility which challenges Jorge's two conclusions. For even if there is a consensus on achieving certain goals, there can still be different methods for achieving them. Conflict is not necessarily competition, because those in conflict may have the same goal in mind. This is all the more reason why there ought to be variety in accomplishing goals. With a variety of individuals, each having a different worldview to present, a greater number of possible solutions would arise in the discussions, bringing to light many alternatives that may not have been addressed in more traditional methods where certain ideologies set the linguistic agenda.

Although consensus building implies a unified worldview, an enlightened consensus-driven community with a variety of views grows and prospers more effectively because consensus determination maximizes its diversity (and productivity as well) by allowing the possible utilization of more than one solution at one time. This is not an example of

¹³ Kohn, *No Contest*, 46.

¹⁴ *CCESO*, 37. Both suggestions are examined in *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. Mustapha Mond represents the first possibility; the cloned and conditioned population represents the second.

competition, because no one method undermines the efforts of any other; different methods may be useful in different conditions, and each may complement the other. It is simply a pragmatic resolution to a problem. Current democratic political methods, however, seem to rely all-too-often on 'single approach' legislation, achieving political ends by mandating unified rather than expanded worldviews. A unified worldview (i.e., ideology) severely restricts solutions to only those which agree with the majority view; in majority-rule governments, for example, legislated worldviews are often determined by little more than half the *voting* population, meaning that ideologies — or the euphemistic 'public mandates' — are often (on average in the United States) sanctioned by less than one-third of the general population.¹⁵ As Thomas Jefferson once said, "In a democracy, a majority of one is the same as an unanimous decision." In addition, there is no necessity that a cooperative utopia need be ruled by a single maximizer as Jorge thinks is critical. In a cooperative utopian community, all citizens would not only have an equal share in the prosperity of the community but, in order to help build the consensus, would also all have input into the maximization process.¹⁶

The cooperative message is amply demonstrated in practical terms by the hundreds of intentional communities that currently operate in the United States today.¹⁷ The cooperative theme is also very common in literature, especially utopian literature. William

¹⁵ This number was determined by taking the average percentage of the voting age population actually voting during the 16 presidential elections from 1928-1988 [56.4%], and multiplying it by the average popular vote for the winning president over the same 16 elections [54.6%]: $56.4(\%) \times 54.6\% = 30.8$. 30.8 percent of the population (on average) voted for the president of the United States. Statistics obtained from *The Universal Almanac*.

¹⁶ Now it is true that Skinner in his work *Walden Two* stressed the ungainliness of this style of cooperative social structure in communities of more than 2000 people. Yet with the rise in computer communications, it does seem plausible that a cooperative society could be composed of many smaller communities — and it is known that small communities do work. Twin Oaks in Louisa, Virginia, has one hundred people in their community, a large waiting list, and an upper middle class lifestyle due in no small part to their savings and investments of over one million dollars.

¹⁷ There are over 2000 intentional communities in the US, but I am unclear as to how many are based on the cooperativist lifestyle. It can be assumed, however, since such communities almost invariably arise to escape the ideological conditions of mainstream life, that the majority came into existence to supplant competitive individualism with a form of cooperative communalism.

Morris, in his work *News from Nowhere* (1890), depicts a world totally devoid of competition. Not only was his futuristic excursion one of the first ecologically sensitive novels of the century, *News from Nowhere* envisioned many social innovations that were picked up by subsequent novels. For example, the idea that children ought to be raised in an environment which made no distinction between work, play, and school was imitated and skillfully incorporated into such diverse works as Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948), Huxley's *Island* (1962), Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), and Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), just to name some of the more well-known books.

So the idea and desire for a totally cooperative society is not something new to our thoughts or our passions. It underlies many of our hopes and dreams. Yet despite all the wishing and wanting, little progress has been made to bring this goal to fruition. Alfie Kohn, lists four major reasons why competition has had such a firm hold on the American (if not global) imagination, some of which we have so far discussed. Competition: 1) is inevitable, 2) is more productive, 3) is more enjoyable, and 4) builds character. Each reason, according to Kohn is a social myth based on disputed or fictional facts, and arguments guided by 'common sense':¹⁸

- 1) The notion that competition is inevitable because it is innate to the human species has been amply dismissed for over a century by animal behaviorists, sociologists, and anthropologists. As discussed in Chapter 1 the evidence that humans are innately competitive is dubious at best. Plus, the vast number of cultures past and present that eschew competition lends credence to the notion that competition and cooperation is a social phenomenon, with little if anything to do with human nature — whatever that may be.

¹⁸ To briefly state Kohn's positions would do him a disservice; but to rewrite his book would be silly. This discussion of Kohn's book ought to encourage readers to discover the voluminous research (over 600 references) and persuasive power of *No Contest* for their own enlightenment. This does not imply that all who support competition accept these justifications. There are defenders of the competitive view who find these various arguments ineffective and discredit them. Yet there are enough spokespersons still using these standard arguments, and often in the more mainstream literature, for us to seriously examine these views.

- 2) The idea that competition is more productive and efficient has been equally disputed and dismissed by the social scientific literature. The idea is based on the unproven (and debunked) assumption that, in some way, a competitive environment provides important incentives for working hard. "Reserving a desirable reward for the winner is thought to promote excellence."¹⁹ Yet with overwhelming consistency, studies have demonstrated that cooperative endeavors produce higher educational results, improve productivity in work conditions, increase the exchange of information, enhance the use of lateral thinking and other alternative approaches to problem solving, reduce redundancy of labor, and on and on and on. In only one respect did competition prove more beneficial — the performance of mindless, repetitive tasks. The only reason competition succeeds in this case is that there is little if any intrinsic motivation involved with such tasks; extrinsic motivation was the *only* motivation. For the vast majority of cases then, the use of cooperation will assuredly lead to higher productivity, greater efficiency, and more humane conditions in education and work, unless proponents of competition wish to claim that competitive activities (like sports) are mindless or lack intrinsic motivation.

Conceivably, such a position could be argued against sports even now. Athletes, sociologists, and psychologists all have determined that those athletes who consciously think about their actions during their performance usually do poorly. They are less relaxed when *not* 'letting themselves go.' The athlete must train him- or herself to transfer thought to kinesthetic experience and train the body to move in a predetermined fashion according to certain stimuli, while the mind merely acts as a passive conduit between environmental stimulus and body response. Coaches subject their players to endless repetitive drilling to stamp out thinking about what-one-is-doing and replace it with just-doing-it (a conditioned response?). Thinking, literally, gets in the way.

¹⁹ Kohn, *No Contest*, 49.

• 3) The notion that competition is more fun can glibly be challenged by the questions, "Have you not ever lost?" or "Is it ever fun to lose?" but some would find these comments unsatisfactory, if not jejune. Perhaps then, they wish to hear that some arguments for sports, like the supposed timeless transcendent capacity of sports expressed in Michael Novak's *The Joy of Sports* (1976), seem to place the activity in a social vacuum and unaffected by cultural changes, which curiously makes culture and society similarly unaffected by sports. Of course humans and society cannot work in such a segmented fashion, despite what some sports apologists would desire. What one learns in sports about competition infuses itself into the individual and helps shapes the person to fit into a place in society outside the stadium — the same society which insisted upon competition thriving in games and sport. George Sage was quite blunt about his interpretation of organized sport:

Organized sport — from youth programs to the pros — has nothing to do with playfulness — fun, joy, self-satisfaction — but is, instead, a social agent for the deliberate socialization of people into the acceptance of ... the prevailing social structure and their fate as workers within bureaucratic organizations. Contrary to the myths propounded by promoters, sports are instruments not for human expression, but of social stasis.²⁰

Not only is competition not playful in its institutional form, but competition appears to have a structural bias against Play. Competition requires instrumental goals for its existence and motivating force (run faster *than* him, jump higher *than* her, etc.), whereas Play reflects an autotelic motivation.

Others have argued that competition, if not playful, has many other advantages, including exercise, teamwork, zest, pushing oneself, strategy, total involvement, existential affirmation (the idea that competition allows one to feel perfection, assert personal freedom, and cheat death), and the thrill of victory.²¹ In all cases but the last, none actually requires competition for their fulfillment; being challenged is not co-extensive with being in

²⁰ Quoted by Kohn, *No Contest*, 85.

²¹ Kohn, *No Contest*, 87-8.

competition. Furthermore, to justify competition in one of these ways (exercise, teamwork, etc.) needs a further justification as to why competition is the necessary (and in some cases, the only) method considered and available for such results.

The last justification, the thrill of victory, is very problematic. It may indicate a sociopathic relationship to fellow human beings who happen to be opponents; for whom but someone psychologically immature would actually derive intrinsic enjoyment over beating someone else and forcing them to fail. Who would actually admit to such? Yet when an athlete "chokes" during competition, for example, could it not plausibly be suggested that such an experience represents some deep-seated psychological aversion to beating a fellow human?²²

However, it may be more convincingly demonstrated that the joy of sports (and competition) can trace its origins back to initial childhood experiences in the sport. At the earliest stages of learning, a child puts tremendous amounts of effort into mastering particular skills which, when accomplished, engender a great deal of satisfaction and an enjoyable sense of relief and completion. Beginning athletes go through many of these pleasurable events as they perfect their abilities. Soon, though, skills will have reached a point when improvement becomes incremental and more difficult as obstacles become less and less challenging. The formerly reliable source of gratification dries up. Only two sources of gratification remain — working with someone to overcome bigger obstacles, or against someone as the obstacle itself. Since there are few arenas for achievement incorporating the former choice, the latter is almost invariably chosen, by default.

Right from the outset, then, over half of the competitors will inevitably leave the sport; the half consisting of the losers who no longer find gratification because accomplishment is thwarted. The competitive effect may explain why nearly ninety percent of children who

²² And is it not, therefore, the psychologists job to help the athlete overcome this "moral" restraint — to make beating a fellow human acceptable and proper, if not necessary?

started playing organized sports in elementary school stop playing by the end of high school. On the same token, it may also explain why competition is so pervasive. After all, pleasure is addictive; and the pleasure of winning is surely to be addictive as well.²³ Hoards of people compete in hopes of a quick fix and, as Percey described, a brief respite from the drudgery of continuous training. Enjoyment comes from the pleasurable accomplishment in beating someone else. Competition, in the end, has a structural imperative to instill in participants a hedonistic passion for domination. Those who do succeed, furthermore, see no reason to discourage others from competing, erroneously claiming it is the competing and not the domination which is pleasurable. More than likely, successful competitors need a continuous supply of potential losers from which gratification can be gleaned.

- 4) The notion that competition builds character (good character is the assumption) is a recent development in the justification of competition, having its origins beginning in the 1850s, and linked to sports participation by the 1920s. During the exponentially dramatic industrializing of America at the turn of the nineteenth century, technological changes and industrial demands resulted in large-scale and sometimes violent social unrest. The conservative ranks of government, many having absorbed the ideological power of social Darwinism, pressured educators to stabilize and counter progressive notions of educational and social reform with a new methodology — one which initially supported social Darwinist views.²⁴ High school sports quickly came into being as this stabilizer. Andrew Miracle and C. Roger Rees write in *Lessons of the Locker Room* (1994), "The growth of sport ... was part of a process of 'inventing traditions' that gave stability to

²³ The pleasure of cooperation might be found to be equally addictive, if it were not for the competitive ideology resistant to cooperation.

²⁴ Social Darwinism, of course, argued that the successful competitor already possessed the proper character. That's why he (and rarely she) was successful. But it was only a matter of careful manipulation and the slow evolution from the hard line social Darwinism to a more socially amenable form to re-configure the necessary justifications.

society and helped make the existing power relations legitimate in a time of unprecedented political and social change."²⁵ In other words, sport mimicked a political hierarchy that required social legitimation while conditioning athletes to the demands of working within such a hierarchy.

Miracle and Rees's work directly addresses the contention that sports builds character. Granted, assessing character development is much harder to quantify; however, basic anecdotal evidence seems to indicate the utter nonsense of such beliefs. We often hear of athletes, elites as well as novices, engaged in morally reprehensible activities (rape, drugs and firearms), NCAA or other regulating-body violations, and violence on and off the playing field. To even consider the position that sports develops morally upstanding citizens ignores reality. Miracle and Rees, after extensive research, came to the same conclusion:

Sport does not build character, at least not in the way many Americans assume that it does. Overall, sport does not promote substantial educational or socioeconomic attainment. High school sport does not reduce delinquency or racial prejudice. Moreover, during the course of an individual's life, high school sport does not promote social success or health. In short, there is no statistically measurable positive long-term benefit for those who played high school sports when compared with those who did not participate.²⁶

So why are competitive sports encouraged by the community, political leaders, educators, etc? The sociologists speculated:

Victory by our high school team makes us feel good. Moreover, we believe that it correctly demonstrates that we are worthy. Therefore we can be justifiably proud of our accomplishment, of our abilities as fans and spectators.... It is not surprising, then, that communities are less interested in what high school sport does for the participants and more interested in what it does for the fans. A dozen of so young athletes can make thousands of fans feel good about themselves and their community. Lest anyone question the use of young gladiators for this purpose, there are always principals and coaches and a few former hero-players to remind everyone that sports are good for the athletes because "sport builds character."²⁷

One might raise the issue that Miracle and Rees throughout their research are referring to *organized* competition. Perhaps the institutionalization of sport and competition in

²⁵ Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 36.

²⁶ Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 202.

²⁷ Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 158. Notice the statement that sport "correctly demonstrates that we are worthy" is an exemplification of residual social Darwinism.

general is at fault, and that unorganized competition is somehow healthier and could improve character? But the odd part about this argument is that it overlooks the fact that organized competition was put in place to explicitly *prevent* rampant competition; and it does so because competition is too rapacious to leave unrestrained. Anti-trust laws, consumer rights litigation, market checks and balances, as well as the notion of sportsmanship, all arose to keep competition under control. Sports alone have undergone countless reforms to purge the excesses from competition (with arguably little success). So the idea that unorganized competition is somehow more beneficial than organized is a simplistic search for a bright side in a very dark issue.

In any case, despite some sobering accusations by Miracle and Rees, they too succumbed to the myths of competition — a bias reflected in their interpretation of a classic study in competition and cooperation. The study²⁸ reported the results of an experiment in which boys were divided into two groups (in a camp setting) and allowed to interact:

They noticed that the main form of interaction, competitive sports, led to great intergroup conflict and hostility that transferred from the sport field to other situations in which the groups interacted. There were food fights and incidents of symbolic violence such as night raids on the other group's cabin and setting fire to the other group's flag.²⁹

Not only should it be emphasized that these boys were involved in sport "organized" by themselves with minimal adult supervision, but one of the most interesting aspects of the study was when the researchers "had to design special events that required the two groups to cooperate in order to achieve a goal that both groups valued before order could be restored."³⁰

If cooperative activities can successfully mitigate the antagonisms of intergroup conflict, then it seems obvious that the goal of any activity ought to be cooperative, especially if one wishes to reduce tensions between rival gangs, schools, communities, or

²⁸ Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn W. Sherif, *The Robber's Cave Experiment: Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press), 1961.

²⁹ Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 89.

³⁰ Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 89.

other such antagonists. This lesson ought to have been very clear. Miracle and Rees don't even pose the possibility. Instead they determined that the study had "important implications for how sport and other competitive activities might be structured so that competition does not get out of hand."³¹ Again, we have another instance where competitive sports need to be further organized to reduce their ill-effects. No mention is given to the implication that competitive sports may not be appropriate at all in certain environments. Nor is the possibility that competitive activities are the wrong activities to begin with ever considered. Miracle and Rees even go so far as to use another myth of competition, justifying sport as an "opportunity for [individuals] to experience the joy of competition and cooperation within the boundaries of the athletic field or gymnasium."³² As mentioned above, the idea that competition is fun is, at the very least, a dubious benefit to consider. Anyone who enjoys beating someone else, and causing them to fail, ought to reconsider how they rationally conceive fun and games.

Because of these comments, the book's message contains a subtle underlying bias in favor of competitive sports (despite the research). Sports are acceptable if they are restructured to be less "win" oriented and more "play fair" oriented — standard reformism. Miracle and Rees find it very hard to give up the idea of competition in this light:

Even the negative position that involvement in sport retards moral growth holds hope for the potential of sport to be a positive force in high school. If "antisocial" lessons are being learned through sport, then perhaps positive ones are possible.³³

This seems plausible, although counter-intuitive based on their research, and it also assumes that a positive aspect is possible. One might reasonably suggest that if there were positive benefits to sport, we would have seen them by now. Unfortunately this potential is a chimera because sport is incapable of reducing the element of competition (since sport requires competition). Only by transforming sport into its more flexible origin (as game)

³¹ Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 89.

³² Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 228.

³³ Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 97.

would a first step towards reform be of any value; for whereas sport is intrinsically competitive, a game can be either competitive, non-competitive, or cooperative.³⁴ In this scenario, administrators would be forced to relinquish autocratic control of the organization and allow the players to adapt and change rules of the game to match varying situations. Each event would be structured differently, perhaps even under a completely different set of rules. Interscholastic sports would not exist on the same level as today. Leagues would be abolished and records will be forgotten as meaningless. Games would live only for the moment.

The authors do mention possible reforms for school athletics, all of which have been put into practice elsewhere. Two of them I mentioned above: 1) A re-ordering of priorities, in order to a) lower the emphasis on winning (with emphasis placed on process rather than product), and b) place decision making in hands of participants and out of the hands of adults (decentralize leadership); and 2) a move away from "Sport" to "Game." Other reforms include:

- Schools without sports;
- Sports without schools (in other words, community-operated sporting events);
- Move to physical education for many, rather than athletics for a few which supports the existence of an elitism among athletes;
- A symbol of community cooperation rather than conflict. In this case, Miracle and Rees offer an unfortunate and unusually myopic approach. If the researchers can claim that "activities which require the cooperation of competing groups help to reduce tension,"³⁵ then it seems incomprehensible that they would not suggest cooperative games as the inevitable (or at least a viable) solution to intergroup conflict. By insisting upon sport after all the rhetoric reflects an unmistakable bias for sport that is more custom than justification.

³⁴ William Morgan proposes this option in his work *Leftist Theories of Sport*, although he resists the idea of calling his revised version of sport "games."

³⁵ Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 217.

The authors even suggest that team members be taken in by the opposing team's players and their families to stimulate multicultural learning experiences. The question I pose is, "Why is sport necessary for this to happen?" If multiculturalism is taken to be the real justification of a sporting activity, get rid of sport and just do the multicultural learning. Miracle/Rees further claim, with no elaboration, that they do see some value in sport. To someone who is sympathetic to competitive sports, that person may nod their head in thoughtful agreement; but for critics of sport, what these values are remain enigmatic.

* * *

MCMURTRY AND "FREE HOCKEY"

The notion that unorganized sport is better than organized is a powerful idea and not one which should be quickly dismissed. It is this idea which inspired the Canadian philosopher John McMurtry³⁶ to write the essay, "How Competition Goes Wrong." In it, he claims that the idealized version of sport (or game, as I would prefer to call it) already exists in the form of "free hockey," from which lessons can be drawn for other games, and competition in general.

McMurtry begins his discussion presupposing that competition is, and always has been, a basic structure of human existence and life in general. Contradictions and confusions arise throughout the literature, however, because of the resulting polarization of arguments — that competition is either good or bad.³⁷ Taking sides on the issues, therefore, promotes a failure to see that there are actually *two* basic types of competition, what McMurtry calls the dominant model, which is reflective of sport that has been

³⁶ McMurtry is author of the book *Understanding War* (University of Toronto, 1989) and other works dealing with social philosophy.

³⁷ McMurtry takes Alfie Kohn to task for doing just that — claiming that there is no form of competition that offers any good to the individual.

commercialized and institutionalized (professional and college sports), and the alternative model — a grassroots, sandlot-style activity.

He breaks down the dominant model of competition by describing four different and basic characteristics of its underlying structure:

- 1) *Strict Restriction of Participation*, where only a tiny set of players are selected based on playing ability and other qualifications at this elite level;
- 2) *Rigid Team Segregation*, where members of a team can only support the values and desires of the team to which they belong, being taboo to openly approve of the play or values of the opposing team;
- 3) *Authoritarian Control by External Officials and Liquidation of Moral Autonomy*, where athletes are subservient to the decision-makers of the team (coaches, managers, administrators) and any indiscretion is quickly punished and the athlete herded back into conformity. This leads to a collapse of moral autonomy; the athletes need only do what they are told to do;
- 4) *Head-to-Toe Body-armouring, Mechanical Routine, Regimented Division of Labour and Reduction of Play to Execution of Externally Prescribed Function*, otherwise known as the rationalization of the athlete,³⁸ where every task or training program is put to the most calculatable precision and nothing is left to chance. The athletic mind is trained (as much as it can be) to react, not to think.

The greatest problem occurs when these professional "methods" of sports competition inexorably infiltrate into lower and lower levels of play, and into younger and younger players. It is at this point when the extremes of sport are most noticeably felt; when the majority of children are no longer participating but watching a select group of elite peers, when youthful athletes learn to alienate themselves from opponents and rationalize their moral thinking, when they mimic the violence and aggressiveness expressed by the

³⁸ Recall Bero Rigauer's *Sport and Work*.

professionals, and in general are "afflicted with the perversions endemic to the prevailing model of competition."³⁹ This list of problems embedded with morally questionable results has no easy solution, but McMurtry wants to claim something even more significant:

The never-ending inquiries and failed solutions to the various pathologies which bedevil this dominant model of competition reveal a hard fact. *They seem incapable of being resolved within the dominant model. For there is a law-like quality to their occurrence. They arise whenever pay-offs external to the activity itself are conferred on one party at the expense of others.*⁴⁰

This is what McMurtry labels "the inner logic of the dominant model of competition" — when there are pay-offs external to the activity itself ("not an internal constituent of the activity"), and that these pay-offs "persist beyond the activity to social life outside the game."⁴¹ These pay-offs are to be only those which are attained at the exclusion of the opponent, as opposed to mutual pay-offs like exercise in which all participants benefit. It is the external, singularly exclusive pay-off — a principle which is applicable to all competitive activities — which generates the dominant competitive mentality. In fact,

the probability and intensity of individual and organizational pathologies increase in direct proportion to the extent to which the goal of competitive activity is pay-offs external to the activity itself which are conferred on one party at the expense of others.⁴²

In his criticism of the dominant model of competition, the excesses he describes are due to the insatiable quest for external goals, rewards, and satisfactions. The external pay-offs that are of a concern for us, McMurtry clarifies, are those "which can only be won by one party at the loss of others."⁴³

"This is where the trouble begins," warns McMurtry. "It is the combination of the pay-offs being external to the game and their being appropriated by one side through

³⁹ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 204.

⁴⁰ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 204. McMurtry's emphasis.

⁴¹ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 204.

⁴² McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 206.

⁴³ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 204. There are mutual external pay-offs, like lower risk of heart disease due to the exercise from the activity which all parties can receive, but these are not where the problems occur.

dispossession of others, that lies at the basis of competition's well-known pathologies."⁴⁴ The underlying problem, as McMurtry sees it, is not that competition is inherently pathological, but only the dominant model of competition itself — the one constructed and regulated by social forces rigidly concerned about the acquisition of external gains. Once these pay-off are set up, then players are more occupied — "alienated from the game" — with the win/loss outcome which entitles the victor to the laurels, rather than the activity itself:

It is in direct correspondence to these imposed conflicts of interest that the interminable problems of competition occur — deliberate injuring, covert violation of rules, dictatorial coaching, sexism, fear of participation, and so on. Reflection reveals that it is only so far as it maximizes the chances of winning, or not losing, that any of these destructive options is rational. Take away the external stakes that have nothing to do with the *action of the game itself* and these persistent pathologies of competition do not occur.⁴⁵

At this point, McMurtry moves onward to the second, alternative, "non-pathological" form of competition. Its paradigm version is what McMurtry calls "free hockey," although it may be more familiar to us as a simple "pick-up" game. "It is competition ... free of competition's contradictions."⁴⁶

All this, however, remains to be seen, which is why McMurtry's description of this "free hockey" paradigm, where there are no external rewards connected with the play of the game, is so tantalizing. Nor does it need external pay-offs to motivate play — "the overcoming of limiting conditions for its own sake" is all that is necessary. Competition for its own sake.

The usual protocol of this new paradigm demands that teams be made up of equal strengths, to maximize the competitive balance and challenge. Where chance selection fails to assure evenness, switches are quickly made. If there are more than the maximum number of players per side, players select themselves to the sidelines to await their turn; reminders often follow someone who abuses the playing privilege at the expense of a bench

⁴⁴ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 204-5.

⁴⁵ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 205. McMurtry's emphasis.

⁴⁶ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 206.

warmer. Fights, when they seldom arise, are subdued with a collective admonition, and any necessary judgments are collectively determined. Intentional rules violations, other than for fun, are disdained:

Since ... there are no extrinsic pay-offs to motivate domination, it is the competing in itself that counts, the *overcoming of limited conditions for its own sake*. Scores are made, but not kept. Success is never converted into pay-off or loss external to the game. Because good plays by one side do not harm or promise to harm the opponent, they can be experienced impartially, and therefore fully. The frustration or anger that does occur is usually at oneself for falling short of one's projected performance. In this way, the edge of competition is made to cut only on the plane of 'competing against oneself': for which the opponent is an *ally* in providing the necessary occasion for test, not an *enemy* against access to valued pay-offs external to the game.⁴⁷

To conclude, he diagrams the differences between the two types of competition (see Diagram 1).⁴⁸

	Commercial Hockey	Free Hockey
Purpose	To win	To play
Strategy	Dominate opposition	Keep sides even
Selection	Cuts and elimination to victorious elite	Chance division and universal participation
Teams	Closed squad/segregated team structure	Open unit/community identification
Organization	Hierarchical command and external enforcement	Self-regulations and community norms
Methods of development	Body mechanics, division of labour, drill training practice	Natural movement, flexible all-round function, play practice
Rewards	External to game, at loser's expense	Internal to play, at no-one's expense
Problems	Violence, cheating, authoritarianism, drug use, mass non-participation	No persisting problems

Diagram 1

McMurtry, in dealing with the idealized versions of sport, rejects the insistence on winning as an important motivator and indicator of achievement and excellence in

⁴⁷ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 207. McMurtry's emphasis. The goal of the contest is surprisingly similar to Simon's "mutual quest for excellence" (Chapter 5).

⁴⁸ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 208.

competitive activities.⁴⁹ One overcomes limiting conditions "for its own sake." Surpassing obstacles is motivation enough. Winning is unnecessary. External motivations that arise from winning is at root the very problem that McMurtry wishes to avoid. Even winning itself could be construed as an external reward of competition. Thus, McMurtry is clearly shunning professional sports or any kind of "pay-off" related competition. He remarks further that free hockey is the type of game that even the best professional players prefer — hardly a ringing endorsement for professionalism.

Free Hockey, and those of its kind, is perhaps as close to the ideal version of sport we can ever actualize — at least according to McMurtry. And I feel sympathetic to the cause of reducing the emphasis on winning and increasing the emphasis on the play element. Furthermore, his utopic description is indeed alluring, almost enough for us to concede to his argument; but I am still uncomfortable with his interpretation, and in his observation that since the rewards are internal to the play, they are at "no-one's expense."

Before examining McMurtry's "Free Hockey" paradigm, however, it would be helpful to see whence he derived the idea that the problem with the debate on competition is that it has become polarized. He tries to bolster this thesis by laying out five "contradictory" disagreements at the core of the debate over competition supposedly indicating two distinct types of competition being debated, each side latching on to one version. But there are problems with each, as I will describe.

- *Contradiction 1.* On the one hand, it is held that competition *promotes excellence*, stimulating participants into better and better performances by their trying to surpass each other. On the other hand, it is held that competition *encourages apathy and mediocrity* by the fear of failure it generates, which keeps people from participating, or doing as well as they can.⁵⁰

As much of the preceding chapters have already pointed out, competition does not promote excellence. Quite the contrary, competition reduces the quality of performance. When concern about victory and the opponent interferes with the performance of the task,

⁴⁹ Simon (Chapter 5), however, thinks that winning is a essential motivator for competition.

⁵⁰ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 202. The other contradictions are also on Page 202.

such a reduction of quality is inevitable. Remember also that these performances are not the best performances possible; they are only the best *under the conditions imposed by the demands of competition*. Therefore, the contradiction in this case, though certainly generating much print, is a mythical one created by the juxtaposition of a "common sense" position bred by a social inculturation into the competitive ethic against sociological and psychological data. The former is asserted; the latter is demonstrated.

- *Contradiction 2.* On the one hand, it is claimed that competition *promotes socialization and moral development* by lessons of fairness and co-operation it teaches in situations of conflict and stress. On the other hand, it is claimed that competition *promotes systematic selfishness and moral insensitivity* by its overriding requirement to seek to win at others' cost.

Competition does not promote socialization and moral development; we learned that much from Miracle and Rees's work. Lessons of fairness, if they are taught at all, are only as a result of the concept of sportsmanship *added* to competition. But for that matter, moral lessons, like sportsmanship, can be added to any activity, even murder; yet murder can hardly be justified simply because the victim was given a sporting chance. Fairness and cooperation are not elemental to competition; added after the fact, they merely curb the competitive excesses which are inherent in the nature of competition.

- *Contradiction 3.* On the one hand, competition is commended as a structure of *equal opportunity for all* where no-one is allowed a special advantage. On the other hand, competition is condemned as a structure of eliminative selection that ultimately leads to *monopoly by a dominant elite*.

Granted, in the simplest way expressible, everyone can compete if they wish. Being "allowed to compete," however, is surely not the equal opportunity to which McMurtry and others are referring, though it is the only thing that can reasonable be suggested. A more apt and more realistic description would be what has been termed the "competitive equality of opportunity" by Lloyd Thomas. Competitive equality of opportunity is "the opportunity to compete, which each can have if he chooses, and not the opportunity to enjoy that which is competed for,"⁵¹ which equal opportunity seems to imply. Opportunity for a meaningful

⁵¹ Lloyd Thomas, "Competitive Equality of Opportunity," 392.

life, for instance, is not the same as an opportunity to compete for a meaningful life. For this, competition will always prevent some from ever having any chance for a meaningful life. So while the competitive equality of opportunity allows everyone equal opportunity to compete, it does not demand or require that everyone compete equally, nor does it permit everyone equal opportunity or even access to the results and rewards of competition. William Ryan ridicules the apparent absurdity with the dominant view of "equal opportunity:"

Does equal opportunity ... always dictate individual competition and unequal outcomes, winners and losers? Following this model, would we insist that we can be absolutely certain that we have equal opportunity to obtain knowledge when we can be satisfactorily assured that only a few are learned and most are ignorant? And if we seek to reduce ignorance, will we be accused of demanding "equality of results" and imperiling the cherished rule of "equal opportunity?" It's really an odd way of looking at life and our relationships with other human beings.⁵²

Furthermore, the idea that no one in a game setting has a special advantage over another is nonsense. People bring into the competitive arena abilities and capabilities which may or may not be equal to their opponent. If the competition is not among equals and these inequalities are not accounted for with certain handicaps, no matter how the competitive framework is arranged equality of opportunity is merely a pipe dream.

Battle between unequals is always possible and perhaps unavoidable with competition. In fact, this problem with competition emphasizes its inherent absurdity — the fact that competition is self-destructive. As argued in previous chapters, the point of any competitive event is to defeat the competition. Eventually, one competitor will rise to the top and defeat all other competitors. In the end then, the unrestrained pursuit of competition leads to a virtual absence of competitors — thus, an absence of competition. This is what almost happened with the coalescing of the great trusts into monopolies during the late nineteenth century. If it weren't for popular outrage prodding the otherwise *laissez-faire* courts and federal government to step in and forcibly break up monopolies, competition would have soon become a thing of the past.

⁵² Ryan, *Equality*, 29.

On the other hand, competition may soon be a thing of the past in our corporate world anyway. With over 70 percent of industry output in the country being controlled by a few giant multinationals, monopolies are just going under a different name nowadays. For that matter, competition may not even exist between supposed competitors. Compare this paragraph by the economist Heilbroner, written in 1961, with contemporary conditions:

Before a Senate Investigating Committee in 1958 ... it was made pretty clear that "competition," in the lexicon of large enterprise, largely meant tempting customers away from rivals by product "differentiation" or by fancy service or better advertising or more enticing corporate images. This new definition of competition ... no longer gave [the consumer] a mechanism which automatically operated to push *prices* down to the lowest level compatible with costs of production. Indeed sometimes the new "competition" seemed to ensure that the customer paid not the lowest but the highest possible price. In 1957, for example, the Ford Motor Company announced new car prices up some 2.9 per cent over the previous year. Two weeks later General Motors published a price list which was up an average of 6.1 per cent. Whereupon the Ford Company quickly revised its prices *upward* in order (as a company spokesman explained) "to meet competition."⁵³

Or this 1977 statement by Robert Pitofsky, former head of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection: "In markets where product claims are viewed with utter suspicion, high price is adopted as an indication of quality, and price competition and product improvement become economically irrational."⁵⁴

As is occurring today, the idea of "competition" when used in phrases like, "competitive pricing" in commercial advertisements and "competitive benefits" in employment ads, merely indicates that the benefits or prices are the same as everyone else's. The meaning of competition is slowly evolving to mean "equal," which is not too far off from becoming "equitable."

• *Contradiction 4.* On the one hand, it is believed that competition *encourages diversity* by its play of opposing forces in creative contention. On the other hand it is held that competition by its nature *imposes uniformity* by the sameness of conditions, standards, means and goals it requires.

⁵³ Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 268-9.

⁵⁴ Crossen, *Tainted Truth*, 73. Crossen argues that this 'utter suspicion' arises from "deceptive advertising [that] can so taint information that people stop considering a product's qualities altogether." Consequently, by giving consumers no useful information, manufacturers compete more effectively and more efficiently.

Personally, I can't see how competition could lead to any type of real diversity. Even if we do not initially agree that competition is suspiciously becoming to mean "similarity," suppose for a moment that two individuals of different nationalities and cultures and educational backgrounds were asked to compete for the best short story or for the best architectural design, or whatever. The fact that a competition has been introduced means that there must be some criteria for judging and evaluating the submissions, and it is hard to imagine how creativity can be openly expressed and encouraged if artists must restrict their work to proscribed limitations. What is instead important is whether or not the submission matches the criteria for determining the winner. If an artist is concerned about winning, he or she will attempt to match his or her work with the norms of judgment. If all competitors do this — creating to criteria rather than for art's sake — then all submissions will invariably look quite similar to one another. Competition requires that activities be performed in the same fashion by competitors who are pursuing the same goals while thinking the same thoughts. The more similar the fashion, the easier it is to quantify results.⁵⁵ After all, apples cannot be entered into an event judging the best orange, no matter how delicious the apple may be.

Creativity is hard to assess, and independent thinking is difficult to control. All too often we hear horror stories of individuals thinking creatively only to be disciplined for stepping out of standard methods of evaluation and expected social norms. The message people receive from this type of reactionary behavior is that, as Christina Bicchieri (and others) have pointed out, conformity is the rational thing to do since nobody willfully attracts discredit or punishment.

⁵⁵ Which is one reason why some schools are moving away from competitive grading practices — away from the old methodology where the key to effective grading is to assure the clone-like preparation of students — and towards a more healthful cooperative learning environment where students learn at their own pace based on their individual intellectual inclination. As a sideline, it is a poorly-known statistic that once standardized national testing began widely being used for college admissions, test scores started dropping. The more testing that was performed, the more the scores dropped.

• *Contradiction 5.* On the one hand, it is supposed that competition provides the *acid test of achievement* in the crucible of trial against others. On the other hand, it is claimed that competition produces *distorted and misleading results* by the rule-bending, cheating, intimidation and so on it enjoins by its imperative of victory before all else.

Only if achievement is linked to competition, where success is gained by someone else's failure, does it become an acid test. But it is a corrosive acid, one which discourages and destroys many in its wake. There is also a subtle innuendo within this statement. Those who don't wish to take part in this acid test are out of the running for true achievement and considered somehow inferior. Social stigmas attach themselves upon people who opt out and choose not to be a part of competitive arrangements. Alfie Kohn describes the affliction of "cooperativism:"

One way a competitive culture deals with those who find competition unpleasant ... is to accuse them of being "afraid of losing." This language typically is used for purposes of derogation rather than explanation. The people who use such language often imply that fear is the *only* reason competition is opposed ... This is really a fancy version of taunting one's playmates by calling them chicken. It impugns the courage of critics — and perhaps their manliness, too, if one reads between the lines. But it is also a clever rhetorical move: it counterposes those who can offer reasons for their advocacy of competition with those who oppose it sheerly because of their emotional state. Furthermore, those who refer to a "fear of losing" mean to imply that this is a shameful reason for avoiding competition or for allowing it to adversely affect one's performance. Many support a system that elicits such fear, saying, in effect, "Let the losers drop out if they can't take the pressure."⁵⁶

The acid test has less of achievement about it and more of indoctrination. Competition is used to engender "jingoist and chauvinist attitudes;"⁵⁷ to determine who is 'one of us' and who isn't; those who believe in the down-to-earth conservatism of competition, and those who 'wimp out;' who can be trusted to maintain the competitive lifestyle, and who will be eyed suspiciously as a threat to an 'American way of life.'

⁵⁶ Kohn, *No Contest*, 64. One of two things is clear: that competition is for a small elite (only those who can stand it), or that competition creates a small elite — an elite which finds nothing wrong in casting aspersions at those who find competition repugnant.

It has been suggested that if competition were really as beneficial as people make it out to be, there shouldn't be so much effort spent in arguing for competition, or in insults flung at cooperativists. To paraphrase Hamlet, "Competition doth protest too much." Perhaps those who support competition need to hide their insecurities and inadequacies by vocalizing more vociferously than is necessary. That itself may indicate an embarrassing chink in competition's armor. Or, as mentioned, the competitive ideology could just be trying to eliminate other competing ideologies.

⁵⁷ Chomsky, *Secrets, Lies, and Democracy*, 52.

What should now be clear to us is that McMurtry, despite his insistence, is not arguing from a truly balanced perspective for at least two reasons. First, he candidly admits his personal bias that competition is "an immutable structure of our existence" and that "we are all competitors in the game of life."⁵⁸ As we saw in the first chapter, competition does exist in the world but is not a necessary ingredient of human *social* arrangements, nor is there any natural imperative that competitive frameworks must have arisen the way they have. McMurtry's underlying conception of society already precludes the mental possibility of eliminating competition from social constructions, especially sports and games.

Second, the contradictions themselves are deceptive because he places assertion and belief on the same footing against that which has been demonstrated in the social-psychological literature. The *ad hominem* attacks against cooperativists Kohn spoke of above is fairly factually substantive. Isn't it unusual, someone might remark, that supporters of competition rarely use actual psychological or sociological data to boost their case. Often they resort to name-dropping, i.e., quoting a well-known personality saying what is generally believed to be the case; or more often, they simply trot out the traditional arguments grounded on nothing more than socially constructed "common sense."⁵⁹ Granted, there is a polarization, but since unsubstantiated theories are given equal weight to those that are substantiated, it is a polarization of ephemeral origins. So even as McMurtry dismisses Alfie Kohn and others⁶⁰ for not perceiving the contradictory nature of the arguments (in a sense playing a part in the polarization process), McMurtry inexplicably overlooks that one side of the argument has hardly any justificatory support in the research. Consequently, the contradictions are ungrounded.

⁵⁸ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 201.

⁵⁹ Recently, it has moved to the realm of definitional manipulation, trying to define away the problems of competition. See below for McMurtry's and Simon's attempt to redefine competition as cooperation.

⁶⁰ *Fighting for Life* (1981) by Walter Ong, in particular.

What McMurtry also wants the reader to consider is that competition itself that is not at fault — thus the contradictions — but rather the often flawed and distorted social and cultural constructions based on competition. For if we remove the contradictions from study and claim absolutely that competition itself is harmful, McMurtry can still point to his paradigm that there are two forms of competition: the dominant model, consisting of professional and highly competitive organized forms (where all the troubles arise), and the alternative model (without external pay-offs). "Look!" he could say, "To those who said it couldn't be done, I have something here which exists in spite of all the research and literature to the contrary.⁶¹ And it is the young who have defied the nay-sayers." McMurtry is quite right in asserting his case. This "utopian" reality cannot be so easily dismissed due to lack of verification. The fact that it exists seems to support all that McMurtry has previously claimed through supposition. "Common sense" has its most potent ally yet.

Having never seen this paradigm sport "free hockey" in action, I can only imagine the grand conviviality which surrounds the spectacle. His description reminds me of a sandlot baseball game or a pick-up basketball game. However, I have to also assume that all the players who partake in "free hockey" have been socialized in some way and to varying degrees into the dominant competitive ideology of institutionalized hockey and competition in general (having at least watched professional hockey), and thus indoctrinated into the assumptions that competition is healthy, builds character, etc. When one pulls back some of the overt excesses of competition, perhaps by lessening the importance of external rewards, there may no doubt be a greater amount of apparent ease and playfulness, if not simply because the children have been educated into believing so.

⁶¹ Apparently, McMurtry seems to think that the research compiled by Kohn reflects only the work using the dominant model. An examination of the research however shows a mix of goal-oriented competition and situational competition.

In any case, what McMurtry argues as two distinct types of competition is actually only demonstrative of what most other social reformer have insisted — a *competitive continuum*, where abuse and excesses range over a wide spectrum of socializations, external rewards, motivations, competitive environments, cultural biases, etc. McMurtry seems to imply as much when he announces his unifying principle of competition:

The probability and intensity of individual and organizational pathologies increase in direct proportion to the extent to which the goal of competitive activity is pay-offs external to the activity itself which are conferred on one party at the expense of others.⁶²

What is true about the continuum is that the further one moves from hard-nosed competition towards cooperative play, the more the game changes. There must be some sports contests in-between the extremes which are not as vicious as professional sports, but also not as pristine as "free hockey," and naturally there are. What McMurtry is examining are only the two extremes of competition.

McMurtry's implication, however, is clear enough to cause wonder. Are all the problems with competition associated solely with external pay-offs? Might not there be other problems with competition, some less visible than the more obvious manifestations that arise from the dominant model? Essentially, in the way McMurtry constructs that argument, there might as well be only two types of competition, the good form without pay-offs (free hockey) and the bad form with pay-offs (the dominant model). Certainly Alfie Kohn doesn't accept this limited understanding of the dynamics of competition when he remarked on the implicit "psychology" of competition:

"Moderate" competitiveness and "excessive" competitiveness are only quantitatively, rather than qualitatively, different; their psychological causes are identical ... The hypercompetitive person may stand out in a crowd because of the urgency of his need to be the best, but the psychological forces at work are no different from those operating in people whose level of competitiveness is judged acceptable. He is just more extreme.⁶³

In spite of McMurtry's misrepresentation of the competitive continuum, we are still left with what appears to be the ideal sport — after we've rid ourselves of professional,

⁶² McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 207.

⁶³ Kohn, *No Contest*, 104.

collegiate, and organized sports of all kinds, eliminating all the excesses and the ensuing vices; but if Alfie Kohn's interpretation of the continuum theory is correct, then even this paradigm version has faults. McMurtry could reject this hypothesis and persist that his dichotomy holds — that all sports which revolve around external rewards are inherently negative. Only those which thrive on internal rewards are acceptable, if not useful. But by doing so, McMurtry ignores the possibility that there may be internal structures to competitive games that could be unacceptable in their own right. I would also argue that, even in a game as glowingly idyllic as "free hockey," there are problems which cannot be eliminated without eliminating competition itself. In other words, there are certain questionable elements inherent in competition that cannot be exorcised simply because we dispense with external rewards. Certain internal rewards can be brutally harmful in more subtle psychological ways, despite McMurtry's unproven claim that "good plays ... do not harm or promise harm to the opponent."⁶⁴ Just because there is no scoring does not mean there is no competitive goal worth "winning":

People get beaten inside this game all the time, but as no more — and no less — than transitions of the play. Here again, possession or loss, scoring or being scored upon, have no imposed external correlatives, but are wholly internal to the game.⁶⁵

Essentially, because of his assumption that players will feel no animosity towards any other player outside the game (perhaps not even during the game), no pent-up anger at someone beating them to the puck, skating faster, making them look more unskilled in relation to fellow competitors, it seems McMurtry naïvely imagines these players as having an emotional commitment only to the game and none to the other players. This can happen, but only if one's perception of their fellow players and opponents changes when on and off the ice. McMurtry may say they are "necessary partners" or some sort of "ally" in the making of the game, but in McMurtry's game, they hardly co-exist. Opponents have

⁶⁴ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 207.

⁶⁵ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 207-8.

become merely obstacles on the psychological level, for only then will players not concern themselves with the emotional state of opponents. Obstacles will not feel humiliated when beaten. They provide moving challenges, but they will not suffer when defeated. I can't help but be reminded of my old toy hockey set, where the little metal players are moved around, passed by, and scored upon without a hint of passion.

McMurtry surely doesn't wish to go to this extreme. As he himself claims, players do feel some fun in defeating others, while the defeated inexplicably blame themselves for defeat, as if it was their fault they are inferior players. Well, why not think that? They let their teammates down, and they let themselves down. They became an "overcome" obstacle. Surely this is not conducive to building self-esteem or promoting a positive self-image. Instead, all of this more clearly indicates some sort of twisted pathology taking place. McMurtry may insist that any "frustration or anger that does occur is usually at oneself for falling short of one's projected performance."⁶⁶ Unfortunately, this "projected performance" is intimately linked to the performance of someone else. McMurtry's euphemistic representation belies the most basic premise of competition, that the determination of one's success at a task is inextricably linked to another person's failure whether or not external pay-offs are at stake. Only by forcing others to fail can one reach projected performance levels to begin with. Opponents are "in the way"; opponents are obstacles preventing players from achieving their goals in the game. Frustrated enough times, the vanquished will begin to conjure up new ways and new goals to relieve the disappointment, or just stop playing altogether.

McMurtry mentions quite explicitly, the "little wars" that occur within the game — the minor skirmishes won and lost on every play, yet his version of competition apparently denies these any relevance. However, throughout the game and all across the ice beaten opponents are strewn about frustrated and angry from failed projected performances. In

⁶⁶ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 207.

hockey, a good stick check is a victory; a well-timed pass beating the defense is a victory. At every instant of the game, success is measured in out-maneuvering, out-passing, and in every way out-playing the opponent. Even at the most basic level of competition, the better players are better for some reason, and the competitors know that. Competition on this level may not be based on the actual score, but to say these mini-victories do not count or mean anything is skirting the obvious. All result from goal-driven behavior, all involve external rewards, and all are tallied. They have to be, otherwise choosing sides that are equal would be impossible; it must be known who won these battles in the past, and who lost them.

What perpetuates the myth about "free hockey" being devoid of competitive excess is McMurtry's assertion that events which occur inside a game can be effectively abstracted from a person's life outside the game; there is "no ulterior private interest external to it that counts."⁶⁷ But surely this is an over-presumption. How does the "beating" of someone in the game *stay* in the game when that memory remains with the individual? How can "fun in the move that defeats" be fun to the defeated, enhance someone's self-esteem, or provide a positive nurturing environment for learning? Whether a score is kept or not, or whether external goals or rewards are available or not, is not what makes competition fundamentally incongruous to a well-formed psychological make-up. Moreover, if everything in internalized into the game, then alternative arguments concerning an athlete's improved self-esteem, confidence, etc., are meaningless, since (theoretically) this type of game offers nothing that will extend beyond the boundaries of the rink. Self-esteem and all the other positive and negative traits cease as soon as the skates come off. Is this truly a realistic supposition?

What is further striking, as we mull over one final aspect of McMurtry's essay, is the idea that a player is able to risk mistakes to learn in "free hockey." That may be the case if

⁶⁷ McMurtry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 208.

the player is receiving enough reinforcement from fairly regular traditional mini-victories to replace them with "hot dog" moves, moves that are more than necessary to achieve the task at hand simply in order to impress oneself and others. Less well-reinforced players will be more inclined to play it conservative. Any self-esteem they have will be aggressively protected. They are in no position to risk their status making foolish maneuvers which may cost a goal — one which may not be scored anywhere, but does count as a "defeat."

On the other hand, these kinds of "hot dog" moves are usually symptomatic of individualistic types of players — players who put the team second to their own development. In fact, only someone who thinks little of both the team and the team concept of sports would risk team ends in favor of individual goals. I sincerely doubt that most people (even McMurtry) would promote this selfish quest for individual accomplishment at the expense of the group as a desirable attribute.⁶⁸

Lastly, a side-by-side comparison of "free hockey" and commercial hockey will elicit subtle mistakes and misunderstandings. The reason is clear. If one examines McMurtry's classifications carefully, it appears that he wants to stretch the lexicographic meaning of competition to the breaking point — to the point where he is describing cooperation instead. But "free hockey" is a competitive activity, and as such, has competitive components which cannot be so easily and cavalierly argued away.

- 1) Purpose? The purpose of commercial hockey is not simply to win. McMurtry argued extensively in the essay that the excesses of hockey arise from the pursuit of

⁶⁸ However, an "objectivist ethics," one promoted by Ayn Rand and followers, would argue that a "rational selfishness" is desirable and is preferable. In fact, according to Ayn Rand, it is the "altruist morality" — the notion of self-sacrifice — that must be supplanted with a "virtue of selfishness." For it is both altruism and the hedonistic pursuit of values based on irrational desires which suppress "values required for man's survival *qua* man" [Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 31]. In a similar fashion, McMurtry's elimination of external pay-offs from the game and the suppression of emotions that one may feel towards other players in the contest reflects the single-minded individualism characteristic of Ayn Rand's heroes. In other words, and in spite of arguments that a "good foul" is not good (Fraleigh, "Why the Good Foul is Not Good"), "self-sacrifice" demonstrated in a competitive game where victory is in some way determined is actually for the sake of team (and individual) victory — a "rational selfishness." Without the conception of a "team" victory available, each individual in "free hockey" will necessarily pursue goals that will maximize their own rational selfishness.

external rewards. Thus, the achievement of external rewards is the purpose of commercial hockey. Winning may be a means to that end and may even be an external reward to some, but it isn't commercial hockey's purpose or even the basic reason why professionals play sports. Professionals play sports to earn a living; teams must also make money to survive. Winning may be important to that end, but survival through money making remains the goal. Conversely, the supposed purpose of free hockey as play is uninformative as well as mistaken, for one can still attain internal rewards in "free hockey." One naturally has to play to receive them (just as much as one has to play commercial hockey to receive external rewards), but as we have seen, internal rewards may be just as unpalatable as external. Alfie Kohn argues as much when he writes that "we do not even need to point to the trophies and the money. The very experience of having beaten someone else is extrinsic to the process."⁶⁹ It is simply a different type of reward structure. Finally, we have also seen that there is an explicit need to win smaller internal battles to engage in any competitive activity; after all, competition by definition implies winning and losing existing somewhere in the activity.

- 2) Strategy? Both versions try to dominate the opponent. One cannot have competition and not try to dominate, or control, or treat an opponent as an obstacle to be overcome. Simply because sides are evened up may make this particular mode of behavior more challenging, but it does not eliminate it. In fact, the more even the sides the greater the effort in affecting domination, thus making supremacy perhaps a more "fulfilling" experience.⁷⁰ On the other hand, what McMurtry seems to be describing is something that is determined outside the confines of the competitive sphere; making sure sides are even occurs long before the puck is dropped.

⁶⁹ Kohn, *No Contest*, 83.

⁷⁰ Delattre, "Some Reflections on Success and Failure in Competitive Athletics" (Chapter 5).

- 3) Selection? Victorious elites may be the outcome of professional sports selections, though this isn't always clear, especially when the poorest teams get the best draft picks in an attempt to create parity among teams. Also, universal participation, for that matter, is nothing new to organized youth sports where the "everyone plays" rule is currently in general use. The process differs only in how the selections are made; and even though one can argue that random selections are preferable to "choosing" teams, acknowledgement of ability is still open for ridicule or prestige. How else can free hockey teams remain equal in strength and talent?

- 4) Teams? Free hockey's "open unit" isn't as open as McMurtry would have us believe. After all, if the sides are to be even, there must be a generally similar level of ability among the players. Novices could not realistically play with advanced players. Novices would either voluntarily weed themselves out, or if they were stubborn enough to persist in playing with the "big boys," they would be asked to leave because their presence would take away from the high level of play necessary to maximize the limiting conditions to be overcome. One might suggest that novices could play with novices, etc, but that is exactly what professional teams do. They choose only among their peers as well, and leave the rest out.

- 5) Organization? Of all of McMurtry's classification, this is by far the strongest, though it is not as strong as he believes it to be. For though it must be admitted that children in unorganized settings do take more liberties with the rules and other aspects of the game than in organized venues (adjusting rules and playing conditions to the benefit of the players, for instance), self-regulations and community norms imprint themselves into the players by the witnessing of actions professionals display in the sport of hockey (which the kids must surely spectate). Certain modes of behavior and organization will be prescribed and dictated to these player/spectators — actions which may might not have existed were it not for the inculturation process.

- 6) Methods of Development? "Free hockey" is hardly void of body mechanics. I know no child who plays sports seriously who doesn't at least try to imitate the movements of the professionals. Also, the more a person plays a sport, the more the individual learns which moves defeat and which get defeated. If, as McMurtry claims, mini-defeats are part of the flow of the game, there doesn't seem to be any incentive not to try to defeat someone. One would cease playing the contest if they stop trying to succeed. Furthermore, as we have repeatedly mentioned, this internal agenda of competition interferes with self-improvement.

- 7) Rewards? Granted, "free hockey" has internal rewards, but whether or not these rewards are beneficial to the individual remains to be seen. The argument that these rewards remain within the contest and do not manifest themselves outside the rink is very problematic. The notion that these rewards are at no-one's expense is demonstrably untrue.

- 8) Problems? McMurtry claims that "free hockey" has "no persisting problems." How does he know that for a fact? As far as I know, McMurtry has yet to do a sociological study featuring psychological profiles on children who play "free hockey" to see how they respond to the game. What someone "sees" and what actually goes on are often two different things.

It ought to be clear by now that the differences between the two "types" of competition are more due to graduated differences which extend from the worst case scenario to the best possible case — a continuum. All of the above eight categories can be easily re-interpreted as part of this continuum on which we can place all competitive activities somewhere between the extremes. "Free hockey" may appear more benign, but the underlying motivations within the game are the same.

What should also be clear is McMurtry's inability to completely divorce the ills of competition from the competitive activity. Of course, such a goal was doomed to fail

considering that his thesis claimed that external goods were the cause of competition's sins. True, external rewards may exacerbate the problem or make the problem more public, but they merely magnify what is already there, especially those elements which are culturally valued — the socially defined perceived good of beating an opponent (success) and the socially defined perceived bad of losing (failure) — and which themselves cannot be removed from competition. That is why assault and battery is a crime everywhere in this country except in a 400 square foot area called a boxing ring (if not more inclusively football, ice hockey, and others). Stephen Luper-Foy was right in suggesting that the only way to remove the pestilence of competition is to remove the internal mechanism for competition — these socially defined perceptions of success and failure.⁷¹ Once rid of those, competition will no longer be necessary; for it is these perceptions which provide the lifeblood of competition.

McMurtry seems to be treating these "free hockey" game activities almost as rituals. Ritualizing does limit certain actions to certain times, and prescribes particular meanings to icons or behaviors which lose their meanings outside their sphere of influence. Consequently, McMurtry may consider the behavior involved in "free hockey" to be meaningless outside of this ritualization. However, rituals do have a tremendous amount of significance and influence outside their spheres. Religions, politics, etc, all have certain rituals (e.g., masses, elections) which transcends the spheres from which they flourish. In fact, these cultural rituals only achieve social recognition once their principles are generally accepted by the public. In other words, the Catholic Church would be powerless unless people believe in God, the Bible, Resurrection — all of which affects the individuals and their lives outside of the ritualistic mass. Politics would have no sway unless the populace believed in elections, the Constitution, representative government, and other elements that

⁷¹ Luper-Foy, "The Anatomy of Aggression" (Chapter 5).

continuously affect how people live outside of the voting booth. Sport is no different. Its rituals must also be ideologically acceptable before sport will win public support.

It is naïve, for example, to claim that sports (as a ritual turned social practice) internally produces certain virtues like sportsmanship, and doesn't produce vices, like cheating; such is patently not the case. Sport will not be left alone to run its own course as its internal logic permits, for what results from its competitive necessity is an appalling level of interpersonal and psychological violence. The fact that sportsmanship tampers with this internal logic, thus manipulating the internal goods and virtues, clearly indicates that larger social forces will not allow social practices to deviate from the specific norms of society. Thus, the concept of "socially established" activities itself is a contestable notion with ominous undertones. As the Feminist philosopher Susan Moller Okin warns us, we must be careful to ascertain to "whose" socially established activity are we referring;⁷² for Sport is socially established, and its virtues must reflect those virtues of the dominant ideological stance of the community in which the practice is allowed to operate — otherwise it would not exist, or exist only peripherally. It should come as no surprise then that the virtues produced by the social practice of sport are those which reinforce the dominant competitive values of society — competitive values which are the mainstay of the largest and most powerful determiners of social policy: Industry, Politics, and the Media.⁷³ As an example of the power of inculturized values, competitive activities (when defined by certain philosophers) can be made to exist as cooperative activities and *vice versa*, without many of us thinking twice about the contradiction of such a proposition.

⁷² Her stinging criticisms of Alastair MacIntyre are in Chapter 3, "Whose Traditions; Which Understandings," of *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (1989).

⁷³ Of course, as Herman/Chomsky have written in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), the media is the propaganda arm of wealthy corporations and government. "Objective" media is used expertly to entrench certain values into the American psyche.

Chapter 5

The Mutual Quest for Excellence

*I will not play at tug o' war.
I'd rather play at hug o' war,
Where everyone hugs
Instead of tugs,
Where everyone giggles
And rolls on the rug,
Where everyone kisses,
And everyone grins,
And everyone cuddles,
And everyone wins.*

SHEL SILVERSTEIN¹

Having examined four myths of competition — competition is instinctual, more productive, more fun, and builds character — and found them at the very least suspect, and then having examined McMurtry's view that competition is only irrational in its dominant (external rewards) form and determined that his views narrowed the possible problems with competition to only one, there is still at least one more argument that needs to be explored. In Chapter Two of his book, *Sport and Social Values*, Robert Simon grapples with the problem of justifying competition, coming to the conclusion that "competition in the context of sports is most defensible ethically when understood as a mutual quest for excellence in the face of challenge in the intelligent and directed use of athletic skill."² In doing so, Simon believes he answered the critics of competition in a decisive and unique way.

¹ Silverstein, "Hug o' War," *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, 19. Used by permission from HarperCollins Publishers.

² Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 32.

Simon begins by arguing against the idea that competition reinforces undesirable social values or, in the extreme, is inherently immoral. To advance his position, he begins by dividing the arguments into two categories: First, the examination of the good and/or bad effects of competition on the participants, society at large, or both; and second, the view that sport, by its very nature, is morally unacceptable — what Derek Meakin refers to, respectively, as the *weak* critique and the *strong* critique of competition.³

In the first part, Simon argues that it is impossible to determine what effect sports competition, learned in and through sport, has on the rest of society. He claims that it is too hard to "distinguish the effects of competition in sport upon the rest of society from the effects of competition in business, industry, science, or the academic world."⁴ Simon wants to separate himself from the ostensibly negative characteristics of contemporary competitive practices in society (the dominant form of competition as McMurtry refers to it), and pursue the position that sports competition can offer some distinct benefits in its own right. It will be easier to see this, moreover, if the assessment is limited to the effects on the participants.

Next, Simon argues that it is the *ideal* version of sport which should be examined, rather than the distorted version now in practice. In fact, if we perform a study using this distorted version as our research medium, what, if anything, do we learn about the benefits which might result from an ideal version?

Even if actual competitive practices often have bad consequences, we should not necessarily conclude that competition in sports is bad, harmful, or indefensible. Perhaps actual competitive practices depart from an ideal of athletic competition; an ideal that would not have bad consequences if it were applied in action.⁵

Simon claims there may be an ideal form of competitive sports that is morally praiseworthy provides a moral standard with which to criticize current competitive sports. Simon offers

³ Meakin, "The Moral Status of Competition," 59.

⁴ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 16.

⁵ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 17.

a possible solution to what could be desirable in the ideal version. Even though there may be many flaws with overt competition, there is at least one justification in keeping it.⁶ But before he can announce this, he needs to debunk opponents who claim that competition is inherently immoral — that selfishness and inequality are essential to competition.

To begin, Simon addresses the primary argument for selfishness — one similar to that used by cooperationists: competition is an activity where one's success is based on someone else's failure. In Simon's terms:

The goal of competition is enhancement of the position of one competitor at the expense of others. Thus, by its very nature, the goal of competition is selfish. But since selfish concern for oneself at the expense of others is immoral, it follows that competition is immoral as well.⁷

Not all aspects of sport involve competition asserts Simon. Team sports require cooperation between team members in order to successfully perform. The better they cooperate, the better they play. It is also not uncommon for other athletes to help or at least offer help to their opponents. Furthermore, there is a framework of constitutive rules by which opponents agree to abide. These rules help curb selfish excess. Of course, as Simon admits, curbing selfishness does not eliminate it. Still, Simon believes that there is something else that might be going on. People may be competing or may want to compete, not necessarily for the sake of winning or beating someone, but for reasons suggested in the essay "Some Reflections of Success and Failure in Competitive Athletics" by Edwin Delattre, "for the process of testing oneself against other athletes."⁸

Delattre believes that the high point in competitive games is not the final outcome, but the "other worldly" moments of the contest; when the game is on the line, "the spellbinding moment when the competition is most intense,"⁹ when competition is at its highest point. This is what makes sport worth playing. Thus, the goal of competitive athletics ought to be

⁶ Granted, it may be argued as to whether one justification is enough considering all the actual mischief competition causes, but I will leave that question for the time being.

⁷ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 19.

⁸ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 20.

⁹ Delattre, "Some Reflections of Success and Failure in Competitive Athletics," 272.

the player's maximal immersion in the sport, or test as Delattre prefers. This test can only be achieved with "worthy opponents":

opponents who are capable of generating with us the intensity of competition. Exclusive emphasis on winning has particularly tended to obscure the importance of the quality of the opposition and of the thrill of the competition itself. It is of the utmost importance for competitors to discover opponents whose preparation and skill are comparable to their own and who respect the game utterly.¹⁰

The beauty of competing with equally matched opponents who play hard, play by the rules, and are not obsessed with the goal of winning is that it insures an environment where "testing one's mettle" will more likely lead to an individual's self-discovery:

The claim of competitive athletics to importance rests squarely on their providing for us opportunities for self-discovery which might otherwise have been missed ... They provide opportunities for self-discovery, for concentration and intensity of involvement, for being carried away by the demands of the contest and thereby in part for being able to meet them, with a frequency seldom matched elsewhere. It is in the face of these demands and with respect to them that an athlete succeeds or fails.¹¹

Victory is not the important issue; the process of overcoming a "worthy opponent" is.¹²

Consequently, and this is the point where Simon picks up Delattre's discussion, this test — by its very nature — requires the assistance of the competitors:

This position suggests that we can view competition as significantly *cooperative* rather than as a purely selfish zero-sum game. Opponents are engaging in the *cooperative* enterprise of generating challenges against which they can test themselves.... Although one wins and one loses, each gains by facing a test that each voluntarily chooses to undertake.¹³

¹⁰ Delattre, "Some Reflections of Success and Failure in Competitive Athletics," 272.

¹¹ Delattre, "Some Reflections of Success and Failure in Competitive Athletics," 273.

¹² How this is really different from trying to achieve victory is unclear.

¹³ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 21. We will put aside the possible objections to the idea of "voluntary" undertaking, especially with respect to the use of mandatory competitive athletics in education. Delattre and Simon would, I think, argue against forced participation in athletics on the very grounds that there would be little concern for matching together worthy opponents, especially when some opponents are coerced into the test. Ideally, the individuals we are concerned with only engage in the test voluntarily.

Also unaddressed is the coercion found in professional athletics. Delattre, however, dislikes professional athletics because the determination of opponents is not in keeping with his belief that success is not based on win/loss percentages, but on the amount of immersion into the sport. The greater the immersion, the more successful the sport experience.

Educator Peter Arnold agrees that, at the very least, a good "sports' teacher's work is measured not so much by his pupils' dispassionate judgements, but rather by their attitudes and conduct as they engage in the fervor and challenge of competition" ["Competitive Sport, Winning and Education," 24]. In this case, however, competition teaches little more than how to act in a competitive situation and how to behave in a socially acceptable manner while competing. In a competitive society, this may be necessary, but the child is not given the opportunity to question the underlying assumption that either competition or a competitive society is unavoidable.

At this point, Simon pauses to address a crucial objection — that Delattre has simply tried to support competition by some verbal trick, redescribing competition to the point when it is no longer competition. For if what is important to Delattre's competition is the goal of self-discovery, then winning is no longer the motivating factor, but the achievement of personal growth. Delattre has thus replaced competition "with the goal of self development." Simon claims that Delattre's argument is not simply a case for improvement, but "improvement in meeting the challenges set by an opponent."¹⁴ Simon admits, candidly, that improvement in sport may not be of the same degree as improvement outside the sports arena, i.e., the comparison between improvement during low stress practice and high pressure games. Thus, the "mutual quest for excellence in meeting challenges" is not synonymous with self-improvement, though there are similarities.

Recognizing the cooperative elements in competition, Simon re-evaluates the argument that sports encourages selfishness. He determines that self-interested behavior is not necessarily selfish behavior. Thus, when a person engages in the mutual (voluntary) quest for excellence, the competitors know what is to be expected and winning or losing has little effect. The self-interested goal is the mutual quest, and it is a goal for both participants; it is not a scarce resource since both have access to the excellence. There is no selfishness when someone wins because winning was not the primary goal.

Simon goes on to address the second argument of the strong critique against competition: competition is inherently inequitable. "It divides us into winners and losers, successes and failures, stars and scrubs."¹⁵ To answer the argument, Simon uses a distinction formerly made by Ronald Dworkin, that "equal treatment" is not equivalent to "treatment as an equal." Simon suggests that "treatment as an equal is a more fundamental right than equal treatment. Unequal outcomes are not unjust or inequitable if they reflect or

¹⁴ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 22.

¹⁵ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 25.

are compatible with equal respect and concern for persons."¹⁶ Thus, when individuals voluntarily engage in a competitive sport, they understand that respect for the opponent consists in trying to overcome each other. Moreover, a mutual quest for excellence only requires that players simply attempt to outplay each other, not thoroughly eliminate one another.

One might argue that Simon's defence of competitive sport does not require winning at all. If the mutual quest for excellence is to "Try your best; the fun is in the trying," then winning is a superfluous entity. Why have it at all? Simon argues that this cannot be the case; winning is important, but it should not be overemphasized. For even though winning can be an unreliable sign for success,

winning and losing often will be principle indicators of success and failure. In many competitive contexts, it won't do to separate winning and losing from how well one played the game, because the outcome of the game is one important measure of how well one actually played.¹⁷

Competitive sport is a significant arena in which individuals can expand their capacities and bodily skills. The competitive pursuit of excellence demands that athletes exceed their expectations of their abilities and tax their talents to the utmost, resulting in beauty, dedication, and courage. After all, "if those things don't matter, what should?"¹⁸

In summary, competitors are engaging in a mutual quest for excellence. Competition is a cooperative endeavor to inspire and increase achievement under competitive pressures. Selfishness is a non-entity since there is no shortage of achievement that can be gained through this mutual quest; the sport no longer operates on a zero- or negative-sum philosophy. Inequitable results are acceptable (if not inevitable) as long as individuals are treated as equals, meaning that opponents respect each other and their abilities — a respect which enhances the playing experience. Winning is necessary to provide the motivation

¹⁶ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 26.

¹⁷ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 30-1.

¹⁸ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 31.

that makes this situation possible and to set some criteria to assess excellence, but winning is not the important part.

In the end, Simon has given us a way of determining whether or not what passes as competitive sports today is really an acceptable version or a horrible distortion of the ideal version. Yet there is something odd about his entire presentation — something which seems to frustrate and baffle any cooperativist argument that could be mounted against it. As Simon admits, "the [competitive] ideal provides grounds for criticizing actual behavior which deviates substantially from it,"¹⁹ but it also seems clear that Simon is only addressing competition in sport. In a strange way then, what Simon's argument may not do is provide any justification for competition that grants it *more* status than simply as an evaluative measure of competition. Whether his argument can be used to justify competition in society appears to be a completely different question, and one which he never really addresses, except at the end of his discussion. Only then does he make any allusion to competition as it may affect society at large, when he uses the conservative William Bennett's disdain for non-competitive games to make a case against non-competition:

The Team is co-ed, they have no "discrimination" and no "rules" ... [A] laughing generation playing football in bell bottom trousers ... is one of sheer aimlessness, of distraction pure and simple, doing nothing. Serious playing and watching, on the other hand, ... are rarely if ever doing nothing, for sports is a way to scorn indifference, and occasionally, indeed, one can even discern in competition those elements of grace, skill, beauty and courage that mirror the greatest affirmations of human spirit and passion.²⁰

Not truly knowing what a cooperative game is or ought to be, William Bennett's description of a non-competitive game is patently uninformed as well as insulting. Non-competitive games are not devoid of challenge. Recalling Alfie Kohn's admonition of Bennett in the previous chapter, that "competing simply means that one is working towards a goal in such a way as to prevent others from reaching *their* goals. This is one approach to

¹⁹ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 32.

²⁰ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 31-2. Quote from William Bennett, "In Defense of Sports," *Commentary*, 61:2 (1976), 70.

getting something done, but not the only one."²¹ Cooperative games can be incredibly challenging, requiring a tremendous amount of skill, beauty, dedication, excitement, mutual acceptance of rules, and practically everything else which Bennett finds so important to human existence — without the necessity of competition.²² Moreover, Simon and Delattre imply that competition is the only method available with which one can experience opportunities for self-discovery. Delattre also pointed out that sports competition offers a high frequency of these self-discovery moments. At best, however, this provides a quantitative justification for competition, not a qualitative one — something which Delattre and Simon deftly blend. It could also be argued that the great frequency of contest stimulations reduces the significance and dulls the psychological impact of the contests. The rise in increasingly dangerous extreme and sports may be a direct result of this numbing process.

It is the competitive ideology itself which seems to equate adequate, or acceptable, challenge with competition. This is reminiscent of the notion that someone must be doing something productive in order to be doing something valuable — a position explored in Chapter 3. Since it is no longer legitimate to state that cooperative games are non-productive in the sense that they aren't reaffirming or challenging, cooperative games are non-productive in the new sense of not promoting competitive values (e.g., free market). After all, non-competitive and cooperative games resist hierarchical structures, rationalization of resources, or any kind of statistical methodology. They begin and end whenever and wherever the players yearn to frolic. The game's existence and dissolution are the only boundaries to the moment of play.

²¹ Kohn, *No Contest*, 46.

²² The classic example of this type of game is tak-a-tak, in which the players spin tops through standing pegs striving to achieve by the end of the game an exact tie in pegs knocked down.

In our society, to elaborate further, adhering to the capitalist/competitive tradition may even provide us the illusion of enhanced self-esteem. Alfie Kohn makes an interesting point about this when he writes:

Such an effect [competition building self-esteem] might take place for the simple reason that living up to the norms of one's culture is rewarding. When we do what is expected of us, we feel better about ourselves, and competitiveness is expected of us in this particular society. Where competition is *not* the norm, we would expect that this effect would not exist — and we would be right."²³

Consequently, even though Simon claims (without much evidence) that the idealized sport might promote good consequences like character development,²⁴ if it is expected of us that we play the game, we will be rewarded outside the realm of the sporting field through social affirmation, whether or not competition is idealized. However, as Kohn describes, we will receive support from society only if we play the right kind of games. As for which kind of games we ought to be playing, Dan Lyons asserts in his essay "Action, Excellence, and Achievement" that achievement is linked directly to public approval²⁵ — defensible once we accept Lyons initial position that "achievement [is] not just doing something better — it [is] doing *better* things better."²⁶ The question then, of course, is who defines what those "better" things are? According to Lyons (who in turn relies on Hannah Arendt²⁷), it is the populace at large who are not only the spectators of the achievement, but also the arbiters of those things worth watching, worth celebrating.²⁸ After all, "doing trivial things obscenely well is just a rat-race."²⁹

This scenario, though, is not as simple as it first appears. If the populace grants fame and fortune to those whose achievements are deemed "worthy," then much can be gained

²³ Kohn, *No Contest*, 107.

²⁴ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 31.

²⁵ Which is a bit more explanatory than Simon's perspective when he writes simply that "what counts as significant achievement requires reference to the performance of others" [Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 23].

²⁶ Lyons, "Action, Excellence, and Achievement," 279.

²⁷ Section II, "The Public and the Private Realm," of *The Human Condition*, 22-78.

²⁸ "Fame [is] granted by the audience" [Lyons, "Action, Excellence, and Achievement," 279].

²⁹ Lyons, "Action, Excellence, and Achievement," 280.

by those who are not only accomplished in a skill but who can also convince others that this particular skill is one worth deeming worthy. Such influencing happens all the time. Advertising, oration, or peer pressure often manipulate audiences into admiring activities at which certain people are good — like sports. "In practice, democratic achievement is doing well those activities most approved, without explicit debate, by influential majorities. Some 'socially approved' employments are more equal than others."³⁰

Lyons's remarks intuit the existence of a clear hierarchy of approval within which individuals rummage around attempting to garner whatever self-esteem — which has now been socially linked to achievement — they can get. This hierarchy expands because self-esteem is a valued entity in the individualistic society we inhabit. Who one is depends greatly on how people (spectators) want someone to be, and this perpetuates a constant struggle for the artificially created scarcity of self-esteem; thus, self-esteem is commodified. Since socially approved activities are fabricated by those who can best persuade the populace into believing that certain individuals and certain activities are more "worthy" (done to justify and commodify one's own worth, self-esteem, and status), reasonable justifications as to why, for example, sport is or must be a more socially-approved activity than teaching or cleaning chimneys are lost; nor can there be any airtight arguments asserting that being an athlete is more esteemed than being a chimney sweep. It all depends on the malleable and volatile whim of the spectators.³¹

³⁰ Lyons, "Action, Excellence, and Achievement," 281. Yet as I will argue in the following chapter, influences need not have to be from the majority. More often than not, powerful political minorities seemingly set the social agenda.

³¹ Unfortunately, the stigmatizing of social roles and character traits begins early and is taught to children by even the most sincere and well-meaning of people. The children's book *I Want to be Somebody New* (Random House, 1986) by Robert Lopshire, yields to horrid stereotyping — stigmatizing obesity, being tall, and being short, as well as proffering a powerful message to succumb to peer pressure. All of which is probably to be expected. As Noam Chomsky describes in his book *Necessary Illusions*, there is little incentive or commercial advantage to print or pursue topics emphasizing or scrutinizing subject matter that puts into question the dominant social values of the society, especially those values supported and sustained by a powerful conservative elite — free markets, the concept of equal opportunity, the necessity of inequality in equality, "healthy" competition, and the need to control "excesses" of democracy. I have yet to read or hear of a single book which even attempts to do more than just inculcate youth into these social mythologies, or in any way doubts the necessity of competition, much less argues against it in

Consequently, "if we agree that we cannot settle by rational arguments which activities are better to do [since activities themselves are determined by irrational movements of community caprices], then we cannot say rationally that people who perform well at 'socially approved' activities are superior as achievers."³² Which means, if we accept as valid Alfie Kohn's assertion that competition is esteem-building only because it is socially approved, then Simon cannot claim that competitors have any rational or natural edge in achieving excellence, or even that which they are achieving is excellence. "There is no simple correlation between competitive spirit and the likelihood of true achievement."³³ It is the result of social constructions, and as such can be changed. If an when society refuses to value competition as a "worthy" means towards excellence, Simon is without an argument.

If excellence is determined by what is 'socially approved' as being an activity worthy of considering its participants excellent if they excel, then it would appear that desires for sports participation are determined by outside influences from the start, lending credence to Noam Chomsky's allusion that sports is a brand of ethnic indoctrination. In this scenario one needs to perform certain activities, like sports, to be permitted to join a certain community. The community which determines the social values of excellence validates to varying degrees this indoctrination. The more valuable the community, the more valuable becomes the association with it in terms of social status and excellence, but also the more limited the opportunities to join. As self-esteem becomes commodified, it is only a matter of time before individuals become increasingly desperate and cheat to gain advantages over opponents enhancing both one's favorable appearance and acceptability into certain

favor of cooperation. Moreover, considering publishers market children's books to parents (not children), perpetuating social values is practically assured; for parents have already been inculcated into the dominant values of society and will probably purchase books reflecting values with which parents are comfortable.

³² Lyons, "Action, Excellence, and Achievement," 283.

³³ Lyons, "Action, Excellence, and Achievement," 292.

communities.³⁴ If they can succeed through cheating and also skirt the unpleasantness of being accused a cheater, then there is no reason not to try to cheat, especially if not cheating may inhibit entrance into desirable and important social groups.³⁵

It is a vicious cycle. Everybody loves a winner. Winners are quickly brought into a wide variety of social circles, and for social animals like humans this type of success is exceedingly desirable. Individuals within communities covet sustained notoriety and so constantly pursue and mingle with more successful candidates for community membership basking in vicarious success. Levels of success are also integral to membership in different groups. This also explains why some parents unmercifully prod their children into sports. Through children, parents can either find new status or regain lost status within the community. In our society, for example, children are expected to grow out of non-competitive games like jump-rope, and grow into competitive sports, thus becoming "mature" adults (reflecting well on the parents). Social forces work hard to speed the maturation process by making competitive sports more accessible to children, through Little League baseball, Pop Warner football, organized soccer, etc., reflecting a growing need for children to be "productive" members of society. Since children have extremely limited access to employment, they play sports; and only in a competitive society can competitive sports have a "maturing" effect.

³⁴ "The child might decide he wants only to seem better, to feel better—so he cheats" [Lyons, "Action, Excellence, and Achievement," 291].

³⁵ Morality is a social entity, and the determination of moral virtues is a social determination. Being good, then, is meaningless if there's no one around to appreciate it. Appearances are everything when it comes to morality. One need only appear just and good and righteous in order to be just, good, or righteous. Whether you are or not in private means nothing, or is irrelevant according to Rorty; all that matters is how one acts in public. As Aristotle wrote: "It is the way we behave in our dealings with other people that makes us just or unjust" [*Ethics*, 92].

Also, by making the ends more difficult to attain, achievers scrambling for some kind of self-esteem utilize increasingly questionable means. This naturally leads to defensive measures by those currently in power making these new means 'crimes,' protecting one's position in the hierarchy. Never mind the possibility that many power elites garnered their superior positions from their or their political friends's use of these formerly legal means.

One might argue that Simon does deal with larger social issues when addressing cooperativist arguments and the perspectives that competition is inherently selfish and promotes inequality, but that is not really the case. Simon explicitly admits that "even if the assertion that competition is essentially selfish turns out to be justifiable when applied to society at large ... it faces special difficulties when applied to sports and athletics."³⁶ Simon explains that team sports are based as much on cooperation as competition thus making the blanket description of selfishness untenable, despite the possibility that players on a team may still think selfishly in that they only want their *own* team to win.

Although Simon's implication that team cooperation blunts the selfishness argument on this count, there is ample evidence from social and psychological studies that dispute Simon's argument. These numerous studies have demonstrated that even though intragroup cooperation enhances performance, in no case was it shown that this effect was as a result of intergroup competition. "Such competition either was irrelevant to the cooperation-generated productivity or actually diminished it."³⁷ Rather, individuals in opposing groups were viewed more negatively, intergroup competition failed to help develop feelings of acceptance within each group, and individuals tended to like each other more when cooperation did not take place in a competitive context. Lastly,

intergroup cooperation promoted more positive cross-ethnic and cross-sex relationships than did intergroup competition. These results disconfirm the position that competition among groups leads to attraction among collaborators ... and they provide some support for the position that the more pervasive the cooperation, the greater the interpersonal attraction.³⁸

³⁶ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 19.

³⁷ Kohn, *No Contest*, 152.

³⁸ Douglas Warring, David Johnson, Geoffrey Maruyama, and Roger Johnson, "Impact of Different Types of Cooperative Learning on Cross-Ethnic and Cross-Sex Relationships," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77 (1985), 58 [Quoted by Kohn, *No Contest*, 152]. Other sources include Robert Dunn and Morton Goldman, "Competition and Noncompetition in Relationship to Satisfaction and Feelings Towards Own-group and Nongroup Members," *Journal of Social Psychology*, 68 (1966): 229-311; and David Johnson, Roger Johnson, and Geoffrey Maruyama, "Interdependence and Interpersonal Attraction Among Heterogeneous Individuals: A Theoretical Formulation and a Meta-Analysis of the Research," *Review of Educational Research*, 53 (1983): 5-54.

Why this is the case is not entirely clear. Some speculate that competition cannot be so rigidly directed at only those against which one is supposed to be competing. The teaching and promoting of competition in one context often inflicts itself into other contexts.

The idea that competition is inherently inequitable is also something that Simon doesn't really dispute. Rather, Simon uses Ronald Dworkin³⁹ to try to convince the reader that inequality (including the kind that results from competition) is quite acceptable as long as people are treated well — by being treated as equals — in the process. "Unequal outcomes are not unjust or inequitable if they reflect or are compatible with equal respect and concern for persons."⁴⁰ Unequal results, therefore, are "not necessarily unjust" and are acceptable because "treatment as an equal is a more fundamental right than equal treatment."⁴¹ Why treatment as an equal is more "right" than equal treatment is never adequately justified, and is probably left for the reader to take up with Ronald Dworkin. In any case, inequality is a reasonable state of affairs in competition, and everywhere else for that matter, as long as people are treated as equals. Unfortunately, this may condone the possibility of being treated as an equal yet separately. Furthermore, as the philosopher Bernard Williams objected, 'treatment as an equal' does not correct for unequal access to this treatment. For example, when treating people as equals prior to receiving medical treatment, all individuals are expected to pay for the services of the physicians, but some may not have adequate money to pay. True, these individuals received 'treatment as equals,' but the result — the lack of medical attention for some — seems irrational.⁴² In the end, therefore, what Dworkin (and subsequently Simon) have provided us is a straightforward alternative justification *for* inequality.

³⁹ *Taking Rights Seriously* (1977).

⁴⁰ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 26.

⁴¹ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 26.

⁴² Williams, *Problems of the Self*, 240-1.

If competition produces or reinforces inequality, it can still be justified not only because the individuals in the competitive act are treated as equals, but because those who are competing presumably "prefer a life which involves competition, with the possibility of winning or losing, to a life that does not." Therefore, if these participants have made a choice to compete, participants who are "capable of forming and acting on an intelligent conception of how their lives should be lived, inequalities that arise from their decisions in athletics are presumptively fair and equitable."⁴³

To claim that individuals who compete "prefer" a life of competition, one must, by implication, admit that a choice of preferences is available to the individual. However, there are several problems that immediately spring to mind. The first, if one recalls the social respectability and expectation of competition, is that if one chooses not to compete (especially if that one is a man⁴⁴), one risks the possible stigmatization and social ostracism that comes with it, as well as suspiciously being viewed as 'less than a man.' So to assume that individuals in a competitive society can freely choose between competitive and cooperative endeavors overlooks the significant social pressures and influences imposed upon individuals making the choices. If not choosing competition will damage one's standing or personal welfare in the community, whether actual or perceived, it hardly sounds like a "free" choice to choose otherwise.

A free choice also implies that there are alternative choices from which to choose. Such a case, however, seems unrealistic when it comes to choosing a competitive lifestyle over a non-competitive one, especially when an accident of birth often makes the choice moot. It could be argued that there are many societies in the world that do not promote competition, but this seems to lead to a "love it or leave it" attitude — a jingoistic nationalism — which avoids the issue entirely. On the same token, there are many intentional communities in the

⁴³ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 28.

⁴⁴ Women, on the other hand, do not seem to suffer the same level of social ostracism because cooperation is more expected in females than males.

United States alone which promote a cooperative lifestyle, but unfortunately, that same jingoistic attitude results. Of course, the vast majority of media do nothing in enlightening the public to even the possibility that such a choice is available. Consequently, one cannot choose something that is not offered. To paraphrase Chomsky, one limit to the force of public demand for non-competitive choices is that people have no means of registering their demand for something that is not offered to them.⁴⁵

Another problem is the inclusion of children in competitive sports. How can we reasonably claim that children ought to be competing unless we admit that they are also capable of forming and acting on an intelligent conception of how their lives should be lived; but this argument is imbedded in another, more serious, argument. It could be suggested in response to a cooperativist like myself that even if the problems of competition are admitted, are we obligated to absolutely prevent people from engaging in it? Will that not be an act of paternalism, something which denies the autonomy of individual choice and action? Total restriction would seem to place the individual at the mercy of state power, and remove any sense of autonomous action. My hard position would seem to place me at odds with individual freedom. By insisting that people not only should not but cannot compete as a mandate for their own good automatically questions every person's ability to make a rational choice.

At the outset, let me unpack the argument and find out who initially can and cannot make rational choices. First, children are presumed to be unable to make completely rational choices because their age, education, and experience are limited. In this case, paternalism is an acceptable, if not morally obligated, practice. Thus if a child chooses to smoke a cigarette, it is viewed as irresponsible behavior and an adult or guardian would be

⁴⁵ Chomsky argues against the view that the population can demand programs disliked by owners of the television media due to market pressures. "One limit to the force of public demand, however, is that the millions of customers have no means of registering their demand for products that are not offered to them" [Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 339].

derelict in his/her duties not to intervene. When a child plays competitive games or sports, on the other hand, there is much less of a compulsion for intervention. Rather, parents who restrict their children from engaging in competition are considered over-reacting and overbearing.

But there is something else going on; and as we will see, there is less of a notion of paternalism in this particular case than what was once thought. On one hand, children cannot vote supposedly because they do not have the necessary experience to make rational choices to determine elected officials. Smoking is frowned upon, not only by the law, but by social standards of conduct as well; not only don't they know better, but it's unhealthy. However, competing in sport is not frowned upon by social custom unless it leads to poor sportsmanship. Up until that point, children can openly compete, and compete hard. Thus, paternalistic intervention often takes place when it involves either a social practice that is dimly viewed by the general society or a practice which requires a certain minimal level of experience and education. Sports competition is not considered a taboo social practice nor too sophisticated for children to understand.

Now this situation could arise because children's games and sports are not considered a serious social concern, and thus a child's choice is of little import and rarely questionable. On the other hand, it has often been remarked that adults take sport all too seriously, and can learn a lot about games by watching children. Competition in the business world is also taken very seriously, where a majority of all legislation deals in one way or another with correcting abuses or adjusting levels of competition to assure parity between businesses and everyday human relations.

In the end then, children are allowed to play sports because the activity is not viewed as a serious social problem. However, if the discussion presented above has at least suggested that competition is a social problem much more serious than previously considered, it may behoove us to take a greater interest in our children's well-being by

limiting or restricting their access to competition and demanding increased availability of cooperative outlets.⁴⁶ We may indeed be morally obligated to do so, even if as adults we are not required to heed the same message. Philosopher and educator Peter McIntosh himself wonders, given the state of affairs that exists which promotes and perpetuates competition in society, whether "such a society is not inevitable or necessarily desirable and that by socializing children into it we may be acquiescing in what we believe to be wrong."⁴⁷

Of course, it has been thoroughly discussed by many others that competition is not as serious as I make it out to be; that no one is being harmed by competition, at least if consenting adults are participating. The term "consenting adults," however, assumes that these individuals are rational agents, something that we cannot assume for children. Considering all the evidence demonstrating the psychologically, socially, and physically destructive components of competition — research practically all children and many adults have never heard of — it may be that we as a society are not doing enough to disseminate the information to parents and children which would make their decisions to engage in sport more rationally grounded. In essence, we assign children too much "rationality" when it comes to playing sport, depriving parents the necessary information to make rational choices regarding their child's upbringing, and leaving them to rely upon the guidance of media (which has a pecuniary interest in sport), coaches and sports organizers (who have a vested interest in sport), and community leaders little more knowledgeable of the effects of competition than the parents.

⁴⁶ In fact, cooperative versions of popular board games like Scrabble™ and Monopoly™ actually do exist, but you won't find them in any major toy store chain in the United States. Places like Discovery Zone which allow free, non-competitive play in a safe environment are expensive (when compared to competitive sports), frowned upon when children get "too old" for childish games, and few and far between.

⁴⁷ Peter McIntosh, *Fair Play*, 179.

This line of inquiry is not to make light of the tremendously difficult task of raising a child. Parents must always think of their child's future and what they learn and what they do should in some way invariably offer the child additional assistance in coping with the world, and becoming an accepted part of it. I agree with Bernard Williams when he writes:

We wish ... to bring up children to share some of these ethical, and of other cultural, conceptions, and we see the process as good not just for us but for our children, both because it is part of our conception of their well-being and also because, even by more limited conceptions of happiness or contentment, we have little reason to believe that they will be happier if excluded from the ethical institutions of society. Even if we know that there are some people who are happier, by the minimal criteria, outside those institutions, we also know that they rarely become so by being educated as outlaws. As a result of all that, we have much reason for, and little reason against, bringing up children within the ethical world we inhabit, and if we succeed they themselves will see the world from the same perspective.⁴⁸

Still, it is both frustrating and unfortunate that parents are unable to provide an alternative to competition because cooperative activities and games are practically non-existent in the United States. When the New Games philosophy ignited popularity in the middle 1970s, the cooperative games mentality soon incorporated itself into elementary school physical education curriculums. However, as free time shrank causing interest to wane, the New Games Foundation disbanded in the middle 1980s effectively silencing a major voice dedicated to cooperative games. Physical education programs for elementary children are also being eliminated due to fiscal difficulties (except for intramural and interscholastic sports), a vast majority of these cooperative opportunities (and there weren't many to begin with) have dried up. Thus, many parents have little choice but to suffer through a catch-22: either swallow their distaste with the organized teaching of competition as their child participates in sports, spelling bees, grades, etc. just to prevent their child's isolation from peers, or refuse to promote competition and perhaps see their child become a pariah in the classroom.⁴⁹ Considering the lack of cooperative facilities, and the

⁴⁸ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 48.

⁴⁹ So strong is the concern with a child's community that even home schooled students have won the right to participate in extra-curricular activities at public schools.

thoroughly ingrained "benefits" of competition, is there any wonder what a parent will, or is coerced, to choose?

Adults, whom are supposedly rational, can choose right from wrong and, therefore, ought to be permitted to make their own choices for their own actions. Unfortunately, as advertisers are well aware, individuals are also quite capable of being persuaded into believing certain things and behaving certain ways. It is not hard to imagine that individuals have, over the years, learned from others that competition is acceptable. In this case, what knowledge they possess is based on tradition, propaganda, and "common sense." The question arises then whether or not a person who makes a rational decision based on irrational, non-rational, or unreliable sources is behaving rationally or freely at all? It ought to be quite obvious that the amount of pro-competitive talk vastly overwhelms what little pro-cooperative arguments one might hear discussed in sports, business, education, etc.⁵⁰

For argument's sake, though, let us suppose that a person has adequate and proper information, yet still chooses to engage in competition. He or she rationally chooses competitive practices at a particular point, but does that itself guarantee rationality? A rational choice must include the consequences of one's actions as well. For example, a person may rationally choose to buy clothing, housewares, even a college education — all on credit — only to experience the horror of bankruptcy in the future. Therefore, choosing competition, knowing all the associated ills that grow from the practice for the possibility of achieving some dubious future benefit, is a risky procedure — perhaps even an irrational one. As Bertand Russell warned, "It is not worth while to inflict a comparatively certain present evil for the sake of a comparatively doubtful future good."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Although cooperative educationalists are on the rise.

⁵¹ Russell, "Philosophy and Politics," *Unpopular Essays*, 18.

Of course, Simon may have meant nothing of the sort when I interpreted his notion that players of competitive sports had a "choice." Whereas I originally interpreted this to mean that players had a choice between competitive and cooperative activities, Simon may simply have meant that a player may have had the choice to either play in a competitive game or not play at all. Unfortunately, this isn't very helpful either; for to play a competitive game or not hasn't yet offered the individual a cooperative alternative. It is now either competition or nothing. Play our game, or nothing at all. That doesn't sound anything like treating someone as an equal. Equal respect would supposedly demand that people who do not wish to play competitive games be given the option to play non-competitive and/or cooperative games. But as I have already detailed, that is not being done. Granted, Simon writes that while "other such frameworks exist, few are as universally accessible and involve us so fully as agents who must use their bodies to meet challenges we have chosen for ourselves."⁵² Thus, Simon never rules out the option of cooperative games; but because of his use of Bennett's statement, I can only assume Simon doesn't believe this option is either acceptable or viable. He also never considers whether competitive sports are universal because people want them, or because people have grown to desire them since they are practically all that are available. Simon clearly accepts the former. I hope I have demonstrated that the latter is equally, if not more, credible.

* * *

THE PROBLEM WITH "EXCELLENCE" AND EQUALITY

To be treated as an equal, if you will recall how Simon interprets it, is the right to be treated with the same respect or concern as anyone else, and presumably as oneself. But what if competition, despite what Simon may insist, is incapable of doing this? After all,

⁵² Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 32.

Simon has already conceded that "justified inequalities of results will emerge"⁵³ in competitive situations.

To make my position more compelling, we must understand why Simon thinks winning, even though the objective of competition is the mutual quest for excellence, cannot be eliminated. Winning is critical because the outcome of the game is an important, though not absolutely reliable, measure of how one played. Winning, or at least trying to win, is also necessary to assure that the players 'stay on task.' "It may be the competitive situation that dictates what counts as a good play."⁵⁴ What may be an aesthetically appealing play, for instance, may be unintelligible in a competitive sense if it does not increase one's probability of winning or presents the best challenge to an opponent. Only if both opponents are playing to win (and respecting the rules in the process) can they be participating in the same game.

What is most troubling is that Simon's interpretation is exceedingly equivocal about winning. Simon states that though "success and failure in competitive sports cannot be identified with winning and losing, winning and losing often will be principle indicators of success and failure."⁵⁵ One would assume that if both opponents play hard, and exert maximum efforts in trying to win fairly, then the winner can be satisfied with playing well and winning, but the loser will also be satisfied with simply playing well. Not really, since Simon says that 1) if one believes in the mutual quest for excellence, "one is committed to the view that outcomes do matter;"⁵⁶ and 2) if "one is trying to meet the challenge set by the opponent, then why shouldn't one feel disappointed in losing or elated by winning?"⁵⁷ In addition, if "the whole point of developing and testing skills is to try to meet the test set by

⁵³ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 26.

⁵⁴ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 30.

⁵⁵ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 30.

⁵⁶ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 31.

⁵⁷ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 30.

an opponent's play,"⁵⁸ then it should seem reasonable to say that winning is a significant indicator of test success, and losing is a significant indicator of test failure.

So apparently, there *is* something psychologically satisfying with winning when it is equated with success, and something psychologically disturbing with losing when equated with failure; and here is where a problem arises in Simon's "treatment as an equal" theory. If competition naturally instigates a difference in psychological states (due to either winning or losing), then the victor may not be treating the vanquished as an equal. The philosopher Stephen Luper-Foy, in his essay "The Anatomy of Aggression," asserts that to hold back something of value that is not universalizable from someone else who desires it equally as much (referred to as a "competitive property" or a "positional good"⁵⁹) — in this case, the satisfying feeling of success through victory — is not treating that person as an equal; because in losing, one suffers misfortune — a misfortune perpetrated by the act of winning. Luper-Foy describes this as a form of aggression:

Any significant steps we take in our competition constitute misfortune for the others, for substantial progress we make towards being fastest makes it significantly harder for the others to achieve something important to them, which is a misfortune for them. Hence we are aggressors ... More serious aggression is generated by competitions whose participants *want* to cause each other misfortune.⁶⁰

The notion that players are voluntarily engaged in competition does not absolve them of this aggression, either. Rather, by voluntarily competing, they implicitly admit and accept that their actions may indeed cause someone psychological distress. It could reasonably be maintained that they may *want* their opponent to experience misfortune, simply because then they themselves won't have to suffer it.

Even though Simon attempts to head-off this line of argument by claiming that the mutual quest for excellence is providing each participant what they want (a challenge to face and test themselves against), he still believes there is something essential to these external

⁵⁸ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 31.

⁵⁹ Positional goods are goods which have more value to us the less other people have them.

⁶⁰ Luper-Foy, "The Anatomy of Aggression," 215.

evaluations of the individual, evaluations which are only actually useful within a system of ranking and hierarchy. It may be claimed that a thing's goodness is its "competitive property" — if we desire something, it's good to have — but a person possesses "competitive properties" only for instrumental reasons; "positional goods" are necessary simply to enhance status and power. Luper-Foy warns us that the "possession of some [competitive] properties contributes nothing of any great importance to our lives: excelling and its kin should be considered neither intrinsically valuable nor essential to a good life."⁶¹ Luper-Foy insists that excelling is not intrinsically valuable, in the competitive sense, because competitive excellence is primarily beneficial in attaining extrinsic rewards and benefits, including money, prestige, and fame which reputedly enhances peace of mind and emotional stability, especially in as unpredictable and as unstable a society in which we live.

One may argue, as Aristotle does in his *Ethics*, that happiness cannot exist for the individual without one's comforts being first satisfied. I do not disagree. However, if a certain level of physical comforts are necessary to achieve happiness, what I object to (and Luper-Foy objects as well) are these necessary comforts to a person's happiness being manipulated into scarce positional goods so only some individuals can have them,⁶² while competition is used to separate those who receive the goods and those who don't. Moreover, the implication of Simon that some people deserve these "competitive properties" more than others — in this case, the level of psychological satisfaction from success at the very least — is an implication determined by virtue of some external evaluation extrinsic to the activity itself. The value of winning or losing is not important *to* a competitive game, but only to life *outside* the game setting.

⁶¹ Luper-Foy, "Competing for the Good Life," 167.

⁶² Aristotle confessed that his *Ethics* can never guarantee everyone happiness, even if individuals live flawlessly by the precepts of the Golden Mean. Not everyone has the means to satiate one's material needs prior to fulfilling one's intellectual needs.

Simon may insist that some people deserving and receiving certain positional goods instead of other people is not necessarily bad, especially if these individuals are treated as equals. Nor is competition bad because the mutual quest for excellence provides a method of determining who gets the goods in a relatively civilized way. Granted, if we accept this, cooperativist arguments then appear irrelevant, because Simon is dealing with a specialized interpretation of competition relating solely to the ideal view of sport. However, I will continue universalizing the argument, if only to illustrate that Simon's definition of competition is inadequate outside of sport.

With winners and losers, positional goods like psychological satisfaction are not, and cannot be, evenly attained from a mutual quest for excellence. Without psychological satisfaction, one's pursuit of happiness is hampered, while another's is supposedly enhanced. To treat someone as an equal, though, one's happiness ought not to be dependent on the unhappiness of another. If winning and losing are important indicators of how well one played, as Simon insists, then to cause someone to lose should indicate treatment not as an equal. As mentioned above, this can be construed as an act of aggression.

Furthermore, if someone states that the individual pursuit of psychological satisfaction which competition encourages does not foster or is not an example of aggression, Luper-Foy maintains that "to flourish [in the sense of garnering psychological satisfaction or some other positional good] at the expense of others ... is to treat others as a mere means,"⁶³ which also is an infringement on one's right to be treated as an equal. First of all, one would hope that people would not like to think of themselves as means to someone else's competitive properties. However, considering the amount of social pressure placed upon status and position in society, individuals seem more than willing to view friends and strangers alike as means to their competitive properties. Second, as an equal, I certainly

⁶³ Luper-Foy, "The Anatomy of Aggression," 222.

would not want to be judged, judge other people, or judge myself based on an outcome that may have little relevance to the quality of play — that is, if the mutual quest for excellence is to have any significance. In the end, according to Luper-Foy, flourishing through the accumulation of competitive goods at the expense of someone else's improvement, including the possession of psychological satisfaction, is aggression:

The pursuit of nonuniversalizable competitive goals involves people in activities which undermine the attempts of others to fulfill similar goals. Hence each of us is led to view the attempts of others to flourish — to fashion worthwhile lives for themselves — as an aggressive attack on us. And the importance we assign to flourishing leads us to return the aggression, even if we notice that doing so makes it more difficult or impossible for others to flourish. As long as we continue to assign central importance to nonuniversalizable competitive goals, the bitter struggle among us will remain.⁶⁴

If the external factors of winning and losing are minimally necessary in making excellence even in the slightest way meaningful to a satisfied or fulfilling life, we find ourselves in trouble — for the more a person slips from the possibility of having the requirements of a meaningful life satisfied, the more imminent the threat of psychological trauma. This fear alone often spurs people on to greater and greater acts of desperation searching for the elusive meaningful life. The more a person loses those attributes which are intrinsically valuable and is forced to resort to possessing competitive properties, the more the self becomes dependent upon positive external evaluations, often inflating their meanings to overcompensate for the loss. They fabricate or take on goals fabricated by someone else as necessary for a minimally worthwhile life. As Roy Baumeister and associates demonstrated, self-esteem based on inflated external factors of appraisal is unstable and most likely triggers individuals to violent retribution when they experience any appraisal which conflicts with the inflated self-image. This may explain to some degree why sports do not improve long-term self-esteem.⁶⁵ If competitive sports, including Simon's ideal version, have some link to winning and losing, then artificially enhanced and

⁶⁴ Luper-Foy, "The Anatomy of Aggression," 217.

⁶⁵ This could explain why some apologists for competition see improvements in self-esteem; they are confusing unstable short-term self-esteem with more stable long-term self-esteem.

unstable self-esteem will be an eventual result. Unless the individual has an alternative source of more realistic appraisals, any attack on a person's athletic ability will be taken as a personal affront, and any attack on their general self-esteem (since it is unstable) will result in a hyper-sensitive response to protect that which already precariously exists. Competitive sports, as well as any other competitive activity, offers to individuals a dangerous method of distorting self-esteem.

Granted, Simon rejects the over-importance assigned to the external goods of competition. However, and Simon never disagrees, a mutual quest for excellence is not the same as a mutual attainment of excellence. This distinction rests on the cherished belief of equal opportunity; yet, as should be obvious, not everyone will be rewarded though they may all be excellent — distinguished from each other by the smallest of margins or some bureaucratic detail. It is not so much the pursuit of excellence, but the pursuit of the most excellent. Competition makes it very clear that only winners (at most half of all competitors) will actually be considered excellent. Losers are not as excellent as winners. As argued above with McMurtry, a "competitive equality of opportunity" does not guarantee everyone opportunity to attain the benefits of the activity; only that the individual is given the opportunity to *compete* for these benefits. Questing can be done together; but in the end, only one will have demonstrated excellence. Only one will have achieved the socially determined requirements of a meaningful life, while the other will be one step further away. Opportunity for a meaningful life is not the same as an opportunity to compete for a meaningful life. To bring it back to Simon, a mutual *competitive* quest for excellence is not the same as a mutual quest for excellence.

But Luper-Foy doesn't rest here. He goes on to question the conceptual foundation of the quest for excellence itself. Contained within the structure of pursuing personal satisfaction through excelling are certain inherent "absurdities" that seem to lead to a never-ending, never satisfying, spiral of competition:

The main point is that attributing intrinsic value to excelling and its kin is to commit ourselves to the absurdity that no matter how rich our lives are in noncompetitive goods, they still lack something of great importance if the lives of others *share the same* noncompetitive goods. To say that life can be worthwhile only if we excel is worse: it is to say that no matter how rich our lives are in noncompetitive goods, they are worthless if those goods are shared by all.⁶⁶

The more positional goods we and others possess, "the closer they come to having no value at all,"⁶⁷ which in turn stimulates greater and greater desires for acquisition. Remember also that noncompetitive goods offer no alternative, because once they are defined within the context of a competitive ideology, they lack importance. Without the competitive ideology, however, goods should have importance and value only to the person possessing them.⁶⁸ One need only look to runners for an example. People who run for the sake of health benefits have no real reason to exercise more than four hours a week. Beyond that, the extra effort becomes less effective; there are diminishing returns and an increased occurrence injuries. However, world class athletes train well above this basic level. The noncompetitive good of health is no longer important to their existences. In fact, these elite athletes place their bodies at considerable risk of injury in order to win; they are willing to suffer debilitating damage just to avoid sharing noncompetitive goods. The solution, as Luper-Foy sees it, is to reject the competitive ideology. "Abandon the desire," Luper-Foy suggests. "The desire to compete; the desire to excel at the expense of another; the desire for aggression, when aggression is defined as using people as a mere means and preventing them from flourishing."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Luper-Foy, "The Anatomy of Aggression," 222

⁶⁷ Luper-Foy, "The Anatomy of Aggression," 222.

⁶⁸ This closely mimics Michael Walzer's attack on dominance in his book *Sphere's of Justice*, where the value of an item is determined by factors often unrelated to its use-value (dominance). His solution is by creating "spheres of justice," compartmentalizing the values and insulating them from other unrelated value-forces, thus preserving the actual worth of the item.

⁶⁹ Luper-Foy ends his discussion by postulating that egalitarianism is dependent on competitivist values. Rather than being constantly frustrated by an elite few winners, goes the argument, the majority of participants will opt for equality: If they can't win, they might as well not lose. This joint frustration sustains competitivist values since it holds itself together by the mutual mistrust of others acquiring competitive goods. So to reject competitivism, we unavoidably reject egalitarianism as well. "Unless I am interested specifically in how I or my holdings (goods, wealth) stack up against others, why would I be concerned about the fact that *you* have more than I? So long as I have enough, why should it matter to me that you have *more*?" ["The Anatomy of Aggression," 223]

If people lose their drive for excellence, however, what is to become of us? The drive for excellence is what seemingly spurs us on to scientific advances, creative masterpieces, improvements to lifestyle and living conditions. To not try to excel may lower goals to the point where they are already being met. Another aspect of concern is brought out by Victoria Davion in her essay "Do Good Feminists Compete?" By "eliminating all competition we would have to eliminate any kind of recognition to individuals for jobs well done. For any kind of recognition can be said to foster competitive attitudes in individuals."⁷⁰

Davion's concerns are justified and would be true if recognition were something for which needed to be sought and competed. On the other hand, her concerns would be inappropriate if recognition was itself unnecessary and people possessed intrinsic motivation to do a job — in which a job well done is reward enough. Or more pithily put, in order to do a good job, one needs a good job to do. We are thus left with a choice between recognition acting as motivator (likely because the work lacks any real interest) that justifies a competitive environment which will create situations where recognition is possibly *dishonestly* gained, and the intrinsic motivation of interesting and valuable work where competition is an unnecessary distraction. It could be pointed out, however, that recognition may be helpful in convincing employees that the unappealing job they are presently doing is valuable and interesting, hoping to inspire intrinsic satisfaction and reduce the amount of recognition (which costs both time and money). This philosophy underlies many of the techniques used in contemporary management development programs; it is much more cost effective to change the attitude of how workers view their jobs, than to change the job so workers will feel intrinsic satisfaction. The dilemma that

To have more than another person is not a problem; what motivates a person to desire more is, whether it be competition or egalitarianism. Yet, just to be content with enough does not dismiss the possibility that someone having more may be depriving someone else from having enough. Perhaps Luper-Foy ought to have said, "As long as *everyone* has enough, why should I care if you have more?"
⁷⁰ Davion, "Do Good Feminists Compete?" 59.

comes up is whether we want to place ourselves in a position where employers propagandize and cajole us into accepting work that is basically uninteresting, rather than redesigning the workplace to eliminate the management "necessity" of employee brainwashing.

As for Davion's former issue — the drive for excellence leads to achievement — Luper-Foy is not talking about this. In fact, it is not really the drive for excellence that does anything at all. Humans achieve because mastering the environment is an innate propensity (infants constantly want to touch and taste things to learn what they are; small children wish to manipulate objects) as well as intrinsically desirable. Excellence is a product of competition, not the other way around, because any pursuit of excellence highlights one's accomplishments in relation to other accomplishments, claiming that X-achievement is better than Y-achievement as ascertained via a set of arbitrarily determined criteria. Excellence doesn't promote achievement; it just makes certain achievements better than others. Excellence is achievement ranked superior to other achievements. Moreover, Professor Michael Katz provides sobering commentary on the definition of excellence:

By definition, "excellence" implies stratification ... [Excellence] implies the re-creation of hierarchies that give primacy of place to academic achievement and link achievement more closely to rewards in the world of work. It calls, in short, for a rigid meritocracy. For many reasons, meritocracies usually serve best those who enter them with a favored position, and it is not hard to predict who will appear most excellent and garner most rewards. A policy stressing excellence, therefore, is another way of redistributing resources upward.⁷¹

It is not achievement that is being rejected then, but the position that excellence by one person directly blocks someone else's achievement of excellence, or pursuit of excellence, or even access to resources which may make such an achievement possible. Consider awards ceremonies, where those few on the dais who are excellent clash vividly against a

⁷¹ Katz, "The New Educational Panic," 180. Katz, an historian and author of several books including *Poverty and Policy in American History* and *Reconstructing American Education*, remarks that the main problem with educational reform today is its continual use of justifications and vocabulary that have been used in failed reforms of the past. Current educational pundits have been unimaginative in devising a new vocabulary of reform, thereby committing the same mistakes. One of these problems is the constant reliance on "excellence," the use of which inevitably determines a particular ideological pattern of reform.

sea of losers in the audience, where failure overwhelms the event. Spectators are justifiably looking in one direction to avoid seeing the failure surrounding and within them. A competitive ideology makes this structure paramount; a cooperative ideology makes this impossible. The ranking of achievements doesn't exist if one's accomplishments are not compared to other people's accomplishments or, in the form of a competitive endeavor, if the achievement is the same. An individual achieves only when both achieves; groups achieve only when other groups achieve, etc. So even though individual excellence will no longer be possible, a vast majority of people will now live meaningful lives because their pursuits are not thwarted. People work together to achieve. Luper-Foy discusses elsewhere that it is *relationships* which provides the greatest component to a meaningful life. "Typically, the fulfillment of a desire plays a role in a good life precisely because it helps to perpetuate and give substance to our relationships with others."⁷² Cooperativists could further assert that a mutual quest for excellence is inherently competitive because excellence is innately exclusionary and not conducive to a cooperative atmosphere. Therefore, since excellence is a construct of competition, justifying competition through terminology dependent on competition is tautological.

Some may think that aggression is necessary to fortify one's pursuit for excellence, and since we cannot suppress our aggressive tendencies, we cannot rule out a thirst for excellence. This may be true if one agrees with what I just described — that excellence is an inherently competitive standard, and as such would normally implicate aggression. If we instead speak of achievement alone as being dependent on aggression however, a

⁷² Luper-Foy, "Competing for the Good Life," 175. It must be emphasized that competition itself does not give rise to meaningful relationships simply because opponents are placed in adversarial roles to one another. Mutual relationships develop and grow outside the competitive arena. Or, as James Carse brilliantly developed the dichotomy between finite/infinite games, competition cannot foster enriching relationships because finite games, by design, inevitably end the relationship when someone has won. Infinite games continue indefinitely, because winning and losing have no meaning or place. "Indeed, the only purpose of the [infinite] game is to prevent it from coming to an end, to keep everyone in play" [Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games*, 8]. No shortage of time nor antagonistic motivations exists to hamper the formation of meaningful relationships.

different dynamic results. Naturally, aggressive action — and aggressive action does not necessitate aggression — will be forever a part of the human existence since there will always be something (a disaster?) in the natural world which needs to be addressed. Aggression against fellow humans, on the other hand, needs to be eliminated — a suggestion hopefully few would resist. If Luper-Foy's argument is successful, then competition is, at the very least, a socially masked form of aggression (a voluntarily performed aggression which involves other human beings), and must be curtailed. "All necessarily nonuniversalizable competitive desires are *prima facie* objectionable because they generate easily avoidable aggression."⁷³

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THE PROBLEM WITH "MUTUAL"

In the next two sections, I would like to address my remarks to the notion of *mutual quest*, and how it fails as a justification of or defense for competition. Both Simon and McMurtry seem to promote the view that the ideal version of competition should resemble or have all the hallmarks of cooperation as much as possible without actually being cooperation.

First, the claim of "mutuality" seems a unique term for any competitive moment. It almost defies what we implicitly accept as competition. One could say that in a mutual quest participants voluntarily entered the competitive arena, but having said so, it would need qualification. There is no doubt that some people compete voluntarily, but perhaps they are fewer than we imagine. It can be well argued, for instance, that sports competitors, influenced and manipulated by social pressures and numerous other cultural forces, have little option but to compete if they wish to play sports (which are exclusively

⁷³ Luper-Foy, "The Anatomy of Aggression," 221.

competitive) and become socially accepted and socially mobile. Outside sports there are very few outlets for any kind of association aside from competition when one must work for a living (or simply survive). There is also the harsh reality that in order to acquire scarce resources to pursue either an Aristotelian or socially-prescribed happiness one must compete. Keeping these two situations in mind, Simon's broad notion of "mutual" dramatically shrinks and competition openly exists when there is very little mutuality whatsoever. In many cases, however, we can accept the premise (in competition) that mutuality implies a voluntary association; yet this mutual association does not automatically imply cooperative intent. Granted, performers must assemble together to hold a game, just as much as a war, a fist fight, a dance, etc., but an agreement to act jointly does little more than make an action superficially cooperative.

A vast majority of other equally learned commentators offer differing and, I believe, more accurate interpretations of what competition really is. The psychologist Morton Deutsch, for instance, sees competition as *constrict interdependence* — where there is a negative correlation between goal attainment — and cooperation as *promotive interdependence* — where there is a positive correlation between goal attainment.⁷⁴ Raimo Tuomela also rejects the notion that opponents are actually cooperating. In the essay "What is Cooperation?" Tuomela prefers the term "joint action" to "cooperation" because there are really two types of joint actions — cooperative and non-cooperative. The difference is demonstrated by the "participants' preferences and ability to help (assist) other members in their performances of their parts."⁷⁵ Tuomela, rejecting Simon's interpretation of mutuality, states that competition (and competitive games specifically) is a non-cooperative joint action:

There is no way to help other participants with their part-performances ... In [competitive games] a participant can at best ... contribute to the preconditions of the other participants' part-

⁷⁴ Deutsch, *Resolution of Conflict*, 20.

⁷⁵ Tuomela, "What is Cooperation?" 90.

performance, but cannot help them improve their performance, given that the agents act on their part-related preferences ... built into the structure of the action.⁷⁶

Tuomela agrees with Simon in that an opponent is necessary to provide the proper environment for the "part-performance" to take place, but athletes cannot improve to the point of success and also *assist* in another's part-performance, meaning that it would be against the internal logic of competition to purposely lose (or not try to win) by helping an opponent win. Tuomela thus points out something which Simon does not debate:⁷⁷ competitors cannot help their opponent achieve *during* the competitive moment.⁷⁸ This is the crux — whether or not the participants can actually aid the opponent during the actual performance — which makes vivid the distinction between competition and cooperation and the actual limit of Simon's mutual quest for excellence. When playing volleyball, for example, one does not try to set an opposing player's spike attempt in order to give the opposing player the best opportunity to hit a crushing shot. One's part-performance must, by necessity, interfere with the part-performance of the opponent. This is as Simon would want it, but there is no cooperation involved. Rather, there seems to be little more than an implicit agreement to act in a certain way — treaties being just formalized ways of standardizing aggression.⁷⁹ Furthermore, it would still not be a convincing argument that some sort of underlying consent to agree to compete and abide by the rules implies a

⁷⁶ Tuomela, "What is Cooperation?" 92.

⁷⁷ "It is not uncommon for opponents to give each other help in the form of instruction *before* contests" [Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 20, my emphasis].

⁷⁸ This is nothing new to game theorists. Non-cooperative game players are not allowed to undertake actions other than those explicitly specified by the rules of the game; players are prohibited from communicating with each other (in order to enhance each other's part-performances) unless permitted by the rules; and players cannot form agreements among themselves for the purpose of changing the way the game is played (e.g., revising rules) unless, again, such an action is permitted by the rules. On the other hand, in cooperative games players are allowed to undertake any actions they wish in order to coordinate a specific outcome, including unrestricted communications and agreements between players.

⁷⁹ It may be mentioned that, according to game-theorists, a cooperative game is one in which players are free to communicate make agreements among themselves. However, these agreements can take place either before or during a lull in the actual event — much the same way Simon envisions. Agreeing to rules or codes of conduct, though, hardly makes a game cooperative. All games involve that basic ingredient. There is more at stake in a cooperative game — where the use of cooperative action occurs during the *actual* play of the game.

cooperative arrangement. Agreement to compete — what Tuomela refers to as the "joint action bottom" — is different from cooperative intent and cooperative action:

In any joint action *X* the participants are jointly committed to furthering *X* and to seeing to it that it comes about; they are thus committed to performing those extra activities concerning their fellow participants' part-performances on which the success of *X* in their view depends ... [In] the case of cooperative action types *X*, *Y* may be a helping action in the sense that it helps a fellow participant *A* perform his part well.⁸⁰

In a noncooperative joint action, action *Y* does not exist and cannot be involved in helping participant *A* be successful in the part-performance. It is this presence or lack of a helping action *Y* that distinguishes cooperative and non-cooperative moments.

It might be suggested that by setting up an opponent's response in the act of competing, their joint actions do help the players improve each other's part-performance. But there are at least two reasons why this argument lacks sufficient support. First, Tuomela's definition of part-performance embraces the final outcome of the part-performances — winning and losing, in this case. If winning and losing were not significant, the argument might then work, but Simon requires winning and losing for his competitive structure to continue. Such is a moot point, in any case; as pointed out in the discussion on McMurtry, winning and losing (if but on a smaller scale) always transpire within the confines of the competitive game, and thus cannot be extricated from the part-performances. A competitor's part-performance would be incomplete without these mini-victories; the greater these mini-victories, the greater the performance. Again, what is missing is action *Y*, though the opposing of another's part-performance might appear to be the very action necessary to improve part-performances. Yet action *Y* is an action which directly helps one succeed in the task; actual competitors, on the other hand, withhold any actions which might help an opponent succeed in the task. It is only by fighting through this lack of assistance that competitors succeed. It should be obvious that competition makes it harder

⁸⁰ Tuomela, "What is Cooperation?" 90.

for individuals to succeed, not easier, but it doesn't make the acts cooperative when one says that each side is making it hard for the other side to succeed.

Second, what appears to be cooperative part-performances (in a competitive act) are only a consequence of the sequence of events and not premeditated. To admit otherwise, one would have to claim that each opponent agrees to make the other look as good as possible competitively, which makes no sense at all. The object is not to make the opponent look good or even to make them look competitive but to win. Only when each one tries to maximize their own individualized opportunities for success will it appear that they are working together to excel. Realize, however, that the individual motivations do not (and cannot?⁸¹) match what Simon claims is going on. Simon (as well as McMurtry) paints a rosy picture of competition in much the same way behaviorists depict animal behavior with anthropomorphic descriptions. We can't possibly know what an animal thinks, so to claim that a particular behavior is territorial, competitive, or aggressive takes excessive etiological licence. However, we know what athletes think (or at least what they tell us of what they think) when they compete, and they rarely, if ever, claim they are "cooperating" with an opponent to achieve a greater mutual excellence.⁸² Both Simon and Delattre blunt competition's sharpness by insisting that one who tries to win, tries to beat someone else, tries their hardest to cause someone else to fail is a "cooperative" opponent

Consequently, part-performances in competition places the participants in situations where they act indistinguishably as obstacles to be overcome. Is it any wonder then why athletes often look at each other with contempt; they are blocking each other's success. Respect in a competitive environment is fought over and viciously earned and grudgingly conceded, if at all. Athletes in cooperative environments, in contrast, willingly grant

⁸¹ It would be interesting to ponder the notion of mutual quest in light of Socrates's rebuttal of Thrasymachus's assertion that justice is whatever is to the advantage of the stronger. For how can one both seek to maximize one's own opportunities for excellence, and at the same time help others achieve excellence as well — something that is clearly not to their advantage?

⁸² A "mutual excellence," I might add, that is only significant in a competitive environment.

respect because cooperation cannot function unless there is a mutuality of respect present. Competition needs no such requirement in order to function.

Just as two wrongs don't make a right, it is a stretch of the imagination to believe that two opponents vigorously striving for their own individual self-interest and executing maneuvers to speed up the failure of the opponent is actually to each one's benefit. What one should find curious about the preceding discussion is that Simon's justification for a 'mutual quest for excellence' is almost exactly the same as the over two century old justification for market capitalism. To recall Adam Smith's dissection of the emergent market laws of eighteenth century England laid out in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776): Self-interest acts as a driving force to guide men and prod them to action, but when all individuals are pursuing their own self-interest, competition erupts to regulate this pervasive possessiveness and prevent rampant and ruthless profiteering. Thus, as explained in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), "the selfish motives of men are transmuted by interaction to yield the most unexpected of results: social harmony."⁸³ Competition, then, is "the socially beneficial consequence of the conflicting self-interests of all the members of society."⁸⁴ In the end, everyone will prosper as the standard of living (or in Simon's case, the level of excellence) rises.

However, the reformers of Smith's day were incredulous to what was being hailed as social salvation in light of the misery which surrounded them — when over twelve percent of the population were indigent, and Coketowns and slums grew increasingly commonplace. It was a time when children were recruited to perform some of the most dangerous occupations of the day — or face being beaten by the factory foremen if they resisted, or by their parents if they quit. Children operated the newly invented spinning throstle that would carve apart the unfortunate little fingers of a careless child. Children ran

⁸³ Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 40.

⁸⁴ Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 40.

around and about the gigantic cogs inside the huge cotton mills, cleaning the colossal looms, risking mutilation and death because the machines never stopped. The life of one child was not enough to stem rising profits nor slow the march of Progress. Employing children, therefore, continued. They were well-suited to the new factory lifestyle:

Since they were unused to the independent life of farming or crafts, children adapted themselves more readily to the discipline of factory life. The move was hailed as a philanthropic gesture — would not the employment of children help to alleviate the condition of the "unprofitable poor?"⁸⁵

And though Smith felt education was necessary to raise the poor from the abyss, if everyone were educated, who would want to work in such deplorable conditions? In essence, the uneducated poor were necessary to keep the factories functioning, the products flowing, and the consumers buying. All the while filth, or "illth" as Ruskin put it, spread faster and further than wealth.⁸⁶ In the bitter words of John Gardner: "For every talent that poverty has stimulated it has blighted a hundred."⁸⁷

How does this relate to Simon's argument? First of all, Adam Smith's philosophic architecture depended upon a view of human nature (perhaps drawing upon Hobbes or what Smith witnessed of his era) which has been a subject of dispute for centuries — that humans innately act selfishly with self-interested reasons. Simon also implicitly promotes self-interest as spurring a competitor's desire for winning and all that winning provides. Even though Simon rejects the notion that competition is innately selfish, competitor's, at the very least, do pursue psychological satisfaction to the exclusion of their opponents' pursuits.

Second, and perhaps more obvious, is Smith's and Simon's contention that if everyone competes, everyone benefits. As long as nothing gets in the way of equal and fair

⁸⁵ Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 45.

⁸⁶ Dickens, *Hard Times*, xi (Introduction).

⁸⁷ Gardner, *Excellence*, 99.

competition,⁸⁸ the competitive arena will maximize all participants's benefits — an after-effect which Smith calls social harmony and which Simon calls 'the mutual quest for excellence.' Yet as has already been mentioned above, these are not the motivations of the participants. Smith's citizens yearn for wealth, Simon's player's for victory. Consequently, for each system to function ideally, it requires the participants to be wholly concerned with their own self-interest, a seemingly morally reprehensible position. Couple this with the fact that capitalism-according-to-Smith only seems to improve everyone's level of comfort in relation to previous generations (a rise in the standard of living over time) and does little to improve one's current standard of living in relation to each other,⁸⁹ much less the effect this self-interested attitude has on interpersonal relationships and sociological and psychological stability.

Simon's assertion that "treatment as an equal" makes inequalities justifiable could plausibly lead to the same ends, at least in sport. How a person ranks in the competitive hierarchy, or how athletes interact outside the playing field is of little concern as long as they are treated as an equal while engaged in sport. Unfortunately, as I demonstrated above, competitive sports do not treat people as equals, not when psychological satisfaction is deprived those who lose thereby making competition an aggressive act impeding individuals from achieving their quest of happiness. In both Simon and Smith, happiness (as defined in the competitive language) is reserved only to those who have succeeded in their respective fields: excellence or wealth. All of which means that the vast majority of the respective populations continue participating in each system, convinced to continue through philosophical or propagandistic techniques, for the material benefit of a few select

⁸⁸ Adam Smith despised monopolies because they interfered with the normal functioning of the market, a market which guarantees the greatest number of goods at the lowest possible price.

⁸⁹ The lowest paid full-time U.S. employee makes a yearly income of less than 1/300th of the wealthiest incomes.

elites. When seen in the light of Adam Smith, Simon's argument against the view that competition is inherently selfish loses a tremendous amount of credibility.

* * *

THE PROBLEM WITH "MUTUAL QUEST"

The idea of a "mutual quest" is puzzling. Most commentators have argued that competition is a mutually exclusive quest because the goals between the opponents are not the same — each desires success and excellence solely for themselves. If each is questing for excellence, this bypasses defining what excellence might actually be for the competitors. As James Keating wrote:

There is no clearer manifestation of the pursuit of excellence than in the athletic contest ... Thus when we say that the athlete is engaged in the pursuit of excellence there is no mistaking his goal, he is seeking victory in the contest, his goal is to exceed the achievements of his opponents.⁹⁰

Athletes invariably wish to be *more* excellent than their opponents. Excellence is a comparative term, and in the arena of sport, both opponents cannot be equally excellent. Competition is constructed to supposedly determine just that very difference in performance quality. A winner will always be more excellent than a loser — determined by a competitive structure, that is; and by competing one is assuring that an opponent *not* reach excellence!⁹¹

Competition, therefore, might be more properly defined as a *singular quest for excellence*. This is how most, if not all, athletes view competition anyway. The individual athletes seek excellence; the opponent is just a means or obstacle to that end. One need not have to treat the other individual any better than one treats an inanimate object if both are in

⁹⁰ Gibson, *Performance Versus Results*, p. 47-8. [Quote taken from Keating's article "Athletics and the Pursuit of Excellence," *Education*, 85:1965]

⁹¹ Remember also that since competition distracts the competitors from the actual goal, true excellence is not actually achieved by the victor either; unless, of course, we are measuring success only within the confines of a competitive event which, however, does little to justify competition.

a position to hinder the pursuit of excellence. In the same way a mountain is an obstacle that must be conquered to achieve the pinnacle, so too are other athletes. Competition fosters an attitude where these competitors are to view each other in no better terms than "things" in the way of success, "things" to be conquered. Much to Simon's possible chagrin, individuals with this mindset seem to make the best opponents against which to test oneself. The mutual quest of excellence, by its very nature, assures that an opponent will do his/her utmost to prevent other opponents from reaching their best. Ironically and disturbingly, the totally obsessed competitor insures the best challenge.

As hard as it may be to accept the notion that opponents are engaged in any sort of mutual quest, clearly teammates are involved in a mutual quest. Unlike competitors, where the goals are different, teammates usually have the same goal and cooperate with each other. In this case the mutual quest for excellence seems to make sense. Simon might respond by saying that the definition includes both competitors and teammates, for they are all involved in the mutual quest for excellence. Unfortunately, if Simon does make that assertion, then both competition and cooperation are defined with the same definition, making it utterly useless — unless he wishes, of course, to somehow conceive of competition as cooperation; but then, it is cooperation that is the implicit goal, not any defense of competition. We also need to think back to what has previously been discussed, that most people playing or working on teams cooperate not because it enhances any pursuit of victory, but simply because working together is more emotionally and psychologically meaningful than working apart or against. In fact, reminding team members of the competitive element usually discourages cooperation within the team. Apparently, most people wish to cooperate for intrinsic reasons, and resist being coerced into cooperating.

As I have mentioned above, Simon redefined the idea of excellence. Simon admits, and the vast research data has shown, that,

there is a major difference between showing improvement in a sport under relaxed practice conditions and rising to the challenge once a competitive contest has begun. Indeed, if we are relatively inexperienced or inexperienced, we may pass the test of competition even if our performance is below our best level but is reasonably good, given the pressure of the situation.⁹²

In other words, competitive environments reduce dramatically and invariably the potential for maximal excellence. It is inexplicable, then, that Simon would want to persist in his desire for a win/loss setting, aside from the fact that it is necessary for a competitive event to occur, considering that it reduces the quality of the performance. Simon is also at pains to argue that a competitive environment promotes the "intrinsic worth" of the pursuit of excellence. According to Edward L. Deci, from his article "Effects of Externally Mediated Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation:"⁹³

Trying to beat another party is extrinsic in nature and tends to decrease people's intrinsic motivation for the target activity. It appears that when people are instructed to compete at an activity, they begin to see that activity as an instrument for winning rather than an activity which is mastery-oriented and rewarding in its own right. Thus, competition seems to work like many other extrinsic rewards in that ... it tends to be perceived as controlling and tends to decrease intrinsic motivation.⁹⁴

Of course, Simon does stipulate that these were "inexperienced and inexperienced" competitors who suffered from the stress of competition. One must assume, then, that experienced competitors will do better in competition, and possibly achieve these levels of excellence of which Simon speaks. However, adapting oneself to a competitive environment really has nothing to do with excelling in the specific activity played. "In a win/lose framework, success comes to those whose temperaments are best suited for competition. This is not at all the same thing as ... talent, and it may well pull in the opposite direction."⁹⁵ Competition permits one to excel in the ability to compete, and not much else. As Deci mentioned, competition seems to have the sole value of "motivating" people to excel. This implies that people do not have any intrinsic motivation to excel, which may not be difficult to understand. Excelling requires the ranking of individuals to

⁹² Simon, *Sport and Social Value*, 22.

⁹³ *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 18 (1971), 105-115.

⁹⁴ Kohn, *No Contest*, 60.

⁹⁵ Kohn, *No Contest*, 54.

each other, and failure becomes public. There is little reason why a majority of people would voluntarily pursue such a course. On the other hand, people are intrinsically motivated to achieve, because achievement need not be at the expense of someone else. The liberal philosopher Robert Paul Wolff describes this distinction when remarking on public education's fetish for grading:

Although quite unnecessary strain may be produced by familial and social pressures to do well in a competitive ranking system associated with the learning, children do not resist learning; what they frequently resist is the demand that they submit enthusiastically to invidious comparisons between themselves and their fellows.⁹⁶

Simon's explanation of the "mutual quest for excellence" falters due to his inability (or unwillingness) to release activities of mutual quest from win/loss settings. There is no justifiable reason to sustain this, except with the idea to sustain competition and preserve an elite of one form or another. It should be clear that Simon's defense and support of competition is designed for the benefit of those who excel in competition. Competition is necessary so one can succeed at competition; there is nothing else which competition actually helps more than cooperation in improving performance. But even in the best of circumstances, only half of those who compete will excel. In reality, far less ever do. Again, this flies in the face of any reasonable reading of a "mutual quest for excellence." The competitive situation itself doesn't even determine what is excellent; that is figured out and judged elsewhere. Consequently, if competition is eliminated, nothing is lost because excellence in the competitive situation cannot be taken out of the situation — it was never *in* there to begin with. Competition's reason to exist is only supported by internal, self-justifying, rationales. Simon must then be saying that *his* excellence is restricted to the competitive environment (since *his* cannot be *true* Excellence). If this is the case, Simon's argument is found to be circular. In order to have a mutual quest for an excellence

⁹⁶ Wolff, *The Ideal of the University*, 15-16.

meaningful in and restricted to competitive environments, one must have begun with competition to start.

If, however, we need to measure excellence as a result of competition alone, it also begs the question. Why do we need to know what *competitive excellence* is in the first place? Because it justifies competition? But that would be another circular argument. Unfortunately for Simon, there is no other argument that makes any sense, for excellence in a competitive environment is irrefutably less "excellent" than achievement in a cooperative environment. Why would Simon be satisfied with second-rate excellence unless he was trying to justify the activity which produces it? I would like to think that the reason is less cynical than Russell's scathing witticism, "Man is a credulous animal, and must believe *something*; in the absence of good grounds for belief, he will be satisfied with bad ones."⁹⁷

Many of Simon's arguments, for that matter, are themselves based in some way on one or more of the myths of competition discussed above. For example, Simon writes (with my annotations), "Sports are activities through which one can have fun [Myth #3], develop our potentialities, and learn to enjoy meeting challenges [both discussed under myth #4]."⁹⁸ Developing potentialities and meeting challenges can easily occur in safe, fun, non-competitive contexts with little of the anguish or angst inherent in competition. The British educationalist Peter McIntosh agreed: "If indeed co-operation is to be the objective ... then there are less humiliating ways of reaching it and certainly more attractive ways for those who dislike competition."⁹⁹

Simon writes that the "meeting of demands athletes place upon their talents often involves beauty, courage, dedication, and excitement."¹⁰⁰ None of these actually require

⁹⁷ Russell, "An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish," *Unpopular Essays*, 99.

⁹⁸ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 31.

⁹⁹ McIntosh, *Fair Play*, 178.

¹⁰⁰ Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 31.

competition for their attainment. Courage and dedication also hardly seem necessary if the individual were involved in the activity for intrinsic reasons. Competition may in fact get in the way of these elements. Studies have demonstrated that beauty or creative expression, for example, is diminished when placed in a competitive context.¹⁰¹ "Finally," continues Simon, "at the professional level, concern for professional success, which may involve winning, is no less appropriate than similar concerns in other professions."¹⁰² But this is hardly a justification considering that winning in endeavors other than sport is no more a validation of competition than sport is. It is not competition in sport that is the problem, but competition itself.

Lastly, it should be clear by this point that both McMurtry and Simon (along with Delattre and assuredly many others) have found ways to manipulate the definition of competition to look suspiciously like cooperation. I have already argued in Chapter 3 that redefinition is a common method to move the political justifications more in line with the agenda of the hegemony elites. Simon and McMurtry seem to be performing just such a service. The sociologist John Wilson inadvertently (perhaps) also corroborates this contention when he writes:

Absolute performance becomes irrelevant as sport is redefined to devalue the single-minded driving of the body to its limit and the elitism to which that leads and, instead, to valorize cooperation and nurturance through sport; if the goal is self-actualization through relationships and through community, rather than competitive achievement; if competition means not domination but joining with an opponent in a mutually supportive and rewarding experience.¹⁰³

In McMurtry's case, the argument is restricted to only a certain understanding of competition (the dominant model versus the "free hockey" paradigm), or the blurring of definitions, as when McMurtry writes, "Since, in free hockey, there are no extrinsic pay-offs to motivate domination, it is the competing in itself that counts, the *overcoming of*

¹⁰¹ Teresa M. Amabile, "Children's Artistic Creativity: Detrimental Effects of Competition in a Field Setting," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 8 (1982), 573-78, is one.

¹⁰² Simon, *Sport and Social Values*, 31.

¹⁰³ Wilson, *Playing by the Rules*, 50. Even though Wilson was referring in this passage to the reform of women's sport, both Simon and McMurtry would have to agree that the sport experience (for males and females) would be more beneficial if it were "thus conceived."

limiting conditions for its own sake."¹⁰⁴ Here, an interesting move is made. Granted, competition is the overcoming of *limiting conditions*, but overcoming limiting conditions need not necessarily be done competitively. Consequently, the definition used (and similar ones used by Simon for that matter) is, on one hand, too broad because it doesn't adequately distinguish between competition and cooperation; and on the other hand, too narrow because it doesn't mention cooperation as equally applicable to the definition.

Consider also McMurry's examination of "competition with oneself" when he wrote:

The frustration or anger that does occur is usually at oneself for falling short of one's projected performance. In this way, the edge of competition is made to cut only on the plane of 'competing with oneself': for which the opponent is an *ally* in providing the necessary occasion for test, not an *enemy* against access to valued pay-offs external to the game.¹⁰⁵

The expression "competing with oneself" would make sense only if an equal though opposite expression "cooperating with oneself" made any sense at all. However, since the latter is practically nonsensical, or if it were to make sense, must be combined with such a large amount of psychological description as to make its usage ungainly, so too the former expression is more a token of colloquialism and of little philosophical value. Notice also how competition is "made" to cut only a certain way. Competition need not be viewed in such a way, nor is it necessarily the right way at all. As I say elsewhere, the fact that competition spends so much time defending itself and justifying its existence indicates, perhaps, that there is something intuitively wrong with competition to begin with; otherwise there would be little reason these arguments would have to work so hard to align competition with cooperation.

In the end, if all that I have said is reasonable, then people who play sports are competing against each other, not for excellence within the game, but for some perceived excellence outside of the game (determined by spectators of the game), questing for some form of nonuniversalizable and community crafted self-esteem (unstable and inflated)

¹⁰⁴ McMurry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 207. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁵ McMurry, "How Competition Goes Wrong," 207. Author's emphasis.

granted through victory. The abstract and abstracted idea of competition being a mutual quest for excellence is meaningful only far beyond the playing field. There is much more at stake than the naïve notion of self-improvement. Since sports is a "socially approved" avenue for achievement, only then can it be said to build "character," and only in reference to the surrounding cultural values. But all of this can equally be said for cooperation. What distinguishes cooperation is that the socially approved self-esteem derived from cooperative activities is stable and not restricted to the activity.

In other words, one can be cooperative anywhere in society, and be secure in their self-esteem. Competition, however, is clearly a restrictive activity. Many competitive activities are not condoned outside of the arena. Boxing is assault and battery on Main Street; stealing anything but a base is a crime. Consequently, self-esteem developed through competition is very fragile. This fragility and transience drives the fear of any non-competitive or cooperative society. Competitive people, or people thoroughly inculcated into the competitive lifestyle (if there is a difference), need competitive moments to continually prop up an unstable view of oneself. They, therefore, fashion a society where group interactions become increasingly competitive; where individual views and discussions become polarized into win/loss arguments; where the art of debating takes precedence over the art of consensus building, and invective dominates conciliation. This new society distorts once cooperative activities into competitive ones, while originally competitive activities are further corrupted and debased.

Chapter 6

The Power Behind Competition

Competition considered as the main thing in life is too grim, too tenacious, too much a matter of taut muscles and intent will, to make a possible basis of life for more than one or two generations at most. After that length of time it must produce nervous fatigue, various phenomenon of escape, a pursuit of pleasures as tense and as difficult as work (since relaxing has become impossible), and in the end a disappearance of the stock through sterility.

BERTRAND RUSSELL¹

If the previous chapter expressed cogent arguments, we come to the conclusion that the "mutual quest of excellence" is not a mutual quest at all, and that Simon's excellence is actually sub-maximal achievement. Also, Simon's contention that "treatment as an equal" is more significant than equal treatment fails when applied to competition because "treatment as an equal" is useful in this case as an aid in the determination of inequality, thereby becoming instrumental in assuring the intrinsic value of inequality in competition. Furthermore, we reached the conclusion that people who play sports are competing against each other, not for excellence within the game, but for some perceived excellence outside of the game (determined by the spectators of the game), questing to sustain some form of self-esteem, unstable though it is, granted through victory. The abstract and abstracted idea of competition being a mutual quest for excellence is meaningful only as verbal subterfuge.

The notion of excellence when placed within the sporting venue, some would argue, reflects the overbearing influence of capitalist methodology. Richard Gruneau explains the argument:

¹ Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, 55.

What passes for sport today is itself nothing more than a product of the technocratic rationality of capitalist productive forces. By failing to confront capitalist domination directly, and by attempting to escape from it through sports, people tacitly accept structures which are the embodiments of bourgeois repression and thereby damn themselves to a reproduction of the society that enslaves them.²

Gruneau, though claiming the argument has "considerable substance," thinks it far too "crude." Those who have argued like such, according to Gruneau, "have continually been unable to understand that players and fans are knowledgeable agents rather than unreflective dupes."³ What I intend to argue in this chapter is that it is not so much intelligence or lack thereof but rather psychological and emotional commitment to competition (and thus capitalism) that provides its staying power.

I will begin, however, by addressing the question of whether or not sports can be *reformed* into something less repugnant and offensive? Are sports (or competition, for that matter) troubling only in excess? Only a couple of decades after the birth of professional sports, the first modern utopian social theorist Edward Bellamy suggested in his classic novel *Looking Backward* that sport can exist in a cooperative utopian setting if any gain of monetary rewards which might be derived from winning is eliminated. Was Bellamy on the right track? Rather than a strictly cooperative society, should there exist a strict delineation within the combination (to some degree) of competition and cooperation creating a less utopian, but perhaps more practical world? This perspective presents us with many additional questions. At what point is the limit to be set as to the amount of competitive spirit to remain? In which institutions ought competition to survive, and how can we possibly keep it from infecting other social institutions? Why ought competition to even exist in utopia considering all that I have presented? To desire a blending of competition and cooperation, there must be some justification as to why competition is necessary in the first place.

² Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development*, 140.

³ Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development*, 140.

If one reads Bellamy's *Looking Backward* closely, it is immediately obvious that competition and status are still very much intertwined; for status, in the form of colored ribbons and medals, is thought a necessary incentive for work. In Bellamy's utopia, it appears that even though there is equality of economic resources, there is a distinct and continued scarcity of social benefits. Pride and glory are at a premium among guilds and guild members as they struggle against each other in yachting competitions; for that matter, all personal initiative is seemingly driven by public recognition. The arts and artists, for example, are deemed either successes or failures based on the amount of support received from the public. Elisabeth Hansot is also unconvinced when she writes:

Bellamy's incentives are, on the whole, not very convincing. A man motivated solely by a red badge is either playing games or not motivated at all. The badges must be seen merely as a sign of what men desire most in Bellamy's utopia: public recognition. And as the author does not attempt to explain *why* men desire public honor, the desire itself must be taken as a primary irreducible motive for utopian activity.⁴

As much an external motivator money was, this drive for public honor through badges and guild dominance in sporting events will more than likely encourage athletes to specialize in certain sporting events in their spare time. Bellamy leaves the door open for this possibility. Global equality of and for everyone will not occur, or if it does occur will not persist, if praise and accolades are considered scarce entities. A scarcity of esteem will take on, as sociologist Baumeister proposes, a zero-sum methodology, when one person's esteem is gained at another's loss. It may not even require an active pursuit of esteem:

If the amount of self-esteem is fixed, then positive claims by one person are sufficient to constitute a threat to others. Thus, one does not have to criticize a person to threaten his or her self-esteem; merely making favorable claims about oneself is enough.⁵

With so few indicators of status, Bellamy's utopians will not learn to eventually do without the badges, but instead scramble more furiously for these very things which provide a justificatory incentive to work.

⁴ Hansot, *Perfection and Progress*, 137.

⁵ Baumeister, "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression," 11.

In the end, Bellamy's utopian world, where competition and cooperation exist co-extensively, fails to eradicate the abuses, merely providing alternative trinkets over which to compete; yet perhaps Bellamy's difficulties arose not from his faulty social constructions, but from his misunderstanding of competitive excess. Going beyond what was stated about McMurtry, the notion that competition is only troubling in excess is an uncomfortable proposition in that it hides a seemingly implicit truth. For if competition without excess is good, then it seems to follow that individuals "need to be set against one another *sometimes*."⁶ In other words, if competition is only bad in excess, then obviously competition is good without excess; and if it is good to do, then everyone ought to do it. However, justifications as to what it is that makes competition "good," even without excess, rarely emerge aside from those already found to be questionable.

The existence of competition in society may never permit cooperation to flourish as the cultural *modus operandi*. Examined critically, perhaps the singular quality of competition rests in its justification to defeat other competitors, essentially ending competition. Consequently, the point of competition is its eventual self-annihilation by defeating all competition; competition is self-destructive.⁷ Cooperation cannot and could not stand up to the challenge, at least not immediately. It would be brusquely shunted aside, treated as just another competitor. Competition, on the other hand, always resists being shunted aside to a small corner. It grows out of control, like a weed choking a lawn, or a parasite slowly eating its host until there is nothing left.⁸

⁶ Kohn, *No Contest*, 237.

⁷ Marxist theorists in the economic arena predicted this in the growth of monopolies.

⁸ The fact that a tremendous amount of damage control exists concerning competitive excesses — monopolies are dealt with through legislation, sore losers are controlled with sportsmanship, cheating is handled with reform — demonstrates in no small way the inherent value of cooperation, which spurs many of these reforms, over competition.

Well, not exactly. What remains after the end of competition is an intriguing thought. Once all competition is eliminated, perhaps all that would be left ... *is* cooperation. In fact, Bellamy theorized that the origin of utopia would derive from this ultimate monopoly:

It became the one capitalist in the place of all other capitalists, the sole employer, the final monopoly in which all previous and lesser monopolies were swallowed up, a monopoly in the profits and economies of which all citizens shared.... In a word, the people of the United States concluded to assume the conduct of their own business ... [The] obvious fact was perceived that no business is so essentially the public business as the industry and commerce on which the people's livelihood depends, and that to entrust it to private persons to be managed for private profit is a folly similar in kind, though vastly greater in magnitude, to that of surrendering the functions of political government to kings and nobles to be conducted for their personal glorification.⁹

A dramatic, though "logical," evolution, it made complete sense; for a nation to absorb the industrial cohesiveness of a mega-monopoly and to operate its government to the benefit of its populace under such efficiency would "relieve the undertaking of many difficulties with which the partial monopolies had contended."¹⁰

Yet in spite of Bellamy's hopes, it does not appear possible that only a little competition can exist in utopia — a competition reserved for the games.¹¹ The only way competition could be contained is with massive amounts of political and social constraints placed upon the market and other institutions to control the inevitable rampage, which is exactly what is happening in today's world. But again the initial question remains: Why ought we to obsess ourselves with and allow such a bureaucratic and autocratic nightmare?

If the previous arguments were effective, reform, no matter how well-conceived or implemented, will never alleviate the social ills competition seems to breed. The reform of sport, for example, has been a perennial concern for well over a century. Even at the beginning of college sports, excess existed. The first official intercollegiate sporting event in the US, a rowing regatta between two ivy league schools in 1859, witnessed betting, accusations that "ringers" were used, equipment discrepancies, even payment for services

⁹ Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (1992), 58.

¹⁰ Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (1992), 60.

¹¹ William Morris, another utopist, foresaw a very different future. In *News from Nowhere* (1890), after a violent and bloody war between the proletariat and industrialists, all competition was eliminated. The new philosophy was to combine work and play, making Art. Competition no longer had any place.

to the athletes. We have also seen that, even with all the changes and adaptations since then and that reforms are increasingly prevalent, sport has grown to be no better than at its birth. It has arguably become worse.

Competitive sports reforms, like the addition of sportsmanship, were necessary to tone down the structurally derived excesses of competition and make the activity palatable to the gaming public. This begs the question: if competition is good in some way, why is it so universally necessary to regulate and restrain it so thoroughly? A cooperative structure, by contrast, needs very little external restraint; there is no incentive to cheat, hurt, despise, crush, or otherwise humiliate a fellow human being. All these attributed need to be controlled in a competitive environment, where the incentives of not being cheated, hurt, despised, crushed, or humiliated are all too clear. Morton Deutsch describes the competitive and cooperative processes as self-confirming; in other words, "the experience of cooperation will induce a benign spiral of increasing cooperation, while competition will induce a vicious spiral of intensifying competition."¹²

Unfortunately (or fortunately, as the case may be), if the previous chapters's arguments were successful, there would seem to be no more justifications for competition. Yet despite all the evidence to the negative effects of sport (and by definition, competition) — including the somewhat illogical physical abuse with which athletes punish themselves¹³ — and despite all the overlooked and previously answered questions,¹⁴ people still seem to willingly participate. Why? Sports analyst George Leonard thinks it's because "competition builds resemblance":

¹² Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict*, 30-1.

¹³ "James Michener, in his book *Sports in America*, commented that if so many injuries and fatalities were produced by some dread disease such as polio or tuberculosis or were the result of some criminal element, the American public would band together. We would sponsor telethons, raise funds, and deliver speeches to denounce and stamp out the villain. But sports and recreational activities? They're OK" [Darden, *The Nautilus Book*, 16].

¹⁴ Roger Caillois, for instance, in his book *Man, Play, and Games* (1961), still used arguments that were debunked decades earlier, insisting that competition is instinctual among animals, then implying that it is instinctual in man.

To compete with someone ... you must agree to run on the same track, to do what he's doing, to follow the same set of rules. The only way you'll differentiate yourself is by doing precisely the same thing, slightly faster or better. Thus, though performance may improve, the chances are you will become increasingly like the person with whom you compete ... In this light, it is easy to see that a culture dedicated to creating standardized, specialized, predictable human components could find no better way of grinding them out than by making every possible aspect of life a matter of competition. "Winning out" in this respect does not make rugged individualists. It shapes conformist robots.¹⁵

Or as Arthur Combs put it: "Competition can only work if people agree to seek the same goals and follow the same rules. Accordingly, as competitors strive to beat each other's records, they tend to become more alike."¹⁶

Alfie Kohn, after sifting through copious amount of psychological and sociological data, comes to the startling conclusion that persistent arguments claiming that sport builds character and self-esteem is inextricably linked to why we compete: "We compete to overcome fundamental doubts about our capabilities and ... to compensate for low self-esteem."¹⁷ The former possibility appears highly probable. We strive to be the best at something because we don't wish to be the worst at it, something which may reflect a personal deficiency we strive to mask. This thinking represents a "global sense of inadequacy" — low self-esteem in other words — signifying a move towards the latter assertion. It is now no longer the case that we *want* to compete. The passionate necessity to enhance one's self-esteem ought to be viewed as a *need* rather than as a want since "one is responding to the push of self-doubt rather than the pull of accomplishment."¹⁸ Drawing upon Maslow's distinction between being-motivated (reaffirming) and deficit-motivated (avoidance) actions, "competitiveness is in reality a deficit-motivated trait. Being good at an activity is something we choose to do; outperforming others is experienced as something we *have* to do. Our self-esteem is at stake."¹⁹ None of these statements should surprise

¹⁵ Leonard, "Winning Isn't Everything. It's Nothing," 245. Chris Rojek mimics this sentiment when he writes, "Increasingly, popular culture is dominated by images of recurrence rather than originality" [*Ways of Escape: Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel*, 4].

¹⁶ Arthur Combs, *Myths in Education* (1979), 19. Quoted in Kohn, *No Contest*, 129.

¹⁷ Kohn, *No Contest*, 99.

¹⁸ Kohn, *No Contest*, 101.

¹⁹ Kohn, *No Contest*, 101.

us. Decades ago, for instance, the philosopher Abraham Kaplan expressed a prophetic and cautionary suspicion that the competitive pursuit of individual self-esteem will eventually lead straight to violence:

Deeds of violence in our society are performed largely by those trying to establish their self-esteem, to defend their self-image, and to demonstrate that they, too, are significant ... Violence arises not out of superfluity of power, but out of powerlessness.²⁰

No matter how convincing his arguments may appear on the surface, however, contemporary work in the study of self-esteem casts doubt on Kohn's insistence that competition is an act of compensation for low self-esteem. In the recent essay "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem," Roy Baumeister, Joseph Boden, and Laura Smart compiled very persuasive evidence arguing that low self-esteem is not a cause of violence. Instead, unstable (inflated) high self-esteem, when confronted with ego threats (events or opinions which contradict their opinion of themselves), forces the individual to face a "choice point." At the choice point, the affected individual must choose a response to the ego threat: either accept the critical external appraisal and revise one's self esteem downward, or reject the unfavorable appraisal. In the latter case, however, "the person would infer that the external evaluation is mistaken and undeserved, and he or she may well develop anger or other negative affect toward the source of that evaluation."²¹ The individuals with inflated self-esteem who are most threatened by ego threats are those whose favorable self-appraisals are "uncertain, unstable, or heavily dependent on external validation."²² Aggressive responses to attacks on this type of self-esteem are common and predictable; they serving to "refute and prevent bad evaluation as well as to constitute a means of achieving symbolic dominance and superiority"²³ over the source of the bad evaluation.

²⁰ Kaplan, *The New World of Philosophy*, 11. Kaplan also wrote: "When it comes to philosophy, there are no spectators, only participants" [11].

²¹ Baumeister, et al., "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression," 10.

²² Baumeister, et al., "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression," 12.

²³ Baumeister, et al., "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression," 12.

Kohn's assertions, if we look closely, are based on what can now be considered misinterpreted data. Pragmatically speaking, one can seriously doubt low self-esteem as a competitive generator for two reasons. First, as Baumeister, et. al., inform us, people with clinically determined low self-esteem invariably are psychologically incapacitated to actively participate in social interactions. Second, after witnessing elite athletes, many show practically no sign of low self-esteem; they act in quite the opposite fashion. If sport actually changed people from low to high self-esteem, it appears to be an activity we should thoroughly support. In another example, Kohn passingly equates low self-esteem with narcissism, a psychological state expressed in terms more reflective of someone with high (though inflated) self-esteem. Kohn also cites a passage by sports psychologist Frank Ryan demonstrating that losing is particularly difficult for the better competitors. This makes complete sense in light of the threatened egotism argument. Since an athlete's self-appraisal is heavily dependent on external evaluations (e.g., winning or losing), it should be expected that losing would result in, what Frank Ryan reports, "a bitter, morose, and sometimes unpleasant person."²⁴

To claim, as Kohn might, that high self-esteem is a patina covering a deeper sense of low self-esteem would be something difficult to disprove, "being able to interpret contrary evidence as meaning the opposite of what it literally means." But in relation to violence, since individuals with acknowledged low self-esteem have been consistently shown in the literature to be non-violent,

only those with covert low self-esteem are violent. But if one accepts that only the covert version of low self-esteem leads to violence, then seemingly one has already conceded the role of high self-esteem as decisive.... Insofar as only the latter group is violent, then the decisive factor would be the veneer of high self-esteem.²⁵

Kohn was correct on at least one point — responses to ego threats are need-based rather than want-based. And though it would be logical to assume that those with unstable

²⁴ Ryan, *Sports and Psychology*, 205. Quoted by Kohn, *No Contest*, 110.

²⁵ Baumeister, et al., "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression," 28.

high self-esteem might wish to avoid situations which threaten it, instead they consciously seek out confrontations — for two reasons, according to Baumeister. First, compared to people with low self-esteem, people with favorable opinions of themselves have a higher need for *self-enhancement*. It is this "quest for opportunities to prove oneself"²⁶ which is appealing. Co-extensively, individuals with high self-esteem have weaker orientations towards *self-protection* (against losing self-esteem) than those with low self-esteem because "they do not anticipate that they will fail or lose self-esteem.... Most of the time they scarcely think about the possibility that they will lose esteem."²⁷ The second reason is that those with inflated self-esteem need situations which reinforce their opinions of themselves, being receptive to favorable feedback. They need this *self-verification* to fend off doubts and confirm their inflated self-appraisals.

Granted, the essay referred specifically to high self-esteem and violence. Can the data be related to sports? Initially, it might be linked to athletes who tend towards violence, especially outside the sporting arena. It could be speculatively argued that inflated self-esteem accumulated in sports colors an individual's view of themselves in other roles. Athletes may think themselves superior based on athletic successes and seek self-verification off the playing field. Thus, when they experience conflicting appraisals (ego threats) in the real world, they resist the appraisals and grow violent.

Not everyone resorts to violence when facing ego threats; this may be due to the differences in situations where personal pride is associated, perhaps more exclusively than sport. Individuals who found or find satisfaction and self-verification in other venues of life won't be as committed to their sports-inculcated egotism. Inflated views of oneself, originating in childhood, most likely grow from forms of generic praise. Abundant general praise would inflate a child's opinion of him/herself to a point beyond what is actual or

²⁶ Baumeister, et al., "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression," 8.

²⁷ Baumeister, et al., "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression," 8.

realistic. Constant reinforcement of one's inflated opinion through institutional methods of rewards and incentives, a narrowing of activities to those which enhance and verify self-esteem, and over-protection and shielding from contrary opinions will perpetuate inflated views until the protection ends and the individual faces reality. Unprepared to cope with the ego threats and unwilling or unable to readjust self-esteem downward, they will fight as hard as they can to keep status or regain lost status; the higher the self-esteem, the more they have to lose, and the harder they will fight.

Even in sporting events, one can witness the affects of uncertain and unstable self-esteem. When a tennis player throws a tantrum and becomes insulting because of a supposedly erroneous call, it is demonstrative of his/her need to respond to threatened esteem by re-establishing dominance and/or increasing one's self-esteem by attacking another's (esteem treated as a zero-sum condition). If a tennis player is to remain mute and pensive at a bad call, it is necessary that the threatened esteem be handled by asserting more stable positive qualities gained from other spheres of psychological influence. Self-esteem cannot be linked to competitive models of winning and losing.

Finally, it could be argued that competition (and competitive sports in this case) is reflective of violent tendencies due to threatened self-esteem. To paraphrase and reinterpret Baumeister's understanding of collective egotism, athletes (whether on teams or not) are "strongly indoctrinated" with the view that the superior team (ours) is threatened. This is termed the "ideology of inherent but jeopardized superiority." This occurs so commonly it hardly needs proof. Any pep talk, coaching session, or editorial cartoon for that matter, depicts opponents as either inhuman, inferior, or incompetent. Any loss is more often described as the result of 'our' mistakes than 'their' superiority. Team athletes, having ample amounts of personal egotism, are often not attracted to or sustained within sport initially by financial gain but rather by "pride in belonging to a valued group, concern over winning admiration and fellowship, accumulation of honor, and largely symbolic

recognitions of success."²⁸ In essence, athletes with high self-esteem join teams in hopes to associate with a winner. However, this quest for external rewards eventually undermines and erodes intrinsic motivation. This leads to the necessity of external sources in generating and sustaining self-esteem. And as was mentioned above, those most threatened by ego threats include those whose favorable self-appraisals are heavily dependent on external validation.

In the end, if all that I have said is reasonable, there is much more at stake than the naïve notion of self-improvement. Since sports is a socially approved avenue for achievement, only then can it be said to "build character," and only in reference to the surrounding cultural values. But all of this can equally be said for cooperation. What distinguishes cooperation is that the socially approved self-esteem derived from cooperative activities is not restrictive to the activity.

In other words, one can be cooperative anywhere in society, and be secure in their self-esteem. Competition, however, is clearly a restrictive activity. Many competitive activities are not condoned outside of the arena. Boxing is assault and battery; stealing anything but a base is a crime. Consequently, self-esteem developed through competition is very fragile. This fragility and transience drives a fear of any non-competitive or cooperative society. Competitive people, or people thoroughly inculcated into the competitive lifestyle (if there is a difference), need competitive moments to continually prop up an unstable view of oneself. They, thus, fashion a society where group interactions become increasingly competitive; where individual views and discussions become polarized into win/loss arguments; where the art of debating takes precedence over the art of consensus building, invective dominates conciliation. This new society distorts once cooperative activities into competitive ones, while originally competitive activities are further corrupted and debased.

²⁸ Baumeister, et al., "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression," 24.

Leonard, Combs, and others²⁹ may be quite correct in their perceptions of the compulsive and structurally necessary conformity in competition; and Kohn and Baumeister may bicker back and forth about the relative merits of high and low self-esteem in justifying competition, but this is not the question at hand — though it may be part of the answer. Why, goes the question, are people ignoring the unmistakable warnings of competition and continuing to play sports? We have seen the persistent attempts of Simon, McMurtry, Delattre, and others to re-formulate the concept of competition as a "cooperative" endeavor. Yet if this is the case, why has it become so difficult to promote the benefits of pure cooperation instead of window dressing the overt ugliness of competition? Perhaps Kohn had it right when he put it this way:

Competing drags us down, devastates us psychologically, poisons our relationships, interferes with our performance. But acknowledging these things would be painful and might force us to make radical changes in our lives, so instead, we create and accept rationalizations for competition ... [The] contention that competition is psychologically beneficial contradicts the intuitive knowledge that I believe most of us possess. Despite direct awareness of what competition does to people ... some individuals persist in claiming that its effects are constructive. This is a powerful example of how it is possible to adjust our beliefs so as to escape the threatening realization that we have been subjecting ourselves to something terrible, that we have internalized a corrosive personality attribute.³⁰

Kohn and Baumeister come closest in intuiting that competition in our society, one geared towards status acquisition, is a psycho-sociological need.³¹ But what *prevents* the population from realizing (and if not realizing then actualizing) that a cooperative world would be a much more civilized and nicer place to live is a different and complex question. As George Orwell glibly put it: "If men would behave decently, the world would be decent." Surely one cannot deny that a cooperative society is a more socially humane one, where individuals are not pitted against each other for social, monetary, or political gain; or that the consequences of a competitive world, now matter how superficially beneficial, are as repulsive as can be imagined.

²⁹ Including Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few* (1977), and Jules Henry, *Culture Against Man* (1963).

³⁰ Kohn, *No Contest*, 114.

³¹ Not to be confused with Fielding's version of a psychological need for competition (see above).

When we play a game and lose, do we ever contemplate alternatives — games in which everyone can win and no one need ever have to lose? When we learn that over ninety percent of all new businesses collapse within their first year of operation, do we wonder why such failure is so common? Do we wonder why we rarely hear such statistics? When we read about rampant hunger, vast illiteracy, and perpetual poverty in the United States, do we grapple with why these problems haven't yet disappeared in one of the richest countries of the world? Think about this: In the United States 1% of the population owns 70% of the economic (capital) wealth; 5% owns 90% of the wealth. Economically speaking, we are still in the grips of totalitarianism. The same can be said for the global predicament. Assets of the world's 358 billionaires exceeded the combined annual incomes of countries with 45% of the world's population. Put it another way, 358 individuals together own assets worth more than the total incomes of over 2.5 billion people.³²

There is a congeries of problems we, as US citizens, don't usually think about; and when we do, we can just as quickly forget them once we grab our remote control, channel surf off the evening news and onto our favorite sports program, sitcom, or movie. But in another sense, we ought to feel especially proud; we lead the world in many categories. According to statistics compiled by Andrew Shapiro,³³ of the major industrialized countries, the United States ranks number one in: ignorance in mathematics [64], science [66], biology [14], and geography [68]; in house size and in homelessness [77]. We're number one in not ratifying human rights treaties [114], in the murder of children [121], and rapes [126]. We're unsurpassed in air pollution emissions [142], paper consumption [150], garbage [150], and time spent watching television [166]. We're unmatched in infant mortality [16] and in the percentage of population without health insurance [8]. We

³² *1996 World Information Transfer's Human Development Report*, 2 (figuring the world's population at 5.7 billion).

³³ *We're Number One: Where America Stands — and Falls — in the New World Order* (New York: Vintage Books), 1992. The numbers in the text represent page numbers.

possess the most Fortune 500 companies that lose money [96]; the greatest number of billionaires [73], as well as children and elderly in poverty [73]. We're also first in golf courses [52].

Such numbers and such reality should shame us into enlightenment and vigorous action, yet we remain on the couch transfixed by ethereal images of a world commercialized and fictionalized for our banal entertainment. Why is that? Why is it that the majority of us continually and purposively ignore these alarming statistics? Have we reached the point of information overload? Is it a simple case of pragmatics — we can't possibly cure all of the ills we face? Unfortunately, altering the social perceptions of an ideology so impregnated into culture as competition is would require Herculean perseverance. Alfie Kohn observed that it would be far easier to describe how change can be blocked than to describe how change can be affected.

- *Limit your vision.* American society has a long tradition of ignoring structural causes of social problems. "By pretending ... that psychological disturbance has nothing to do with the societal forces that shape personality development, you can help see to it that those forces continue unabated."³⁴ It is only worsening with the rise in pop sociobiology which claims that our vices, virtues, and behaviors are somehow based on instinct, and thus unchangeable. "The implication is that whatever is, is right."³⁵ It should be recalled from Chapter 2 the political implications that can be extracted from any kind of biological view (e.g., social Darwinism) of human behavior.

- *Adapt.* Or rather let yourself be adapted to the conditions of society. "A wealth of advice is available on how to become successful ... and virtually all of it proceeds from the premise that you should adjust yourself to conditions as you find them."³⁶ Instead of eliminating the problem (which is thought unassailable), pop psychologists exist to help

³⁴ Kohn, *No Contest*, 189.

³⁵ Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*, 24.

³⁶ Kohn, *No Contest*, 190.

people deal with the problem — essentially helping people adjust themselves to the environment.

- *Think about yourself.* "Implicit in any exhortation to succeed ... is the suggestion that you should be totally preoccupied with your own well being."³⁷ This self-limiting concern guarantees a proportionate lack of concern for larger social issues. But considering that most personal concern is about success or material goods, "social change is irrelevant to [such] goals and techniques."³⁸

- *Be "realistic."* Yes, one may grant that a totally cooperative society is a good idea, even a commendable one, but what can be done? One need not have to defend the larger structural components of society if one shrugs and pleads impotence to change anything. "Such protestations of powerlessness are actually very powerful, of course, since they make sure things are left exactly as they are. Every person encouraged to take such a stance is another person rescued from social activism."³⁹ In most cases, self-perceptions of social impotence are masked by one's power to mold their surroundings in other areas — landscaping and lawn care, for instance. For those who lack even the simplest materials with which to manipulate their environment, violence is practically inevitable, as Kaplan warned. Last, if a person persists in their demands for social change, they are viewed as well-intentioned but misguided, idealistic — Dare I say, utopian? Such stigma assure that the person will not be taken seriously.

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³⁷ Kohn, *No Contest*, 190.

³⁸ Kohn, *No Contest*, 190.

³⁹ Kohn, *No Contest*, 190-1.

IS CHANGE POSSIBLE?

Are we truly as paralyzed by the magnitude of desolation, or by the "lunacy" of attempting change, as Kohn would have us believe? Why does the majority of the population remain seemingly content with so many adamant problems? It might be suggested that since competition, by its very nature, flourishes when people acclaim self-interest as a way of life, a continual supply of supporters must be generated. The ideology of competition functions optimally when sympathetic social institutions (like Education⁴⁰) educate and train people in the American competitive ethos, to be and remain individuals and think only of oneself. Soon, this thoroughly inculcated ideological stance breeds individuals unable to work together, who don't know how to function cooperatively; the token cooperation one is asked to demonstrate usually takes the form of simple obedience, often under coercion.

This outcome does, however, have its political advantages for those in power. At times when political action and social unrest are called for, people are incapable of organizing, or pooling resources, or making a spirited effort at changing things *en masse*. The Vietnam protest marches, for instance, quickly lost steam when President Nixon ended the draft; concurrently, university administrators's intransigence to campus demonstrations strengthened. Put together, these events eliminated a large percentage of students who now feared losing their individual stakes in education and future job prospects more than being shot by the Viet Cong or the National Guard. These fair-weather marchers sloughed off the burden of world change to the few vocal zealots. The trend hasn't changed. These

⁴⁰ Education's insistence on individual learning and competitive grading is a perfect example, though recently, the emphasis is gradually shifting to cooperative learning procedures. However, even cooperative learning handbooks suggest methods that clearly promote competition between students within the classroom, particularly when desiring certain behavioral modifications.

"The solution ... [is] to change how [children] are taught. Literally hundreds of studies have shown that children who are encouraged to help each other to learn (rather than being forced to work individually or to compete against each other) end up achieving more. This is true for all grade levels, all subjects, and all kinds of schools. Cooperative learning produces kids who like each other more, like themselves more, like school more, and become better learners" [Kohn, *You Know What They Say ...*, 165-6].

same students make up the increasing number of people who more than willingly send in their membership fees to let someone else do the organizing and protesting — as if one can purchase a social conscience; but part of the American ethos is, of course, that money can buy anything.

On the other hand, these inculcations may not be imposed upon us by outside institutions as much as they are of our own making; our social paralysis is self-induced. Perhaps it is because, as Kenneth Galbraith adds his thoughts to the speculations, we are being willingly fed world visions crafted to our own liking and choosing:

The most clearly invariant [lesson] is that individuals and communities that are favored in their economic, social and political condition attribute social virtue and political durability to that which they themselves enjoy. That attribution, in turn, is made to apply even in the face of commanding evidence to the contrary. The beliefs of the fortunate are brought to serve the cause of continuing contentment, and the economic and political ideas of the time are similarly accommodated. There is an eager political market for that which pleases and reassures. Those who would serve this market and reap the resulting reward in money and applause are reliably available.⁴¹

Kenneth Galbraith poignantly argues in his book, *The Culture of Contentment* (1992), that the majority of those people who vote are also those who not only find their current conditions and way of life satisfactory, but eagerly pay those who will guarantee that nothing will endanger this manufactured reality. They wish to stay "contented" with the way things are, and rarely concern themselves with how much better or worse they might be in the future. Worried that such change will go poorly for them, they play it safe and stick with what is known. They have little care for long-range plans and respond primarily to whatever provides immediate comfort and contentment to themselves — often to the neglect of their children. The unrestrained domination of individualism has made even this aberration possible.

How we reached this unenviable point is the topic of innumerable books. Christopher Lasch, in his book *The True and Only Heaven* (1991), briefly describes one path to this method of egocentric self-fulfillment which (according to Lasch) began with Machiavelli.

⁴¹ Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment*, 2.

Whereas the Greeks promoted virtue — a notion grounded in "an idea of austerity and self-denial" which underlay "civic order" — meshed with the backdrop of *fortuna* (bad luck) against which there was no defense, Machiavelli politicized virtues, gradually altering the idea of *fortuna* to "the newer idea of civic corruption":

Once the antithesis of virtue ceased to be *fortuna* [and] became corruption instead, the succession of temporal events could be defined not as sheer disorder but as the product of social forces: specialization, the division of labor, and the growth of luxury.⁴²

With this change in vocabulary came the impetus for unlimited progress — since now human development and social perfection was just a matter of both time and the correct amount of institutional tinkering. Adam Smith considered this a possibility with the advent of Market Capitalism, albeit a Capitalism tempered by the virtue of "family centeredness" — where people work hard to benefit their off-spring and posterity. This virtue of "family centeredness" slowly evolved by the nineteenth century into a "cult of domesticity" — the notion that marriage and parenthood would tame the avaricious impulses of men and their commercial dealings. Unfortunately, along with the hope that the women of the family would assure the 'civilizing' of men came not only the "patriarchal subordination of women" but subjected the lower classes to the social and moral control of Victorianism. However, the supposed underlying benefits of a well-ordered family life made the oppression acceptable, for such a life style "allegedly generated the demand for improvements that assured the unlimited expansion of capitalist production,"⁴³ alleviating poverty, raising living standards, etc.

Others have argued a different path. James Lincoln Collier, in *The Rise of Selfishness in America* (1991), writes that the sudden fruition of Victorianism and the "cult of Domesticity" was instead a reaction to the sexual debauchery of the eighteenth century. Instead of licentiousness, families should (and would) stay home — out of trouble, away

⁴² Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 51.

⁴³ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 61.

from the red light districts. He also concludes that the necessity of domesticated family life grew in the United States as a result of expansionism; families had to stick together because communities were too spread apart. After all, Victorianism took hold in a country where "only 5 to 6 percent [of the population] lived in centers of 2500 people or more."⁴⁴ Thus, the call for family values appeared originally as a southern and midwestern, middle-class, anti-city movement. With the rapid development of industrialism throwing families into turmoil and the extraordinary influx of immigrants, the cities acted as human sponges, soaking up the disenfranchised and unemployed. By the time the upper classes took on the panache of Victorianism, it was already passé to the majority of the population.

So there is certainly a difference in historical interpretation — Collier sees the collapse of Victorianism at the same time Lasch sees its fruition — but this difference does not distort Lasch's theory to any great extent. It was the rise in Capitalism which made vice and debauchery profitable leading to the Victorian backlash. And whether or not the Victorian mentality began in rural America or Bleeker Street, the fact that family values were and still are used to sustain economic expansion, if even on an ideological level, cannot be denied. Furthermore, this Victorian ideology can be loosely equated with Lasch's notion of "nostalgia" — a passion for an arcadian Golden Age in the past combined with "generic images of childhood or ... cultural symbols of childhood like the [American] West of the small town."⁴⁵

Moreover, "the more closely capitalism came to be identified with immediate gratification and planned obsolescence, the more relentlessly it wore away the moral foundations of family life."⁴⁶ With the aid of the burgeoning field of advertising, and the turn of the century opinion that "savings ... led to underconsumption and declining

⁴⁴ Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America*, 19.

⁴⁵ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 108.

⁴⁶ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 63.

investments,"⁴⁷ delayed gratification no longer seemed the public panacea. Also, due to the unique juxtaposition of politics and economics in the United States, "the idea of democracy came to be associated more and more closely with the prospect of universal abundance."⁴⁸ Even the "cult of domesticity" worked unexpectedly to benefit the status quo. For once the population's concerns were focused inward towards the family, they soon lost interest in politics to the personal search for material satisfaction, helping social elites operate unencumbered by public scrutiny. It was only a matter of time then before the focus narrowed again to the point of neglecting family for oneself.

In addition, the fragility of American ideological stances ineluctably necessitated more pronounced propaganda to shore them up. For instance, as Lasch described, the immigration torrents of the late nineteenth century evoked an invidious xenophobic reaction quite possibly because the growing presence of an underclass of foreign laborers in the United States cast grave doubts over the universally-held "American Dream" — the social Darwinistically inspired belief that hard work and a little luck would assure employees of advancement out of wage labor (a despised though eventually accepted way of life) into the realm of property ownership. This "mythology of opportunity" suffered considerably as more and more immigrants were placed into wage labor positions of a rising proletarian class, all with increasingly scant opportunities to escape. "Permanent status as wage

⁴⁷ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 72.

⁴⁸ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 68. Lasch's argument concludes that "the attraction of progressive ideology, at least in the liberal version, thus turns out to be its greatest weakness: its rejection of a heroic conception of life" [78]. According to Lasch, the answer to liberal notions of progress and futile utopianism is the need for suffering to continually prod for change those lulled into inaction by luxury and comfort. Hope should replace optimism, for optimism (according to Lasch) is based more on the historical determinism of progress. Hope takes nothing for granted.

George Kateb responded decades before (*Utopia and Its Enemies*), when he stated that suffering need not be experienced in order to be avoided, nor should suffering be kept in existence to serve as a reminder to others. Furthermore, even though hope takes nothing for granted, Lasch overlooks the eventual move from Greek virtue into Roman Stoicism. Since *Fortuna* is out of our hands, one might be lulled into an equal sense of inactivity simply by accepting the future as it comes — the "Que sera, sera" perspective on life.

workers — the newcomers' probable fate," as Lasch concluded, "could simply not be reconciled with the American dream as conventionally understood."⁴⁹

The century-long survival of the traditional "American Dream" generally deemed a failure for the vast population (especially during the Great Depression) owes its durability primarily to the aftermath of WWII. Due to fluke world economic conditions — practically all industrialized countries except for the United States were in shambles, along with military/industrial expansion due to the Cold War, Korean War, and Vietnam War — the 1950s exploded with both optimism, consumerism, and land ownership. The "Camelot" years of the Kennedy presidency and the progressive social programs of Lyndon Johnson reinfected and revitalized society with the possibility of opportunity. The American Dream was alive again — if for less than 20 years — until, along with Martin Luther King, Jr, Robert Kennedy, and fifty thousand other Americans in Vietnam, it died. In the early 1970s the gasoline shortages placed the industrial might of America on notice (at least until the Middle East could be made "safe for democracy," as George Bush demonstrated in 1990.)⁵⁰ Unfortunately, many current politicians raised in the glory days of the 1950s remain convinced, despite the obvious disparities of social, economic and political conditions, that the American Dream is just as viable now as then. However, the growing mountain of material things which can be acquired has shifted the American Dream from land ownership to "thing" ownership. If one cannot own land (although it is still fervently desired), one has many other options from which to choose.

This burgeoning passion in possessing material things accomplished by the phenomenal growth in technology since the 1950s and promoted by this revised American-

⁴⁹ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 206.

⁵⁰ However, many argued that the gasoline shortages were more serious than ought to have been just to boost additional profits from an already paranoid public. There were numerous accounts of many oil tankers anchored off-dock full of crude oil which were not unloaded. This created shortage seems especially plausible when one recalls the US government's pseudo-shortage during WWII when a rationing plan was devised, not so much because there was a shortage of food, but to try to bring the war home to Americans.

Dream of sorts, has lead to the "domination in gratification"⁵¹ predicted by Herbert Marcuse, one of the first theorists to foresee the possibilities we now embrace. Just as Galbraith blames the uninspired and insipid consumerist for the social-political crises we now suffer, Marcuse spoke of the ramifications for personal freedom in the face of consumer avarice:

[A] rising standard of living is the almost unavoidable by-product of the politically manipulated industrial society ... The growing productivity of labor creates an increasing surplus-product which, whether privately or centrally appropriated and distributed, allows an increased consumption — notwithstanding the increased diversion of productivity. As long as this constellation prevails, it reduces the use-value of freedom; there is no reason to insist on self-determination if the administered life is the comfortable and even the "good" life.⁵²

In the end, both capitalism and democracy together function to celebrate the quest for personal success and gratification.⁵³ On one hand, if one accepts Lasch's interpretation, Capitalism created the ideological need for material contentment. On the other hand, returning to Galbraith and Marcuse, these "contented" individuals like their new lifestyle — becoming not only physically lazy⁵⁴ but politically lazy in the process by voting for the continuation of this lifestyle and, in so doing, rewarding those politicians who sustain this "feel-good" attitude. The voting populace, for the most part, wishes to be soothed and have their fears ameliorated by soft-spoken authorities and experts.⁵⁵ Doomsayers are

⁵¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 167.

⁵² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 49.

⁵³ Ortega y Gasset's wrote of his reflections on the "Mass man" — a person created by commercialism and personal gratification — in his book *The Revolt of the Masses*.

⁵⁴ American obesity has increased continuously since the end of World War II.

⁵⁵ "It would seem that many of the basic issues of individual and social life are very simple, so simple, in fact, that everyone should be expected to understand them. To let them appear to be so enormously complicated that only a 'specialist' can understand them, and he only in his own limited field, actually — and often intentionally — tends to discourage people from trusting their own capacity to think about those problems that really matter. The individual feels helplessly caught in a chaotic mass of data and with pathetic patience waits until the specialists have found out what to do and where to go.

"The result of this kind of influence is a twofold one: one is a skepticism and cynicism towards everything which is said or printed, while the other is a childish belief in anything that a person is told with authority. This combination of cynicism and naïveté is very typical of the modern individual. Its essential result is to discourage him from doing his own thinking and deciding" [Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 250].

Of course, Fromm argued from the position that humans in civilized societies wish to avoid moral decision making and the incumbent though unstable freedom it entails. As Marcuse argued, however, freedom is diminished in a consumerist society. Thus, the increasing consumerist demand for the

soon forgotten; while those who claim they have answers to problems stick around to assuage the masses. "The result is government that is accommodated not to reality or common need but to the beliefs of the contented, who are now the majority of those who vote."⁵⁶ Or as Marcuse presciently wrote over thirty years ago:

If the individuals are satisfied to the point of happiness with the goods and services handed down to them by administration, why should they insist on different institutions for a different production of different goods and services? And if the individuals are pre-conditioned so that the satisfying goods also include thoughts, feelings, aspirations, why should they wish to think, feel, and imagine for themselves? True, material and mental commodities offered may be bad, wasteful, rubbish, but Geist and knowledge are no telling arguments against satisfaction of needs.⁵⁷

A vicious cycle emerges, intuited by Marcuse's "pre-conditioned" individuals, where industry prompts advertisers to convince people they are discontent, thus spurring consumers to purchase items and re-configure their environment to re-establish external symbiosis and relieve their discomfort, who in turn elect public officials which will permit them continual access to these items of relief — to regain the "good" life. This is how the historian Loren Baritz eloquently put it:

The new gospel [of consumerism] ... rested on an interesting proposition: contentment prevented happiness. One adman explained that contentment was in fact subversive of the American way: "An absolute resignation to things as they are is found among the fatalistic inhabitants of India and China." But in America, happily, advertising "helps to keep the masses dissatisfied with their present mode of life." Based on the optimistic middle-class assumption that living would continue to improve, that the present was less desirable than the future, this mass grumpiness ... was the single most powerful engine of economic growth the world had ever known.⁵⁸

Paradoxically, Americans can only experience happiness and political "contentment" if government stays out of the way of their unending gratification of consumerist contentment perpetually undermined.

We are inadvertently (or not) allowing commercial interests to create a fictional reality, fabricating pseudo woes and miseries to which we predictably respond. People view

luxurious physical life seems to logically lead to an increasing leisure and subsequent lax in mental and moral life.

⁵⁶ Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment*, 10.

⁵⁷ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 50.

⁵⁸ Baritz, *The Good Life*, 80. Baritz quoted Otis Pease from *Responsibilities of American Advertising* (1983).

violence and hatred on television (either scripted or actual), never seeming to realize that they are viewing that which is commercially viable and sellable. The spectating public has crafted for itself a second vicious circle — we fear the night because we buy and believe programs which pander to our fears of the night. The line blurs between reality and fiction. Yet as has hopefully already been demonstrated, this political/economic conception of "virtual" reality should not be surprising to us. Sinclair Lewis expressed the pervasiveness of consumerism, Victorian ideology, and the new American Dream perfectly (even at the turn of the century!) in his classic novel *Babbitt* (1922) — a work in which he describes an upper middle class family man trying to reconcile his Victorian upbringing with his fascination for the changing mores of a younger generation he finds more invigorating than the static *status quo*:

Just as he was an Elk, a Booster, and a member of the Chamber of Commerce, just as the priests of the Presbyterian Church determined his every religious belief and the senators who controlled the Republican Party decided in little smoky rooms in Washington what he should think about disarmament, tariff, and Germany, so did the large national advertisers fix the surface of his life, fix what he believed to be his individuality. These standard advertised wares — toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters — were his symbols and proofs of excellence; at first the signs, then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom.⁵⁹

Sinclair Lewis's unique perspective of the symbolism of consumer goods apparently escaped the notice of many of his contemporary and was not thoroughly examined until the 1970 publication of *Consumer Society* by the French radical postmodernist Jean Baudrillard. In the book, Baudrillard describes consumerist society as a collection of individuals obsessed with consumption objects, not for their use-value or functional utility, but for their value as signifiers of social position. "Consumer objects constitute a *system of signs* that differentiate the population."⁶⁰ By interpreting consumerist items as "signs," consumer objects relinquish their materialist association with, or as a reaction to, some human need or problem (along with their connection to the ills of a consumerist/free market society), and become instead a "network of floating signifiers" of social status. "It is

⁵⁹ Lewis, *Babbitt*, 95.

⁶⁰ Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 162.

through objects that each individual searches out his or her place in an order. The function of commodities, then, is not just to meet individual needs, but also to relate the individual to the social order."⁶¹ People "consume" meaning and significance from which individuals define themselves in relation to the consumption of other signs.

The pandering to public caprices by politicians and corporate executives also reinforces the schism between the mythology of contentment and actual reality. The viewing public watches the entertainment media, if for no other reason than to vicariously witness adventure, horror, and fantasy without the incumbent risks. We can view murder and mayhem from the comfort of our own homes; we watch the slaughter of dozens of nameless faces, while eating tacos and sipping beer. Yet this madness of carnage must be reserved for the film medium only, and never to actually be witnessed.

The voting public tries very hard to maintain this separation between media and reality. The madness one views on television, including the evening news, is only the "acceptable" version, a sanitized watered-down version, often renamed in deceptively polite terms as "family-sensitive." Otherwise, public outcry and disgust will flood the television stations general managers, not about what they saw, but the fact that had to witness it. The horrors of man must also not be discussed in public forums, must not be mentioned in mixed company, must not be brought up in political debate.

There was a time when televising horror was very effecting in mobilizing public outrage against social institutions supporting the carnage. The viewing of the Vietnam War demonstrated the power of reality in changing the course of mankind. Unfortunately, the military and government learned their lessons well. In the Persian Gulf war, media was herded from one briefing room into another, and strictly prohibited from the actual battlefield. The Pentagon could now hand out its own brand of reality and truth, and the media as well as the public was powerless to stop it. Nor was there a real desire to stop it;

⁶¹ Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 162.

there was no public forum decrying the restriction of information. The public "knows" what horror exists in war. They have seen enough in the movies and on television and have become desensitized to it all. They are familiar with the occasional anonymous stranger being mutilated; let's keep it that way. The general public is in no mood to know the people who die. Strangers, stereotypes, and clouded images will suit.⁶²

But if one examines the arguments, history, and conditions closely, what emerges is a unifying theme which underlies all these excuses, and why so many people persist in accepting the myths as reality. To explore this theme, I would like to recount a story. It tells of an ancient Greek philosopher who argued for the necessity of suicide. So convincing was he through his lectures that some of his students actually killed themselves. It quickly became apparent to the Greek authorities that this man must stop and was subsequently banned from lecturing.

What we have is a story which poses some interesting thought questions. First, and probably simplest, why did not the philosopher follow his own advice and kill himself if, as it appeared, the arguments were *that* convincing? Perhaps he felt obligated to ignore his own mandates in order to spread the word. Perhaps he never really believed in what he was preaching; most sophists of the day were trained and paid to convince people of causes in which the lecturers may have had no interest. The second, less obvious question, is why the Greek authorities banned him from speaking? It would seem incongruous to the Ancient Greek polis, which had the resources of the finest rhetoricians and philosophers of the day at their disposal, to resort to censorship. Apparently the Greek intelligentsia couldn't produce an effective counter-argument, and thus imposed a summary end to discussion. In the end, however, both questions are interrelated; for in either case, the

⁶² Of course, this isn't always the case for everyone. The dramatic attraction of the Vietnam Memorial, designed by a graduate school art student as a class project, is in part due to the listing of the actual name of those who died and were missing in action during the war. However, conservative elements have found the Memorial unappealing, perhaps because the names make war a personal affair rather than an affair of state. As for the art student, she received a 'B' for her effort.

necessary component which created the paradox was the failure of a logical argument to convince or persuade certain individuals. In essence, "moral argument is too multifaceted an activity to be measured against systems of formal logic alone."⁶³

This failure of logic within moral arguments to affect moral action is hardly a new revelation. As Hume alluded to, reason and logic can never be causally connected to action. Reason, therefore, cannot stir us to action. Furthermore, rationality (the application of reason) is merely a formalized, sequential structure of language, something which can be used to 'rationalize' anything as long as it prescribes to its own internal sequential rules of logic. Consequently, according to H. L. Nieburg:

There is no difference in rationality between a description of reality based upon demons and devils and one based upon impersonal physical forces. The difference lies in the choice of irreducible assumptions about reality, working hypotheses which are validated by their success in achieving values.⁶⁴

Traditional understandings of logical and moral arguments are thus missing a step — a step absent in the above scenario. In order to go from logic to action, there has to be a *desire* to connect a specific logical (or illogical) call for action to that specified action. As Hume wrote, "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions." Nieburg continues his interpretation:

Any prescriptive syllogism [the basic unit of rationality] is meaningless except in terms of the emotional force which is attached to the first principle. The infinite regress of syllogistic reasoning ends somewhere with a commitment of self. Such commitments cannot be explained or understood by reasoning alone.⁶⁵

This "passion" or "emotional force" can never be a logical construction nor even conceived logically or with logic, for that would just push the question back an additional step. It must derive from an indescribable emotional component. People do things, not because it is logical, or ethical, or legal to do so, though that may be part of the decision making process; rather, people perform acts, in the end, because they *accept* or *do not*

⁶³ Orr, "The Logic of Moral Argument," 421. Orr continued later: "Models of formal logic, while helpful, do not sufficiently account for the flexible use of data in the process of moral argument" [422].

⁶⁴ Nieburg, *Political Violence*, 48.

⁶⁵ Nieburg, *Political Violence*, 48.

accept what reason prescribes that they do. It is this acceptance which has no logical foundation. It is an "emotional" commitment to a particular course of action. It exists in some place other than the conscious (otherwise it could be discussed and debated, which by definition is impossible with this "desire") and comes forth as a hesitance, a pause, perhaps in the form of conscience (although a conscience may imply understanding, which this force lacks).

This emotive desire, this "gut reaction," is the necessary impelling force in all decisions of all actions ever taken; a gut reaction spawned of a lifetime of conditioning from countless influences that have accosted the mind and body. We react to arguments, to people, to places, to everything predictably because all these prior influences have determined our responses; yet these responses remain unpredictable even to ourselves because no human will ever carry the same set of influences, nor know which influences will be more pertinent at which time. As social critic Stanley Fish describes the process:

Change can and does occur, not however by a process of "reasoned exposition," but through conversions, defined nicely as "a sudden deeply emotional switch from one non-rational cluster of beliefs to another that is no more (often less) rational ... Conversion can follow upon anything — reading at random a verse from the Bible, falling off one's horse on the road to Damascus, suddenly seeing the first gray hair — for anything, given the right history, psychology, pressuring circumstances, etc., can "jar people out of their accustomed ways of thinking."⁶⁶

Fish speaks of a "conversion," a type of switching of moral positions which, if we are to accept the contingency of history (personal or otherwise), could be sparked by *anything*. Any event whatsoever, no matter how dramatic, profound, or completely insignificant, can trigger a "conversion." Logical argument simply becomes only one element among many. However, Fish also claims that "[if] the minds of people ... are changed by conversion rather than by the operation of reason and logic, then change is a contingent matter and

⁶⁶ Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*, 207. Fish quoted Richard Posner *The Problems of Jurisprudence* (1990).

predictability ... is a chimera."⁶⁷ Life is unpredictable, and any single or series of unpredictable events can trigger an unforeseeable reaction.⁶⁸

Consequently, people will strive, then struggle, to conceive of reality in a fairly consistent way until something totally unexpected happens triggering a change of one's position or worldview into an alternative position or worldview. This is not to be confused with the occasional epiphany or flash of inspiration that individuals experience once in a while. These instances are simply moments when the mental processes, working in the background on a specific problem, strike upon the solution and fires forth with the answer from the depths of the mind into the open. But there is no change in moral position, just a momentary enlightenment of currently held beliefs. Fish wishes to emphasize something more substantial: that changes in moral position are not due to constant reflection on a subject, but from some fluke contingent stimuli.

Moreover, this "conversion" experience, if it occurs, will not be attributable to a special skill or ability that has been acquired through the regular practice of redescription — through empathy exercises — but rather to the (contingent) fact that for this or that person a particular argument or piece of testimony or preferred analogy or stream of light coming through a window at the right moment just happened to "take."⁶⁹

Granted, Fish would agree that previous moral positions may have been under siege for varying lengths of time by the usurper positions, but these moral positions were still firmly in control within the individual during the build-up. Only until "critical mass" was reached did the "conversion" happen.

⁶⁷ Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*, 7.

⁶⁸ Sartre was only half right then when he wrote in his work *The Age of Reason* (1945) that we are "condemned to be free." We are certainly condemned to do, think, and desire only those things and in ways which our contingent circumstances have constructed for us. But we are "free" only in illusion; since we all have different contingent experiences, we will sometimes react differently to similar situations lending the illusion of free will to humanity but will always respond in ways which the contingencies demand of us. Thus, the free will rejoinder to determinism, that "one could have chosen otherwise," now becomes irrelevant. It is not so much whether one could have chosen otherwise, but whether one *would* have chosen otherwise. If one would have, then one would have. One could never have chosen otherwise.

⁶⁹ Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*, 217.

What is "critical mass?" If moral facts are both contingent and political, and one's moral underpinning is based on political interrelationships, then any new moral view will either be accepted or ignored *based on how well they blend and coalesce with the current dominant personal moral base*. Thus, an individual will incorporate only those moral claims he or she can reasonably reconcile with his/her current moral foundation. What doesn't reconcile is cast aside for the moment and becomes one of the straws which may accumulate and eventually result in the switch later on, once enough of these "straws" are brought together to reach "critical mass."

Only after a "critical mass" of knowledge accumulates will there be the appropriate shift in moral positions. There is no gradual change in a moral position; there is only the gradual and continual accommodation of one's position to another. This precariously constructed pattern of thinking will persist until one's moral foundation can no longer reconcile the mounting discrepancies necessary to maintain stability and then, *click*, on comes the metaphysical light bulb. The mind gives up trying to juggle the confusing juxtapositions of moral inconsistencies and succumbs. Everything of the old collapses, making room for a new morality to be built. The new version has become the easier version with which to live.

It has been considered, then, that an argument's (whether logical or other) power to instigate personal change is purely dependent upon whether or not such an argument reinforces, challenges, or replaces what one already "believes" (on a gut level) emotionally and spiritually, which on occasion will result from a conversion.⁷⁰ We accept only what we are *capable* of accepting based on our contingent histories. What prompted Ionesco to proclaim, "There is no such thing as pure logic; it's all a hoax," was the determination that no meaningful logical statement is ever devoid of personal ideological content.

⁷⁰ These arguments, though still "unbelieved," remain uncomfortable, stimulating doubt and gnawing away at one's emotional resistance, until "critical mass" is reached and belief is granted.

Consequently, logic is only successful in gaining acceptance when it supports belief. "Public argument never convinces the other side; its only function was to rally the true believers."⁷¹ Logic, therefore, cannot be accepted solely on its own merits. To have any effect in altering a belief, the individual has to want to accept the logic, but that also means accepting the ideological baggage that comes with it.

Kenneth Galbraith adroitly pointed out that the "power of contentment over belief is universal."⁷² So, another sure way to prevent change is to fill individuals with emotional, physical, and spiritual commitments to the *status quo*, amassing a "critical mass" for contentment until they are satisfied with the way things currently are. Once the majority is satisfied, then there is little hope of changing the minds of the masses. Erich Fromm brutally stated that "people want nothing at all except to be governed decently."⁷³ In the final analysis, who are we logicians to shame the population into enlightenment when they are quite happy the way things are? One should expect nothing less from a democratic society brought up under the mantra of relativism, consumerism, and competition.

But how does one maintain such a proliferation of sentiment for the *status quo* — or in our case, for competition? It should be clear by now that the four myths of competition (that competition is innate, more productive, more fun, builds character), plus Simon's attempt to redefine competition as cooperation by redefining "mutual" and "excellence" in his own special way, are no more than a result of flawed common sense and unsubstantiated pretensions — yet very effective pretensions, perpetuated with and by media, advertisement, and political propaganda (the more entertaining, the better), all of which are used to justify certain "necessary illusions" of social hierarchies, hegemony, cultural ideologies, and the *status quo*. Even Fish's hope that a critical mass of knowledge

⁷¹ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 432. Lasch quotes the sociologist and New Deal supporter, Thurmon Arnold.

⁷² Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment*, 10.

⁷³ Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 223.

will instigate individual moral change and social advancement appears unlikely, as more and more the average individual's collection of knowledge is institutionally determined. Due to the vast amount of information that currently exists and is continually growing, the media has taken upon itself the task of setting "our political and social agendas, narrowing a vast river of information into a stream by deciding which is important."⁷⁴ So, even though John Wilson may write that in "choosing to play certain games in certain ways people express their commitment to a 'way of life',"⁷⁵ it must also be claimed that individual choices are in many ways pre-determined by what is available and what is *made* available. Consequently, a "way of life" can conceivably be manufactured by commercial powers, and the commitment to this way of life can be fashioned into being through institutions under the influential power of commercial interests, e.g., politics and media.

Furthermore, as Noam Chomsky reminds us:

In the democratic system, the necessary illusions cannot be imposed by force. Rather, they must be instilled in the public mind by more subtle means. A totalitarian state can be satisfied with lesser degrees of allegiance to required truths. It is sufficient that people obey; what they think is a secondary concern. But in a democratic political order, there is always the danger that independent thought might be translated into political action, so it is important to eliminate the threat at its root ... Debate cannot be stilled, and indeed, in a properly functioning system of propaganda, it should not be, because it has a system-reinforcing character if constrained within proper bounds. What is essential is to set the bounds firmly. Controversy may rage as long as it adheres to the presuppositions that define the consensus of elites, and it should furthermore be encouraged within these bounds, thus helping to establish these doctrines as the very conditions of thinkable thought while reinforcing the belief that freedom reigns.⁷⁶

Chomsky, however, was being relatively kind. If one explores society carefully, he or she will witness many events which promote a totalitarian perspective — where obeying the law co-opts individual liberties, primarily in the name of safety. The Supreme Court has recently permitted police to enter private residences without warning. It has also given police the authority to force all occupants out of a car on a minor traffic violation, whether or not the occupants are suspected of any crime. Even worse, a Chicago housing project

⁷⁴ Crossen, *Tainted Truth*, 232.

⁷⁵ Wilson, *Playing by the Rules*, 324.

⁷⁶ Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, 48.

voluntarily gave up their civil rights to allow unannounced and unwarranted searches of apartments in hopes of finding weapons.

Chomsky was certainly not the first to see the political and propaganda power of the press. Walter Lippman began his attacks on the media in the 1920s with a quick succession of scathingly critical works, including the article "A Test of the News" and the book *Liberty and the News*. Both published in 1920, they argued that press coverage and press reporting was both ideologically biased (defending conservative Victorian values) and substantively bankrupt (selling sex and violence) — a paradoxically unique combination marketing both voyeurist desires and social guilt. Several years later, Lippman authored *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925) in which he expanded his criticisms to include the notion of public opinion. As far as Lippman was concerned, public opinion expressed irrational responses to emotional appeals and opinions and could provide little more than public affirmation of the effectiveness of media propaganda:

Public opinion was unreliable ... because it could be united only by an appeal to slogans and "symbolic pictures." In a society ruled by public opinion, government became the art of "manipulation" — the "manufacture of consent." "Where all news comes at second-hand, where all the testimony is uncertain, men cease to respond to truths, and respond simply to opinions. The environment in which they act is not the realities themselves, but the pseudo-environment of reports, rumors, and guesses ... Everything is on the plane of assertion and propaganda."⁷⁷

Yet despite Chomsky's lack of novelty, the statement about media and elitist power setting the bounds of debate and discussion is essentially correct. It is quite similar to the thoughts of Stanley Fish when he claimed that the struggle for "truth" and the moral high ground rests in a vicious competitive fight for the claim to authority:

It means they must argue, thrash it out, present bodies of evidence to one another and to relevant audiences, try to change one another's mind. To be sure, the process is not guided by unchallengeable authority, but authority, not unchallengeable but temporarily regnant, is what is fashioned in the course of it. That is to say, authority does not *preside* over the debate for a position outside of it but is the prize for which the debaters vie.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 365. Lasch quotes Walter Lippman.

⁷⁸ Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*, 10-11.

For both Fish and Chomsky, in the end, "what is essential is the power to set the agenda."⁷⁹

Could it be then that individuals like sports and ignore the ills of competition because they are surrounded by a morass of people who design and make available only certain avenues for experience, and have influence over other people's appreciation and perception of their experiences? Is some sort of mob mentality in effect, where people, in order to make their lives easier, have become sheep and will do what they are told by experts who have taken the responsibility over what people ought to think? Do people like sports and competition because it is so much more socially beneficial to these individuals — in the acquisition of prestige, brownie points, friends — to like these things? To not like sports certainly threatens one's social connections within a society inundated by sport and competition. To fight for anti-competition, as Kohn suggested, would place one in the disheartening position of being tolerated but otherwise ignored; and being ignored is the deathknell of thoroughly social creatures as ourselves. Perhaps then, it is not so much that people prefer competition, but rather they fear the consequences of not preferring it.

For reasons stated throughout the chapter, and perhaps many more which are fabricated to justify the present hierarchy, the answer to the above questions is yes. Social Darwinism is not dead, as was originally thought. In fact, the end result — the goal — of all the conservative aspirations and social commentary discussed is to create a society full of powerless people: where a person's liberties have been replaced with concerns for personal safety; where morality has been replaced by jurisprudence; where critical thinking has been replaced with the thoughts of media experts. The majority of the population are powerless because they are told of the inevitability of nature; powerless because of their conviction to capitalist efficiency; powerless because of the fear of losing social stature and a particular standard of living, and any number of other factors that keep people from

⁷⁹ Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, 48.

foregoing comfort for the sake of conscience. We live in a world of resigned fear, and we close up into ourselves as a response, worried only about our personal well-being. Martin Plattel reminds us that as citizens in a democracy we have still a lot to learn:

Western man thought that he was democratic but, as a matter of fact, he more and more neglected his social responsibility. He withdrew within the shell of his private prosperity and private little pleasures and more or less left society to its fate. He was willing to believe in democracy if it guaranteed that his private income would annually grow by a few per cent.⁸⁰

In its totality, society becomes paralyzed into powerlessness through a variety of social control methods.

Education is no less responsible for the creation of uselessness than are corporate or political entities. In the early stage of education, it was considered antithetical to make learning a matter of expression which followed a particular agenda:

In my opinion, it is quite unnecessary to act in the schools as you act when playing cards or dice, where any infringement of the rules spoils the game. In a learned discussion ... there should be nothing outrageous or risky in putting forward a novel idea.⁸¹

Times have considerably changed, one might argue, especially since Horace Mann's belief that primary schools should furnish the first steps in developing proper modes of citizenship and social behavior. Schools ought therefore to be structured to reinforce such goals; but as education became more and more institutionalized, the role of schools evolved into teaching children to be obedient students, not necessarily well-educated students, much less well-educated citizens. A school's administrative arrangement itself is designed to assure its efficient function by producing, out of necessity and through regimentation and control, passive and submissive students which will not disrupt the normal flow of education. This minimizes individual differences and promotes over-reliance on authority structures of the school; it also guarantees a continual supply of well-conditioned myrmidons for an increasingly institutionalized society. Times have changed, but Mann

⁸⁰ Plattel, *Utopian and Critical Thinking*, 15.

⁸¹ Erasmus, *Erasmii opus epist.* Quoted by Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 156.

would have shuddered in disbelief at the type of *laissez-faire* citizen institutionalized society demands primary schools to mold.

Miracle and Rees perceptively pointed out that sports is of prime importance to this goal:

Educational administrators have learned that the cultural value placed on athletics can be used to bureaucratic advantage. For example, control over sport in the school increases the authority of the principal. The power of the administrator is great indeed when it can prevent a student from playing school sport or attending a sport-related event since these are generally considered to be the most important school functions by students and many community members.⁸²

Here, we have an individual (the principal) setting the social/political agenda of the school population by coercing students through the use of events which validate their personal and social existence. In fact, by creating academic requirements to participate in sports, sports emerges as an even greater part of a student's life; now, classes (and education in general) have become the necessary evil to playing sports. In the hopes to emphasize the role of education, administrators have unwittingly and effectively slashed the child's intrinsic motivation to learn. Educational pundits may cringe at the thought of offering candy to bribe classes into behaving or doing well on tests, but limiting sports to only those students who achieve a certain minimum average is no different. In the end, however, the carrot of sports rather than the stick of educational martinets has fashioned obsequious students, crafting a smooth-running bureaucracy in the process.⁸³

The conservatism of social Darwinism is alive and well and flourishing with the help of selective information through popular forms of dissemination. In the news media, articles and stories abound about even the most implausible genetic causes for distinctive personal behaviors. Articles which dispute the premise of sociobiology, however, are

⁸² Miracle and Rees, *Lessons of the Locker Room*, 65. This quest for efficiency represents a clear demonstration of what Jorge's contention would represent if developed in an educational setting. Autocracy is necessary for proper functioning, with the students (workers) having very limited recourse for expressing grievances, especially grievances which would disturb the efficient educational machine.

⁸³ It could be argued that a well-disciplined school permits *more* education to take place, since teachers need not have to spend time in class doing the disciplining. This may be, but it clearly sidesteps what I think is a more invidious situation: students are forced to adjust the the expectations of the teachers and their teaching style, rather than teachers adjusting to the expectations and learning styles of their students.

absent from the media. Sports fills the airwaves; protests or anti-sports discussions are practically non-existent. These situations continue because the latter examples are not newsworthy items; yet as critics of the media instruct, newsworthy is just another name for something economically beneficial to the corporation. The truly balanced perspective is, essentially, a myth.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Alfie Kohn himself acknowledged the failure of logic, as well as the sensationalism which guides the search for newsworthiness, as he describes his and *No Contest's* rather infamous journey through the media: "The first thing that happened [after the book was published] was that I received invitations to appear on more than one hundred TV and radio programs, including Donahue, to say nothing of the interviews for newspaper and magazine articles ... I realized pretty quickly that all this attention signified not that the book's reasoning was seen as cogent but rather that its position was seen as outrageously controversial. It was not that I had offered a meaty argument so much as that I had turned our most sacred cow into hamburger" [Kohn, *No Contest*, 233].

Chapter 7

The Logic of Literature

It seems to me imperative that literature enter such [social and political] arguments because what is being disrupted is nothing less than what is the case, what is truth and what is untruth, and the battleground is our imagination. If writers leave the business of making pictures of the world to politicians, it will be one of history's great and most abject abdications.

There is a genuine need for political fiction, for books that draw new and better maps of reality, and make new languages with which we can understand the world. [It is necessary, even exhilarating] to grapple with the special problems created by the incorporation of political material, because politics is by turns farce and tragedy.

SALMAN RUSHDIE¹

Over the past several chapters, I have tried, at least cursorily, to weave an argument demonstrating that competition is not simply a social construction (as opposed to an innate human trait), but a social construction useful in perpetuating and justifying social inequalities (often under the guise of equal opportunity), and one that facilitates the creation of myths that help design social practices that institutionalize inequality. If William Ryan was correct when he (drawing from Karl Mannheim's definition of ideology²) pointed out that the "maintenance of a particular system of inequality ... is to a large extent dependent on the prevailing belief system,"³ then to weaken or eliminate current inequalities it will be necessary either to weaken or eliminate the vice grip that the competitive ideology has over social institutions and individual interrelationships, or to restructure our institutions and interrelationships so cooperation is seen as being more beneficial than competition. Ideally,

¹ Safire and Safir, *Good Advice on Writing*, 92.

² As paraphrased by Ryan: "It is: (1) a set of ideas of beliefs (2) that have an "unconscious" basis, (3) that are distorted by the interests of a particular group, and (4) that serve the interests of that group in maintaining the status quo" [38].

³ Ryan, *Equality*, 38.

one ought to implement both correctives simultaneously. Each scenario will go far to supplant a competitive ideology and reinforce a cooperative belief system. Unfortunately, as Chapter 5 explained, the ideology of competition is so thoroughly entrenched in the American psyche, mere argument seems insufficient in encouraging a reconsideration of competitive methods used in a variety of institutions, such as education, health care, or jurisprudence.

So, after reading the preceding chapters and realizing there are so many powerful forces promoting the competitive agenda, one might understandably come to the conclusion that trying to change the way we see the world, and perhaps even the way we comprehend what is real and truthful in this world, may be a fruitless venture. Fruitless because in the struggle with competition we may not know how to begin breaking down the ideological barriers that have implanted themselves on the road to civilization and knowledge. In other words (and as I argued at the end of Chapter 5), the arguments for competition have been very successful (almost entirely too persuasive) because these logical arguments are readily accepted. Through a cultural and media-enhanced indoctrination process, individuals grow up with the inclination to want to believe pro-competition arguments. Reasonable and logical arguments for cooperation fail to adequately persuade, as is seemingly apparent, because acceptance is hindered by the emotional commitments which underlie resistance to these other arguments. To persuade, therefore, one must find a way of altering emotional biases.

This chapter works through for the reader a possible solution to the problem of making cooperation more convincing to a population inundated with competitivist propaganda. It begins with the understanding that cooperation must be "sold" to the public in much the same way competition has been for centuries. The discussion next turns to an examination of the role of language in the determination of truth, and how the evolutionary character of language makes truth transitory. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to claim

that philosophical works offer insight into contemporary life considering the changes in language that have taken place. The section ends on the possibility that art and literature may possess an understanding of truth that rivals (if not surpasses) that of the more traditional venues, including philosophy.

The following section examines the evolution of morality and ethics, both of which are intimately linked to language. Essentially, since truth in language is transitory, so too are the truths in morality and ethics, leading us to the inevitable conclusion that morality is more Emotivism than Rationalism; but as alluded to in the previous chapter, emotive responses are taught. Although some have argued for a resurgence in classical virtues to re-establish a fundamental morality, their arguments reflect an understanding of languages which underlies a competitivist meta-narrative, a perspective which may be more the cause, rather than the solution to our problems.

Next, the argument tries to tie together the alternative value of literature in affecting the emotional commitments of the readers (even if in a subliminal way) and the linguistic component of morality. Through an interpretation of Richard Rorty and Orwell's classic dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it should be clear that literature possesses the capacity to introduce moral and ethical guidance that is meaningful and potent. This leads us into the final section which argues that utopian literature contains the necessary elements to promote ideological changes throughout society via a method that makes these alterations more tangible and less obscure by addressing the emotional and psychological commitments we hold. As we begin, though, we should keep in mind the views John Steinbeck held concerning the purpose of a book:

Now the purpose of a book I suppose is to amuse, interest, instruct, but its warmer purpose is just to associate with the reader. You use symbols he can understand so that the two of you can be together ... With the rhythms and symbols of poetry one can get into a reader — open him up and while he is open introduce — things on an intellectual level which he would not or could not receive unless he were opened up. It is a psychological trick if you wish but all techniques of writing are psychological tricks. Perspective in painting is a trick, word sounds are tricks, even

arrangement and form are tricks. And a trick is only good if it is effective. The writer never knows whether his trick is going to work until he has a reader.⁴

* * *

THE LANGUAGE OF SELLING

In his classic utopian novel *Walden Two* (1948),⁵ B. F. Skinner wrote that we must urgently acknowledge the fact that it is the environment — more specifically, the carefully choreographed education in and of that environment — which determines the 'freedom' of individuals. Since it is impossible to remove morality and ethics from social institutions like education, politics, and sports, or from the realm of human interactions in general, we must manipulate experiences and exposures so the ethics and morality which the public ought to possess can be learned. How? As Skinner proposes, the "science of persuasion" has always been here for the asking:

The potency of behavioral engineering can scarcely be overestimated. It makes one wonder why the techniques haven't been put to better use long before this ... But its techniques and methods are in the wrong hands — they are used for personal aggrandizement in a competitive world or, in the case of the psychologist and educator, for futilely corrective purposes. My question is, have you the courage to take up and wield the science of behavior for the good of mankind?⁶

Instead of letting chance and accidents (which are disorganized and inefficient), or despots and advertisers (who inscribe behavior which often undermines cooperative beliefs for the sake of sustained elitism, e.g., the caste system of India, and competitive motivations, e.g., consumer-driven conspicuous consumption) determine human behavior, we must make a concerted effort in structuring our environments to maximize the inculcation of appropriate mores and beneficial human behaviors. As we no longer need competition for survival, no necessity remains to sustain it. It is now up to cooperation to civilize us.

⁴ Safire and Safir, *Good Advice on Writing*, 53.

⁵ Later elaborated on in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971).

⁶ Skinner, *Walden Two*, 207, 256-7.

Admitting that physical violence and coercion are unacceptable and inefficient possibilities for persuasion (especially in a democratic society),⁷ we must resort to a different method, a method repeatedly shown effective by the "science of persuasion." To put it crudely, one must *advertise*. Of course, the call for persuasive advertising as a device for social change was nothing new to Skinner. Thurmon Arnold, in the midst of the Depression, insisted that democracy has little effectiveness in improving society if it is allowed to be operated by irrational individuals guided by emotionally unstable opinions and perspectives. Rather, "men are moved by myths and symbols, not by moral arguments, and that if responsible leaders did not provide compelling 'faiths and dreams,' irresponsible demagogues would gladly leap into the breach."⁸ In the end, governments ought to be composed of "ideal" administrators who "combined the diagnostic skills of a psychiatrist with the arts of persuasion perfected by the advertising industry."⁹ The solution is for government to develop propaganda based on a new social philosophy which will inspire people to work altruistically for the benefit of their fellow humans.¹⁰

In spite of the lunacy and counter-intuitiveness with which the following might sound, we must *sell* cooperation to the public. Obviously, cooperation is not currently selling, and cannot sell, itself in an atmosphere of economically- and politically-supported competition. However, as some readers may have immediately noticed, won't selling cooperation require argumentation? Won't that, in turn, place us in a Catch-22 situation — relying on arguments after I have just claimed that arguments aren't effective?

It is important to understand that not all methods of argumentation may be fruitless. Recall what I wrote above — that if logical arguments are to be effective, the listener must

⁷ Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* discusses Bentham's image of the panopticon and its role in self-discipline and self-policing of personal ethics. Also relevant are Aldous Huxley's criticisms of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; its repressive political state is much too labor intensive and exhaustive to be sustainable or realistically threatening.

⁸ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 435.

⁹ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 435.

¹⁰ Thurmon Arnold wrote *The Symbols of Government* (1935) and *The Folklore of Capitalism* (1937).

already have some desire to believe the arguments's premises; essentially, the reader must be in the proper frame of mind to be positively influenced. The persuasive argument will move beyond the realm of logic then, and into the realm of emotion where the desire to believe resides. Therefore, an argument introduced into a skeptical atmosphere must change the emotional commitments of the listener or, at the very least, create an environment in which logical arguments can take root.

The question now facing us is how to reach and modify the emotional commitments of the listener. If we have learned anything at all from advertisers, it is that it is not so much *what* one is to be convinced of, but *how* one is convinced that counts. It is the presentation of words and a specific organization of thought that initiates movement towards involvement and emotional commitment to the content of the words. Orators throughout history, from the ancient sophists to the contemporary sophists in the courtrooms of today, learn quickly that stating facts is only the tip of the rhetorical iceberg. Persuasion is all in the presentation.¹¹

First, the road that social commentary travels in affecting social change may not lay fundamentally in presenting the logical arguments of philosophy or the social sciences (though one might draw from these sources). Recall Hume's statement that reason must be the slave to passion. The twentieth century set the stage for a concerted move away from a traditional philosophy that reached its zenith with Hegelianism and its ensuing theories — a philosophy too grand and too abstract. Out of this obese leviathans of thought arose more "earthly creations, like Marxism and Existentialism. Yet there was much more going on at the turn of the century, for the new philosophies were as much influenced and directed by

¹¹ The best form is that which is not perceived as propaganda. Unfortunately (or fortunately for the propagandists), the Cold War has equated in people's minds the Soviet brand of propaganda as propaganda itself. On the other hand, contemporary advertising — slick, entertaining, and flashy — not only doesn't look like propaganda, it is not even conceived of as propaganda — which is, ironically, the best kind of propaganda.

the reaction to Victorian ideologies and hypocrisies as by any scholar's brilliance or any philosophy's over-extended immensity. Robert Collier described the opposing sentiment:

Whether philosophy, or social science, the new ideas were running in the same direction: they were calling for spontaneity and open expression of feeling instead of Victorian self-control. They were demanding that the visceral rawness of life be exposed, a cry exactly contrary to the Victorian idea of modesty and concealment of the rough underside. The new art, the new literature, the new philosophy were determined to throttle Victorianism — and it would be done with glee.¹²

Vigorous responses and sometimes violent attacks were to be almost expected. The artistic movements of Dadaism and Cubism destroyed the visual and emotional comfort of traditional perspective; the primitivism of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) and the extraneous need for tonality of Schönberg's *Pierre Lunaire* (1912) shocked the public and exemplified the intellectual fragmentation taking place in Europe.¹³ The advent of World War I definitively crushed any innocence that may have remained of Victorianism.

Out of this cataclysmic change in social and philosophical orientation came not only Marxism and Existentialism, but the language philosophers, ostensibly starting with the brilliant American philosopher Charles Saunders Pierce's essay "How to Make Ideas Clear" (1878). Perhaps one of the most profound philosophical papers ever written, it set the guiding principles of Pragmatism in the United States, and prepared the way for Europeans like Frege and Russell in the following century.¹⁴ Simply put, Pierce's philosophy can be expressed as the *pragmatic maxim*:

In order to understand what is meant by any proposition, we must ask ourselves, "Suppose this proposition were true; what conceivable bearing might it have on the conduct of our lives?" When we have fully answered this question, we have said all there is to say about the meaning of the proposition. And if we are unable to specify any respect in which its truth or falsehood could conceivably have any bearing on our lives, then we are also unable to specify any meaning whatsoever for that proposition.¹⁵

¹² Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America*, 105.

¹³ However, it has been suggested that Schönberg and the Expressionist school reflected an abstraction of an inward nature, as opposed to the outward flamboyance of late nineteenth century Romanticism, but an abstraction nonetheless.

¹⁴ However, it is unclear if Russell or any of the early Logical Positivists ever read his essay before coming up with their interpretations.

¹⁵ Kaplan, *The New World of Philosophy*, 22-3.

Even though the content is similar to the "verifiability theory of meaning" of the Logical Positivists, the Europeans omitted a critical aspect of Pierce — the notion of a statement having a bearing on the conduct of our lives. This omission by the Vienna School seems to indicate more an aversion to the use of philosophy or similar studies in the conduct of our lives and a bias towards logic and mathematical interpretations of nature than any fault of the Humanities. Although it is often argued that Logical Positivism was an attempt to correct the metaphysical excesses of nineteenth century philosophy, it might be suggested as well that Positivism arose as either 1) a reactionary response to rising irrationalism (for example, "The Underground Man" by Dostoyevsky) and existentialism, or 2) a defense against detractors who claimed that scientific industrialism both increased personal alienation, conformity, and repression (e.g., *We* by Zamyatin), and decreased human control over science itself (e.g., *Brave New World* by Huxley), or both.

The logical genius Wittgenstein, however, refused to throw out morality or ethics simply because statements about these could not be empirically verified. The last line of his *Tractatus* (1921) — "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." — emphasizes Wittgenstein's understanding that ethics, morality, epistemology and other "non-verifiable" studies are not necessarily meaningless; we just do not have a language available with which we can verify its propositions. On the other hand, Wittgenstein's "picture theory of language" was one of the first direct assertions that language and reality are interrelated more intimately than what has been formerly assumed, and that language is not simply a collection of symbols depicting objects in reality. Instead, language pictures reality. How so? At the risk of simplifying what is an excruciatingly abstruse work, the *Tractatus* claims that a proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it. A collection of words in a proposition is similar to a collection of objects in reality — at least that is how it should be. For if one can say anything, to utter a proposition, one can only clearly say something that is in the world, that are facts.

Philosophy, then, "aims at the logical clarification of thoughts ... Philosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions,' but rather in the clarification of propositions" (4.112). According to Wittgenstein (in the *Tractatus*), present languages are ill-suited for the task of providing proper expression to our thoughts in a logical and clear manner.

In his second book, *Philosophical Investigations* (published posthumously in 1953), Wittgenstein disavowed much of what he wrote in the *Tractatus*. Instead of envisioning an ideal language which perfectly pictures reality,¹⁶ he asserted that ordinary languages were logically perfect the way they existed. It was only in our mistaken usages that problems arose. When asked, for example, "What time is it?" a person can easily respond; the sentence makes logical sense. However, when asked "What is time?" the person pauses, not knowing how to respond; the sentence makes little logical sense. The ordinary person, therefore, seems to have a better sense of what is logically sound than even the best metaphysician philosopher.

Furthermore, Wittgenstein claimed in the latter work that languages are structured by specific "games" in which words have different meanings based on rules determined by their environment and use; there is no one single meaning to any word. Yet, if one were to draw connections between the *Tractatus* and the later Wittgenstein, could it not be stated that these language games create rules for the picturing of reality? If so, would not then the order of words (how these "facts" are arranged) and how propositions are worded (as part of the language game) determine how we see reality? The order of words, then, could define reality. And since the order of words is a construction of the mind, could not reality itself be a construction of the mind? Thus, the mind defines reality by taking "facts" in the world and organizing them in a particular way, defining the psychological component as well as the emotional and logical commitments in the process. Affecting each one requires

¹⁶ In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein wrote, "4.002 Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense."

a unique configuration of words and expressions. Poetic order has tremendous emotive force (as if it were ever doubted).

Add to this line of reasoning Wittgenstein's enigmatic statement from the *Tractatus* that reality is the combination of existing and non-existing facts (2.06), we gain insight into the emotive impact of poetry. But first, what does that mean — "non-existing facts" — if facts are a combination of objects? If one recalls Heidegger's comment that "human expression [via language] is always a presentation and representation of the real and the unreal,"¹⁷ then we get a clue to its meaning. Non-existing facts are artificial configurations of objects in the world, and reality permits this. Reality permits fiction. In essence, facts do not necessarily exist; facts, therefore, do not, by definition, need to be verifiable. To summarize Wittgenstein in light of these additional possibilities, since language structures our reality, and language is a string of logical facts, and logical facts are mental images of actual facts, then facts, as mentioned above, structure our reality. However, now that facts can be fictional as well as real, poetry or literature¹⁸ has just as much an influence on our creation of reality as "verifiable" facts.¹⁹

From the philosophical perspective of the later half of the twentieth century, the world became a construction of words. Language configures the reality through which we move.²⁰ However, if language is the arbiter of reality, then as the definition of words change, so too does reality. If one admits that, then what connection do we have with either our past or our future?

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 192.

¹⁸ Or advertisement or propaganda for that matter.

¹⁹ This was something to which Pierce alluded, William James understood, and the Positivists completely ignored. This also might explain some of the animosity between Wittgenstein and the Vienna School. Even Bertrand Russell, who was asked by Wittgenstein to write the introduction to the *Tractatus*, went so far off the mark, expressing more of what he read of his *own* linguistic ideas, that Wittgenstein requested that Russell's introduction be removed from all subsequent editions. The above interpretation may also offer insight into Wittgenstein's own assertion to a friend that the "point of the book is an ethical one" [Moran, *Toward the World and Wisdom of Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, 15n].

²⁰ Arising from this post-structuralism was the view that if language structures reality, and from reality comes truth, then truth is a product of language as well. Postmodernism arrived.

For whom, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder, was he writing this diary? For the future, for the unborn. His mind hovered for a moment round the doubtful date on the page, and then fetched up with a bump against the Newspeak word *doublethink*. For the first time the magnitude of what he had undertaken came home to him. How could you communicate with the future? It was of its nature impossible. Either the future would resemble the present in which case it would not listen to him, or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless.²¹

This is how George Orwell, through the persona of Winston Smith in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, expressed the dilemma between literature and reality. How can any age understand the meanings and vocabularies of any other age? Later in the novel, Winston, beholding a long-lost newspaper article (planted by the Thought Police) which "slipped" through without historical alteration, makes a similar observation concerning his discovery: "It's a little chunk of history that they've forgotten to alter. It's a message from a hundred years ago, if one knew how to read it."²² Is language, and therefore expression, locked into a specific temporal location? In the second half of this century, such seems to be the case. Meanings change, and thus words change, and thus reality changes. Why else would so much effort be spent, for example, in trying to understand the implications and underlying meanings of Shakespeare's, or Milton's, or even more recently, C. S. Lewis's or e. e. cummings's rhetoric?

Because languages and meanings change, all constructions of language will wax and wane with the ages. No work of art, therefore, can be a work of art in its own right; its admiration or comprehension is composed of languages and meanings that have changed. No piece of literature can be a classic for every age and every reader; the value of literature is only as great as the knowledge, understanding, and vocabulary of the readers and their time. Harold Taylor, a renowned spokesperson for arts education, wrote about this personal connection:

The conduct of the observer ... when he comes to the gallery or to the museum is a matter for the observer to determine for himself. If he screams with rage, if he feels himself threatened, insulted, or badgered, if he shouts that contemporary reality is not like that, if he cries for the police, this reveals something in him, not in the artist or the art.²³

²¹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 4.

²² Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 121.

²³ Harold Taylor, "Moral Values and the Experience of Art," *Art and the Intellect*, 57-8.

Granted, a work of literature can be a great piece in many ages; this is not due, however, to any internal greatness. Unlike the Formalist view of literary criticism, expressed for instance in the classic essay by Wimsatt and Beardsley, a fallacy is present, but it is not an "intentional" or "affective" one. The fallacy, a "naturalistic fallacy" if you will, is that there is somehow inherent beauty in any work of art.

Shakespeare, for example, speaks to us despite a language over three centuries old because his language is, in some ways, still understandable, albeit understandable primarily only to certain communities — communities which made efforts to perpetuate the vocabulary of Shakespeare's time. However, an interesting relationship exists between the past listener and present. In Shakespeare's time, his plays were not considered works of art in the same sense we classify them. They were entertainment — commercial enterprises first and foremost — even to the "unrefined" penny gallery spectators standing for more than two hours at a time on the sometimes muddy infield of the Globe Theatre. Obviously, what were *divertissements* in the past may now be works of art, works which may still entertain us, but only if one knows the vocabulary. Over time, however, as smaller and smaller audiences grasp the language, the works will soon become dusty and forgotten in library archives, curios for the academicians. Even now, some of his works are "being forgotten." The further the language strays from the current practice however, the less relevant a work becomes to the audience, until it ends up as an obscure citation in ultra-erudite and highly specialized fields of study.

Others have seen vocabularies and languages as the seeds of an individual's self-repression, and only by analyzing works of literature do we see particular vocabularies in action and how they speak to a person's social condition by what they don't say. Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson made a clever point when he glibly defined Formalism as a method for those who refuse any interpretation, and subsequently dismissed such approaches to literary criticism. "To deny interpretation of a work is itself interpretation.

We interpret even when we avoid interpreting."²⁴ Therefore, Jameson's "interpretation" does not result from an interpretation of content, since content "is itself already essentially and immediately meaningful."²⁵ Furthermore, Jameson argued that formalism, despite claims of immanent interpretation, "is really a form of transcendent interpretation in disguise. Formalist criticism simply rewrites literary works in terms of an ethical master code that is a product of its historical moment."²⁶

The notion of the 'master code' is critical to the understanding of Jameson's work. "The master code of any interpretative method is the ideology it works to perpetuate. Ideology is the repression of those underlying contradictions that have their source in history."²⁷ Ideologies become "strategies of containment;" and literature becomes "an ideological production mirroring such strategies at the level of individual works."²⁸ Consequently, the interpretation of literature (and probably all other art as well), according to Jameson, involves the "revealing" of the work's actual meaning by bypassing any ethical code which would prevent "a restoration of the original message, the original experience," hidden "beneath the distortion of the censor [the creator of the work of art]: and this revelation takes the form of a explanation why the content was so distorted; it is inseparable from a description of the mechanism of censorship itself."²⁹ The work of literature exists as a view of the world censored by *qua* filtered through the author.

A piece of literature does two things then, both of which mimics what philosophy attempts to accomplish. The more coherent a plot is, the more it reflects the reader's understanding of social conditions represented because "it preserves the subject's fitful contact with genuine life." On the other hand, a work's

²⁴ Jameson, "Metacommentary," 9.

²⁵ Jameson, "Metacommentary," 16.'

²⁶ Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 179.

²⁷ Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 179.

²⁸ Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 179.

²⁹ Jameson, "Metacommentary," 16.

mechanisms function as a censorship whose task is to forestall any conscious realization on the part of the subject of his own impoverishment; and to prevent him from drawing any practical conclusions as to the causes for that impoverishment and mutilation, and as to their origin in the social system itself.³⁰

The less coherent and cohesive a plot, the more at odds it becomes with the reader's conception of reality; the more it challenges the reader's delicately constructed and carefully shielded view of the world; the more it unveils that which was so meticulously concealed. Eventually, a work comes along which so lacks coherency it shatters this former reality, exposing the repressive ideological 'master code' and all the impoverishment under which the reader suffered. These "plotless" works create new languages, thus, new *interpretations* of the world. New meanings are created from the old by their unique juxtapositions inherent in literature. The larger the set of new meanings in a piece of literature, conceivably the better the literature. The preferred (if not only) method to analyze this conception of literature is through "metacommentary:"

Metacommentary ... aims at tracing the logic of the censorship itself and of the situation from which it springs: a language that hides what it displays beneath its own reality as language, a glance that designates, through the very process of avoiding, the object forbidden.³¹

There is little doubt that a work of literature depends upon the reader and the society, and on the amount of similar vocabularies which still exists between the reader and the author. However, only by admitting that ideological distortions exist within all works of art will we begin to understand what the distortions were and are, their origins, and their evolution through time. From these distortions, we learn what knowledge of personal impoverishment foisted upon the individual by social forces wished to be masked or exposed. Even the history of literary commentary relating to specific works represent an evolution in the "distortions" and "censorships" of the actual meanings in the work. Backtracking through these reviews permits us to set the scene (so to speak) in the beginning and uncover the original set of social parameters which characterized an author's original filters of censorship.

³⁰ Jameson, "Metacommentary," 17.

³¹ Jameson, "Metacommentary," 17.

There is, furthermore, a sense of power as well as a coercive force that comes with the possession of languages and vocabularies. For centuries, the type of vocabulary one uses classifies an individual in numerous ways, including social rank, economic success, and intelligence. There is, consequently, an elitism built into vocabularies which should not be overlooked. It is all-too-often claimed that those who understand the arcane languages of the classics possess some justification of being the vanguard of civilized society — the believers of tradition, holders of truth, and the defenders of liberty. This intellectual position places them on a pedestal which, in turn, places all non-initiates off the pedestal. A cultural hubris ferments in the guardians, and a gnawing animosity grows in those below; and since tradition is the touchstone for sustaining the *status quo*, conservatism necessarily persists in this cultural schism. It is, however, a double-edged sword. Christopher Lasch describes the emergence of the new "information class" or "managerial class," making it clear that the use of specialized vocabularies and technical jargon "insulated" the supposedly cosmopolitan intellectuals from society just as much as those perceived as provincial:

Education gave them vicarious access to the world's culture, but their acquaintance with that culture was increasingly selective and fragmentary, and it did not seem to have strengthened the capacity for imaginative identification with experience alien to their own. Their educated jargon had lost touch with everyday spoken language and no longer served as a repository of the community's common sense ... Their technical jargons were unintelligible to outsiders but immediately recognizable, as a badge of professional status, to fellow specialists all over the world. The cosmopolitanism of educated specialists overcame the old barriers of local, regional, and even national identity but insulated them from ordinary people and ordinary human experience.³²

We may wonder, then, if there is any escape at all from provincialism — within any field of study or within any community. In the age of postmodernism, there isn't. The best we can do is accept this limitation, understand that one cannot know everything, and that the acquisition of certain knowledge ought not to necessarily entail moral superiority. According to Lasch, however, the *cosmovincialism* of the professional-managerial class

³² Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 466-7.

not only determined the exclusionary aspects of one's social standing, but also a more appropriate and "enlightened" morality — of its class and society in general — that rested on "academic and therapeutic virtues:"

It had to rest on a respect for human potential,... a critical attitude toward authority, a refusal to be governed by traditional precepts, and a belief that most conflicts could be resolved by submitting them to the arbitration of knowledgeable experts. By reformulating these values as psychological norms, the professional-managerial class made it possible to dismiss dissent from the educated consensus as evidence of emotional and cultural backwardness. Members of the educated elite upheld open-mindedness as the supreme political virtue but refused to debate their own idea of the good life.³³

Conservative elements of today are no less enamored by the prestige available to professionalism, and are equally unwilling to relinquish their possession of the "true" path to the good life. Moreover, conservative thinkers also appear to be those which seemingly control the economic and political destinies of societies. Thus, contemporary aesthetics can be (and are) used to isolate "social provincials" by reinforcing the intellectual and moral high ground which supports the dominant hegemony of society. To some extent, this explains why contemporary scholars (or scholars of any age for that matter) try to justify certain philosophical positions by redefining present-day words based on their long-forgotten etymological roots. For example, the philosopher Drew Hyland wrote of the word "competition":

I [pay] heed to the etymology of the word "competition": *com-petitio*, to strive or question together ... In this case, the etymology of "competition" points first to the element of cooperation involved, that something is being done together, and second, to the element of a striving or questioning toward something that presumably one does not already have. The original significance of competition, then, seems to entail a shared striving or questioning towards something one lacks and which one could not achieve, or at least could not achieve as well, without cooperation.³⁴

³³ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 468. Yet, Lasch throughout the entire book seems to place the challengers and victims of progress — those resisting unbridled change, unlimited growth, and the boundless and optimistic possibilities of humanity — in a morally superior position *qua* more pragmatic. Granted, there is a need for restraint in consumerist society, especially when confronted with dwindling limited resources. Furthermore, Lasch admits that the Populist theorists lacked any coherent economic alternative which resolved the magnitude of present human needs with its call for smaller industries and an increase in individual proprietorship. Consequently, the belief that our society can work its way out of its economic quagmire, in spite of an inability to do so, may be just as optimistic as the Progressive thinking Lasch assailed.

³⁴ Hyland, "Opponents, Contestants, and Competitors," 178.

It would be nice to know what the etymological root of cooperation is to determine what distinctions exist between the two words, because based on Hyland's interpretation, there seemingly is no difference. If this is the case, the original significance of competition has no real significance. But competition does not mean cooperation, for even at the origin of the words there was a subtle difference between the two roots. Cooperation comes from the Latin *co-operari* meaning "to work together." Since both words originated from Latin, there must have been a clear difference between working together and striving together, a difference Hyland never considers. Perhaps people who are "striving together," because they obviously aren't "working together" (that would be *co-operari*), could also be read as either "working against" or "fighting with" each other. If this is acceptable, to claim that anything being done together equates to cooperation is too simplistic. In a war, for example, nations and individuals fight with one another, yet to say they are *cooperating* — even in the hopes of "reducing the surplus population" — makes a mockery of the term.

Considering what we know about the power of language, by looking to past etymological roots of these words, Hyland (perhaps unknowingly) implies that the original creators of the definitions understood the social-psychological effects of (in this case) competition better than we understand them today. However, this attitude seems to reflect a more pervasive and conservative "nostalgic" vision of the past as being more enlightened than the present — having answers to problems we are unable to solve today. Whether the past offers solutions to problems our ancestors never faced may be an interesting philosophic conundrum, such a position implicitly vindicates to some extent certain justifications for social inequalities that wish to sustain themselves in the present. Nostalgia tries to keep past social conditions and moral values in the minds of the population, one might argue, so justifications for inequalities can maintain their meaningfulness and thus continue to draw support. It is hardly surprising then that defenders of competition would look to the past for philosophical corroboration.

In another instance of past cultures containing virtues forgotten in the present, it has been argued that sport grew out of a backlash to the ever increasing leisure available to the American population; without misery and hardship to somehow build character and developed moral virtue, industrialism and consumerism would make the once strong and rugged frontiersmen into effeminate spectators of life.³⁵ On the other hand, Loren Baritz argued that the pioneer myth was useful only in its personification of American individualism and as the stuff of legends. The actual strength of America (and something clearly understood at the time) flourished once the lone Pioneer left, and the farming families settled down, providing the stability of physical and spiritual sustenance for a nation:

The idea of the self-reliant, virtuous, and necessarily democratic farmer was widely shared by the men of the revolution ... [who] insisted that political intelligence, public morality, and national prosperity depended on the continued dominance of pastoral America. Thus, for most of the Founding Fathers, America could safeguard its uniqueness, its civic virtue, only by maintaining eternal vigilance against fawning city people, whose decadence would destroy the republic. Manliness was the American answer to the mincing courtiers of the Continent, and the farmer, secure in his strength, instinct, and virtue, epitomized a new and better man than Europe had seen since Rome fell.³⁶

But whether the American population — increasingly clustered in the cities and more and more enamored with progress and the utopian possibilities that science portended — was composed of the farmer's, the pioneer's, or a distinct urban sentiment, it would eventually shun conflict and dismiss limitations; in the end, the (male) American citizen would wither from disuse without conflict, represented a pattern of thinking many of the supporters of competition hold even today (recall William Bennett's comments). Gradually, this "defense of the strenuous life degenerated into the cult of sheer strength."³⁷ It reached such a level of fanatical patriotism that Oliver Wendell Holmes,³⁸ in his speech

³⁵ Ironically, early defenders rarely considered sport a "leisure" activity on a par with reading, smoking, Sunday strolls, or the like. Sport had clear instrumental value.

³⁶ Baritz, *The Good Life*, 11. Note that the farmers were glorified for their stability and moral rectitude and not for any competitive or military prowess — something from which early colonialists left Europe hoping to escape.

³⁷ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 296.

³⁸ As well as many other famous (like Theodore Roosevelt) and obscure pundits.

"A Soldier's Faith" (1895), could legitimately defend war as providing the average American an antidote to the industrial ease which sapped a nation's fighting spirit.³⁹ In a sense, Holmes and others suggested that we ought to go to war for our own *moral* good, inspiring a better breed of American — if one didn't die in the process. Aghast at this possibility, social progressives then and now supported efforts to promote sport as organized conflict,⁴⁰ perhaps even as a "moral equivalent" to war — something William James suggested (though not directly relating it to sport) to distance himself from the war-mongers — or "soft war," as Stewart Brand of the New Games tradition termed his rebellion to the Vietnam debacle.⁴¹ It was during the emergent sports militarism of the late nineteenth century that Sir William Fraser, in 1889, invented Wellington's mythical remark, "The Battle of Waterloo was won on the fields of Eton."⁴²

Holmes further felt that a "misguided notion of justice led humanitarians to the absurd conclusion that it was 'unjust ... that any one should fail.'"⁴³ However, Holmes, along with other supporters of competition, mistook a lack of competitive failure as a *complete* lack of failure. It is not that humans ought not to fail (which no cooperativist maintains),

³⁹ Invariably, these comments take place at the very beginning of any great international military conflict — for example, Holmes speech was a prelude to the Spanish-American War — but the culprit of American laziness differs based on the social climate. Holmes responded to the massive immigration and growth of cities which emphasized ephemeral pleasures in the city (offending the Victorianism of the day) as opposed to the traditional and rugged virtues of the farm and country. Before World War II, Baritz satirically pointed out, the cause of American effeminism shifted to women who "valued comfort over strength and had converted men to this suicidal view ... Women had convinced men that opportunity was dead — therefore security, a matriarchal ideal, had replaced the vital patriarchal values of competition and struggle" [Baritz, *The Good Life*, 168].

⁴⁰ Konrad Lorenz wrote: "It is undeniable that there is no situation in which all these virtues shine so brilliantly as they do in war, a fact which is dangerously liable to convince quite excellent but naïve people that war, after all, cannot be the absolutely abhorrent thing it really is" [Lorenz, *On Aggression*, 272].

⁴¹ Stewart Brand felt that "American combat was being pushed as far away as the planet would allow, becoming abstract and remote ... Stewart defined softwar as 'conflict which is regionalized (to prevent injury to the uninterested), refereed (to permit fairness and certainty of a win-lose outcome), and cushioned (weaponry regulated for maximum contact and minimum permanent disability).' As Stewart later commented, 'If you don't see much difference between softwar and sports, you're getting the point'" [Fluegelman, *The New Games Book*, 7, 9].

⁴² Boller and George, *They Never Said It*, 130-1. Not only did Eton not have any playing fields when Wellington was a student in the 1780s, but Wellington himself disliked Eton, never completing studies there; and when Eton administrators asked for a donation to help fund building renovations, he refused.

⁴³ Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 297.

but that they ought not to fail at the hands of other humans. Individuals can fail at many things without having to lose to another competitor or participate in institutions which formalize the production of failure. There appears to be such a fear of a lack of competition as some sort of human weakness (whether physical or spiritual) that forms of cooperation which often strive to improve humanity and relieve suffering are looked upon with suspicion; for despite the almost certain conclusion that if all interpersonal competition is eliminated, an almost infinite number of problems and challenges would still remain to be addressed.

Lastly, moving beyond Marxist criticism that art is a historical reflection and evolution (albeit distorted) of dominant ideologies, aesthetics itself appears to be a result of cultural and social hegemony. If that is the case, then there are no aesthetics in any society in which there is no hegemony — a stunning and perhaps tragic possibility.⁴⁴ Although it is only a theory, we have yet to come across any culture that contradicts this — where art exists and power is not in the hands of some person or some group. So, agreeing with Marx and many others, ideology *is*; and as such, there will always be aesthetics. Thus, the best we can do is understand what and which social dynamics are involved in the creation of hegemony and continually expose them. The constant flux of hegemonic power simply replaces one repressor with another; but the hope is that those in power currently, unwilling

⁴⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr went one step further in his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). He felt that politics creates social injustice in order to establish social cohesion, as expressed in this remarkable passage: "If social cohesion is impossible without coercion, and coercion is impossible without the creation of social injustice, and the destruction of injustice is impossible without the use of further coercion, are we not in an endless cycle of social conflict?" [Quoted by Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 377]. The solution, according to Niebuhr, is non-violent coercion — to deal with the destructive ideology and beliefs without punishing the followers. We must not forget that both accuser and accused are human, with common frailties. One must temper justice with mercy, and end conflict without cruelty to the participants. Of course, the failed experiences of Lincoln/Johnson in their attempts for a civilized reconstruction and Wilson's impotent entreaties prior to the Treaty of Versailles demonstrated the monumental difficulties in doing so.

Charles Taylor wrote in a similar fashion more recently. His essay, "Explanation and Practical Reason," argued that since most civilized individuals agree to the same first principles of moral justice, the problems lie in the ideological exceptions to these principles, the "special pleadings," one of which allowed the Nazis to state that human life is sacred but Jews and Slovaks aren't really human.

to give up their political influence, will accede to demands for better living conditions originating from potential usurpers.⁴⁵ Similar to Heidegger's and Sartre's notion of art as disclosure of truth, literature (great literature) seems to have a built in necessity to challenge political hegemony, for it practically goes hand in hand that disclosing truth is like exposing ideology (which, according to Sartre, is just distorted truth).

But there seems to be a paradox at work. How can great literature both support and be critical of the dominant hegemony? Because both are happening at two different times under two different vocabularies. Initially when a work of literature is first created, it is critical of the contemporary ideology.⁴⁶ But as times change, and the ideologies shift and alter their language component, the works no longer seem to have that critical bite. Often, they have been subsumed into the dominant class and treated as art, thus restricting its meaning and vocabulary. Walter Benjamin argued that since art is "determined by the institution within which the work functions," as an institution Art "neutralizes the political content of the individual work. It prevents the contents of works that press for radical change in a society — the abolition of alienation — from having any practical effect."⁴⁷ Furthermore, as was done when the Greeks placed the cult god Dionysus up on Mt Olympus with the other Gods, by "aesthetizing" literature, intellectualizing its existence, dominant classes effectively control its potential for passionate change. In other words,

⁴⁵ However, even when an alternative arises, there is no guarantee that any change in hegemonic influence will occur. As pointed out by Richard Gruneau, the struggle for equal rights for women and people of color, along with the noncompetitive/New Games movement of the 1970s, were important "interventions, but did not appear to have much transformative consequence" [Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development*, 152].

In a passage from the short story "The Illusion of Difference," I dramatized the transience even of contingencies, emphasizing the power of hegemony to smooth out dissent by dictating language and vocabularies: "Your ripple is just an insignificant bulge on the great wave of our society. It will soon be engulfed by forces you cannot stop. The ripple will then disappear, affecting and infecting nothing. Your words, in time, will be answerable in our language, so the contingent forces now disrupted will come back under our control. All will be calm and orderly in our past, our present, and our future."

⁴⁶ We are referring to literature in the form of prose, not poetry, which Sartre argues as being contemplative, and could as easily be ignored as understood.

⁴⁷ Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 149.

today's art was perhaps yesterday's ideological criticism ... but no longer.⁴⁸ That is why Jameson's approach to literary criticism would be so valuable and so necessary in exposing forces of hegemony.

* * *

THE LANGUAGE OF MORALITY

If we agree that words and definitions and reality change over time, then most of what is said today (and most of what I say) is of limited value outside our experience and our era. Language, and thus expression, is locked into a specific temporal location. The only way any age can understand the meanings and vocabularies of any other age is if the significance of these languages is sustained over time. Subsequently, can not the same be said about morality and ethics? How about emotions, which are also expressed through words?

Morality was questioned, along with other areas of philosophy, when traditional social structures supporting Victorianism came under attack. Women were no longer satisfied with being placed on a pedestal if that meant being easier to spot and subjugated by male domination.⁴⁹ Bertrand Russell pointed out quite adroitly that all mistreated minorities receive preferential lip-service; they are often attributed with commendable characteristics with the covert intention of making their oppression bearable if not acceptable.⁵⁰ This

⁴⁸ Which is one reason why many conservatives abhor public support of the arts, effectively negating the coercive power of private patronage. This condition would sidestep the traditional progression and foster aesthetic expressions which may be ideologically critical but, at the same time, would also be deemed art and thus made immediately impotent.

⁴⁹ On the other hand, according to A. R. Orage, the emancipation of women was one of the steps in the "cheapening of the raw material of labor," increasing worker dependence on wage labor, and further consolidating business and government as agencies of social cohesion at the expense of unions, community, and family. [Quoted by Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, 321]

⁵⁰ "The belief in [women's] spirituality was part and parcel of the determination to keep them inferior economically and politically ... The idealizing of the victim is useful for a time: if virtue is the greatest of goods, and if subjection makes people virtuous, it is kind to refuse them power, since it would destroy their virtue" [Russell, "The Virtue of the Oppressed," *Unpopular Essays*, 61, 63].

situation, of course, became unacceptable. Soon, the guiding moral restraints of the nineteenth century lost credibility. The vast majority of humanity threw off the epithets attached to them like shackles and determined to carve out their own place in the world. This meant, also, defining a new morality — a morality less rigid and more malleable, a moral code defined and designed by the individual and with the individual's life situation in mind. Victorian values may have been suitable to the well-bred, well-fed, and well-educated; they meant nothing to the poor, the illiterate, the hungry and the war ravaged. Whereas Victorians obsessed over inviolable principles of conduct, moral obligations, ethical absolutes, and divine orchestrations, the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century and the rank-and-file intelligentsia of the twentieth century searched for more pragmatic, individualistic, and earthly origins to guide them, gradually realizing that there were no absolutes in reality.

One might respond, and perhaps rightly so, that this moral vacuum opened the way for the Logical Positivists's interpretation of ethics, Emotivism; but Emotivism has a longer history than most people assume, beginning with the school of American Pragmatism — especially William James, who was heavily influenced by Charles Saunders Pierce. Even though James digressed into religion (trying to find a practical foundation for religious mysticism through stoic faith⁵¹), he agreed with Pierce on morality. Pierce was uncomfortable with the idea of intuition, especially that introduced by Descartes.⁵² Both

John Kenneth Galbraith describes a similar phenomenon to explain the constant persecution of the poor. "Where the impoverished are concerned ... government support and subsidy are seriously suspect as to need and effectiveness of administration and because of their adverse effect on morals and working morale. This, however, is not true of government support to comparative well-being. By Social Security pensions or their prospect no one is thought damaged, nor, as a depositor, by being rescued from a failed bank. The comparatively affluent can withstand the adverse moral effect of being subsidized and supported by the government; not so the poor" [Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment*, 14-5].

⁵¹ The essay, "Human Immortality" (1898), is a defense to objections raised against the more thorough exposition in James's classic work, *The Will to Believe* (1897), a polemic decrying the overwhelming complacency and rationalism created by science and industry.

⁵² "[He] had doubts about our power to grasp meanings *intuitively* without dependence upon language and signs. Pierce's pragmatic theory of meaning was directed against Descartes's reliance upon immediacy as the sure road to clarity" [Smith, *The Spirit of American Philosophy*, 8].

Pierce and James believed that experience not only provides answers to moral questions, but to what makes an action itself moral. Morality is shaped and, to coin a term Pierce uses, "evolves" based on how certain actions work in society. Actions are reinforced if they meet with social acceptance; others are eliminated if they don't meet approval. Essentially, at least according to the early pragmatists, morality is grounded on immediate expediency; what works now is what is moral. The "cash value" of actions grants truth.

The notion of moral expediency was, and still is, a problem with Pierce's argument. But the Emotivists, primarily A. J. Ayer, advanced beyond Pierce and James and threw out immediate expediency altogether. Moral statements only serve to express feeling or feelings for things, actions, or events - past, present, or future. Moral statements have no truth-value. In fact, such statements are not genuine propositions at all.⁵³ Ethical disagreements become merely disagreements in facts.⁵⁴ When facts are acknowledged, all relevant emotions come to bear on the issue at hand and a decision made. If another individual is still not convinced that his position is incorrect, so be it. All one can do is try to convince one another by introducing relevant facts; there is no objective moral truth upon which to rely. Furthermore, Ayer essentially rejected the notion that Emotivism provided any type of theory of ethical action. Ayer simply stated that good and bad are expressions of either moral approval or disapproval which happen to be fairly consistent (a result of moral teaching). When one reacts to a moral situation, one responds with a consistency which assures a stable social structure. Individuals feel similar emotions to similar situations. We may not all act exactly the same in similar situations, but we cannot deny that, initially, people experience a moral feeling about the event; and these feelings are close enough that philosophers erroneously construct a general theory of morality from this consensus.

⁵³ Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 107-8.

⁵⁴ Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 110-11.

Later emotivists, however, found the idea that Emotivism could provide little if any moral foundation uncomfortable. C. L. Stephenson, in his work *Ethics and Language* (1944), agreed that moral argument was emotive, and that propositions about moral obligations had no truth-value. Yet, Stephenson maintained that "there is a kind of order to moral argument ... [that] the art of being emotively convincing requires discipline and argumentative craftsmanship."⁵⁵ Consequently, Emotivism doesn't eliminate moral argument; it is now in the guise of emotional persuasion — which, too, can be an art. In the end, at any case, "it appears that in ethical reasoning (as perhaps all reasoning?) there is no complete insurance against parochialism and bias."⁵⁶

A recent version of Emotivism drawing upon and reinvigorating the expediency theories of Pierce can be found in Allan Gibbard's book *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (1990). In it, Gibbard promotes a norm-expressivistic view of ethical analysis, using sociobiological analysis of the evolutionary coordination of like feeling and its link to like acts — "to join two ways of seeing normative life: as a part of nature, and as part of a world of norms."⁵⁷ To foster and maintain the survival of such a socially-centered creature as man, it would have been only natural, according to Gibbard, that humans coordinate their feelings toward behaviors that promote the best chances to maintain the survival of the species. A community will find similar actions evoking guilt in the culprits, and anger towards these acts in others; anger and guilt end up being coordinated. But more than that, Gibbard theorizes on the regulation and organization of emotive responses — including, perhaps, the conditioning of emotive responses, much like Skinner and other psychologists have suggested. Emotivism, therefore, does not rest on relativistic premises; individuals learn precisely how to emotively respond to certain situations.

⁵⁵ ORT, "The Logic of Moral Argument," 422-3.

⁵⁶ ORT, "The Logic of Moral Reasoning," 425.

⁵⁷ Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 326.

There is some merit to such presuppositions. As I have explained in Chapter 1, cooperation is more common and more beneficial in animal relations than competition simply because working together better enhances species survivability; and it may be through this "emotive" conscience that social coordination in humans is learned. Consequently, individuals who perform unconscionable acts failed to learn the necessary preventive stimuli involving interpersonal coordination.⁵⁸ But unlike animal societies which can only reside and survive in local environments that remain relatively stable, humans can and have drastically altered their global environment, and the variant stimuli easily lead to different responses and "consciences," and one seems to stumble back into a moral relativism. Furthermore, there is an amorphous size to Gibbard's community — an uncertainty that seems to lead him into trouble. Though Gibbard doesn't mention where a border of a community exists, he does claim that the Earth is as large a community that ought to exist, practically. But how can Gibbard be successful securing global community through coordinated behavior when these very behaviors are based on and strengthened by small-scale interactions which may arise independently of each other and have completely different coordinated stimuli and responses? Gibbard appears unable to guarantee any reliability for large-scale moral similarities, except probably on the most broad of understandings. He admits as much when he writes that an expressivist "does not think there is a realm of moral facts that might turn out to be systematic." If instead, "moral inquiry consists in deciding what norms to accept as governing moral sentiments," there remains quite a broad range of differences.⁵⁹

This may not be a problem, however, if one views human misunderstandings as taking place primarily on a smaller scale, where disputes will almost invariably involve the fine details, the special pleadings, the local idiosyncrasies. Even though there seems to be an

⁵⁸ Of course, the individual in question may not be able to learn the proper responses or, having learned the responses, is unable to act appropriately (perhaps due to biochemical imbalances in the brain).

⁵⁹ Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 311.

unfortunate conundrum in how one breaks out of moral provincialism, it is this localized aspect which may help larger communities overcome the sticking points to social interaction — one which prevents reaching global moral/ethical/emotive consensus. Gibbard is actually more successful with his argument by restricting his assertions to localized communities which have the highest probability of being within relatively stable environments and formalizing norm-expressivist behaviors.

Of course, Gibbard may not need to examine how larger communities reach moral coordination with each other. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor explains (albeit in a totally different context) how communities might coordinate, or "fuse," norm-expressive behaviors and consciences of other cultures, gradually becoming more inclusive, more enlightened, and more similar over time. According to Taylor, a continual re-evaluation of one's position in relation to contingent forces results in a constant struggle for personal moral control in light of social demands. As more information (stimuli) enters an individual's psyche (much like the increase of information in society), previously held conceptions are increasingly questioned leading to its psychic change and a change in vocabulary. This gradual accumulation of new vocabularies allows the individual to appreciate previously hidden points of view and to change one's opinion of formerly unenlightened positions (assuming one is willing to change). New vocabularies allow for new 'facts' to be comprehended, while old facts are treated as stepping stones to higher levels of understanding. New vocabularies are more inclusive than older vocabularies, and thus better explain the world. These cultural narratives build upon one another and define new areas and provide a better explanation of what is 'ultimately true.'

With this as a psycho-social foundation, we can see how one rectifies seemingly irreconcilable differences in moral positions; for what may have been originally assumed as either self-evident or unarguable first principles before — a position from which no rational argument can result — may not be first principles at all, or all that much different, when

placed under the scrutiny of matching vocabularies. One must "become capable of conceiving of disencapsulated conditions, or at least of seeing one's society as one among many possible ones."⁶⁰ The method of "seeing" the multiplicity of societies involves the merging of the clashing vocabularies into a more inclusive vocabulary. Taylor describes this process interchangeably as either "perspicuous contrast," or (appropriating Gadamer's term) as "fusion of horizons."⁶¹ The solution to moral disputes, as well as multicultural clashes, is to absorb the opposing vocabularies within one's own. This blending of cultural values and perspectives avoids problems inherent in arguing from incompatible first principles. Dropping pre-conceived notions about one's own culture and opposing cultures leads to an exchange of cultural constructions, some of which may be beneficial to learn and retain. Only when the psychological boundaries to moral understanding are broken down will the physical boundaries also be breached. Taylor grants, however, that the possibility of a complete "fusion" may be an impossibility, but the goal is clear. By blending cultures, we learn the best that another culture has to offer us; and they in turn learn the best of ours. "[There] is no doubt that the step is an epistemic gain."⁶²

Gibbard's difficulties in establishing large-scale consensuses, therefore, can be answered by Taylor's call to merge moral vocabularies — or in Gibbard's terms, merging socially coordinated moral responses. However, a second and perhaps more serious

⁶⁰ Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," 229.

⁶¹ Taylor, "Understanding and Ethnocentricity," 126.

⁶² Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," 229. However, the creation of new vocabularies also signifies that the relationship between two historical points of transit are 'asymmetrical,' meaning that we can only go in one direction. We cannot, for instance, go from an era of *more* enlightenment into an era of *less* enlightenment — which is, however, exactly what conservatism brings into question in its rejection of progress and a search for moral enlightenment through nostalgia. To Taylor, such a possibility doesn't make sense, except in the perspective that not only can the new worldview understand its own new concepts, but it can also appreciate the rationale for any previous understandings of certain phenomenon. On the other hand, the previous conception has no vocabulary to explain the present conception, just as much as we now have no current vocabulary to explain the next phase in our intellectual development. Conservatives might argue in response that Taylor's theory explains intellectual development, from mysticism and alchemy to modern science, but improvement in moral understanding is less convincing, if it even exists, in spite of the possibility that current moral development has allowed us to appreciate past moral viewpoints and what we may be lacking in our own.

objection arises if one examines the possible implications of Gibbard's theory. Since humans require relatively similar needs to survive, then similar actions to enhance species survival should result. But we have no assurance that this will ever be the case; socio-biological theories have been unreliable in universalizing its claims.

Current global situations also seem to scoff at such a pat solution. Because evolutionary development is triggered by environmental changes, different environmental conditions will alter ethical and moral reactions, understanding, and sensitivity. Attaining maximal moral development is considerably dependent upon, for one example, the level of material resources available to a community. It would seem to make sense that in order to permit the full development of moral capacities, such development must arise in an environment of minimal distractions; while to maintain optimum moral development, social and environmental factors must remain stable. Consequently, according to this theory, poorer and unstable communities have less potential for ethical enlightenment than richer, more secure communities.

Therefore, if material scarcity is one factor which promotes inferior moral conduct while emotive coordination resulting from a stable environment promotes successful survival of the species, wouldn't it be natural (or at least ethically defensible) to absorb as many struggling communities as possible under one secure and morally superior auspice immediately after raising their economic and material levels to heights where the populace can now appreciate moral inquiry — a line of reasoning surprisingly similar to one used to justify European imperialist expansion, or the New World Order and Corporate Multinationalism of the present?⁶³ Yet we don't actively promote this imperialistic venture; we try not to interfere in other communities moral mandates. This appears to be the moral mandate of our own community, and of postmodernism in general, where tolerance dictates

⁶³ It must be admitted, however, that verbal justifications and actual motivations are often separate entities. Economic gain is the prize to be had in expanding markets and exploiting both natural and human resources.

relationships. However, insisting upon a fragmentary global community seems to go against evolutionary urges. Is it because we don't want to associate with these lesser communities, and will do nothing to raise their level of economic independence inspiring moral development in the process (a Western hubris and racism)? Or is it because our community fosters an "unnatural" demand for individuality and autonomy and refuses to interfere in another's freedom, no matter how justified it may appear?

Ironically, by resisting Gibbard's thesis, the dominating forces of international relations tread quite closely along the lines of social Darwinism and corporate imperialism. By keeping countries in positions of economic servitude, not only can multinational corporations ravage the indigent population for cheap labor, but the moral standing of dominant societies can easily maintain (by default) a condescending attitude towards the more morally inferior societies without actively pursuing a policy of cultural intolerance. Furthermore, imposed material scarcity exists within competitive environments which, if I am correct, lead unavoidably to moral deficiency, moral stagnation, or moral uniformity. After all, if survival depends on having a certain amount of personal needs met, then those who control these needs can easily demand and coordinate any of the three preceding moral results.⁶⁴ The threatened use of impending poverty to craft moral obedience is currently in vogue, as state governments fashion laws which would limit or withhold public assistance from unwed mothers who birth additional children, or able-bodied workers who do not find employment after a specified period of time.

However, legal attempts to limit subsidizing "free-loaders" (by using starvation to spur them to work — an act so barbaric that no civilized country ought to tolerate it) contain an implicit inconsistency. Underlying these legislative efforts, there is an unsubstantiated hope that charities and other organizations will come to the aid of those individuals who,

⁶⁴ Ostensibly attempted by Pullman in the 1880s and Henry Ford in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

despite their efforts,⁶⁵ cannot find sustenance when eventually released from the welfare roles. It seems astonishingly naïve, though, to assume that a society founded on individualism and driven by an economic system dependent on self-interest will ever produce more than a small percentage of individuals willing to contribute to charities. A clear double standard operates under such conditions. In the ideal market and competitive situation, everyone works for themselves, and those who fail are left to crawl away under the streets like rats, while charities close up. Yet there is an expectation that *some* people will ignore the cultural calling for self-interest and actually donate their time and money to help those that other people refuse to help. In essence, helping the poor seems to require an abnegation of the capitalist/competitive ideology which, in turn, requires something innately more powerful than that ideology itself.

So, as I return to my previous line of inquiry, questions are begged, questions I unfortunately must leave for others to answer: What level of moral enlightenment is most acceptable, as opposed to most desirable, in our society and in other societies? How much social tinkering and economic manipulation will be necessary to assure these levels? And are we morally obliged to "encourage" other less advanced cultures along to higher moral standards?

Unsatisfied with the possibility of Emotivism and unwilling to deal with the difficulties of economically-determined moral development, contemporary moral theorists have looked to the long-lost notion of classical virtue (or at least virtue in the classical sense) as the "cure" for moral relativism. Alastair MacIntyre, perhaps the most persuasive advocate for this return to ancient virtue, begins his argument by insisted that, essentially, we have lost contact with the origins of our morality:

⁶⁵ After all, based on a U. S. Conference of Mayors report in 1988, about 25% of homeless people are employed. This clearly indicates that "having a job in this country isn't enough to ensure that one can afford a place to live" [Kohn, *You Know What They Say ...*, 128-9].

[What] we possess ... are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have — very largely, if not entirely — lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.⁶⁶

Even though the fragmentation of experience and memory might be viewed as a condition of postmodernism and not a dilemma, as MacIntyre and others see it the lack of moral context is a problem — one that arose in the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment's desire for a "free" and "happy" human released from the constraints of authorities — metaphysical absolutes, religious dogma and political tyranny — supplanted the pre-Enlightenment's notion that human existence had a specific purpose, or a *telos*:

The *telos* of man was to fulfill his role in society, that role ascribed to him at birth or through position. This was the essence, or true nature of man; to play one's part effectively and faithfully. The loss of such a *telos* is one of the prices we have paid for the Enlightenment's freedom in the contemporary western world. MacIntyre further claims that the purpose of moral life has been lost in the process. Ethics was the means by which "man as he is" could become "man as he could be if he realized his *telos*." With the loss of the *telos*, modernity and contemporary western society is left with "man as he is," and a set of now incomprehensible values, and ethics is still with us today, but it has no reference point in post-Enlightenment life.⁶⁷

Without a specific meaning or purpose of life, we are unable to latch on to a particular morality to guide us. We are therefore confused with the remnants which remain. This uncertainty over a single morality leads to its displacement by a congeries of possible competing moralities; but the most pervasive and dangerous morality according to MacIntyre is Emotivism — an Emotivism which entails "the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative [treating humans as means] and non-manipulative [treating humans as ends] social relations."⁶⁸ Instrumentalism (and in some ways utilitarianism) has become the *modus operandi* of choice in the post-enlightenment age. The scientific method made the quest for Truth more fundamental than the quest for the Good:

Truth, it was claimed, can be known through rational thought, while good is merely a statement of preference. Thus, all values become instrumental, which is no value at all, in a moral sense ... What the Enlightenment had done, in short, was to remove the hope that

⁶⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2.

⁶⁷ Gibson, *Performance Versus Results*, 21.

⁶⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 22.

something universal and absolute (God, for example) was underwriting existence. The notion that there is such certainty and order in the world is what Nietzsche called "metaphysical comfort." It was the loss of such comfort that was the price of the individual's freedom gained in the Enlightenment.⁶⁹

The rational foundation for moral action before the Enlightenment was based on the lack of individual freedom or choice in the world. Plato realized as much, perhaps unknowingly, when he described in the *Republic* that all children are free to have the opportunity to train for the upper levels of the Guardian class. However, it was deemed necessary to placate those unsuccessful in achievement with the Myth of the Metals, establishing the position that, through no fault of their own, certain individuals were never meant to succeed to certain levels. In other words, one's lot in life had already been determined.⁷⁰ Ironically, this belief also helps circumvent significant discussion concerning the ills of competition. If success or failure are based on factors outside the control of individuals, the fact that nothing could have changed the outcome mitigates some of the sense of inferiority and inadequacy that one might feel losing a competition.

Additional confusion comes not just from the existence of incomprehensible remnants of a long-lost morality, but because these remnants have such dubious significance for us today. Our ancestors of the Enlightenment (albeit a Western Enlightenment) chose freedom to select or to create their own moral standards rather than accept the stability that a traditional but inflexible morality offered. In so doing, however, Enlightenment thinkers mistook their fellow humans as social peers. As a Chinese proverb aptly puts it, "Philosophy is only good on a full stomach."⁷¹ It is all well and good to promote independent moral thinking, but one cannot indulge in such speculation without the necessary time and training — and even then available only when the necessities of life are at least minimally met. The pragmatist Aristotle admitted as much in his *Nicomachean*

⁶⁹ Gibson, *Performance Versus Results*, 14.

⁷⁰ Such myths are periodically attempted, e.g., social Darwinism.

⁷¹ Or as Adelai Stevenson put it, "A hungry man is not a free man."

Ethics when he wrote that "it seems clear that happiness needs the addition of external goods ... for it is difficult if not impossible to do fine deeds without any resources."⁷²

Furthermore, along with the freedom of the Enlightenment came freedom of the market. Soon, the freedom to think for oneself and to be able to reject moral dogma became the freedom to buy and sell anything which could be bought or sold, ultimately to the exclusion of any moral compunction. Freedom was no longer an end; it turned into a justification for the pursuit of economic means necessary to achieve utilitarian Happiness. As merchandise propaganda filled the thoughts and minds of the population, the capability to make moral choices took up space and got in the way. Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor may have insisted that people preferred to be happy than to be free, but in this light it could be argued that Dostoyevsky examined his subjects's preferences after the propaganda of economics had already gripped the ideological loyalty of the masses. Dostoyevsky complained that human nature preferred happiness over freedom, but perhaps it was what *homo economicus* desired. After all, there is a not-so-fine line between desiring only that which is necessary to permit free thinking, and desiring more and more physical and psychological gratification (which may color or even discourage free and possibly dissenting thoughts).

Rediscovering the finer points of virtue within a modern interpretation might make classical virtue relevant to our daily existence and thus temper the excessive extravagances that presently exist and are glorified. Unfortunately, as was apparent with Aristotle, not everyone can be virtuous. Virtue is a selective component of humanity, and as such, restricts only a portion of the population to its possible achievement. Naturally, once one has come to that conclusion, a selection process must exist and criteria for selection must also be determined. Inevitably then, those actions or behaviors which might be deemed virtuous can only be ascertained by other humans. This leaves a great deal to the discretion

⁷² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 79-80.

of social and cultural influences of individuals. History has repeatedly demonstrated that those in positions of power are invariably the same ones which determine the attributes necessary to become powerful or virtuous (using themselves as models, of course), as if virtue and power are somehow coextensive; whereas influential individuals arising out of the obscurity of poverty or bureaucracy (e.g., Jesus or Confucius) went on to established religious and secular theories which promoted the cultivation of personal attributes, such as love, honesty, and filial devotion — but also expected and encouraged obedience to political institutions. Ironically, both extremes of the social hierarchy supported political resignation, either because political leaders were the most virtuous individuals, or because it was the virtuous thing to do.

Recently, as the immense power of language has been exposed, we have come to learn that it is easier to change terminology than to change social conditions. As early as the beginnings of Christian theology, poverty emerged as a virtue (and in the middle of the Enlightenment, a virtue of the working class) and Wealth was considered the cross to bear; those who were well-off could never be truly happy or truly virtuous or without sin. This explains somewhat why many wealthy individuals who near old age and the impending visit to the Final Judgement, often relinquish much of their wealth to philanthropic and other socially responsible causes. Desperate for forgiveness, they must attain virtue by becoming poor. On the other hand, Protestant doctrines have supported the suspect notion that wealth may be an indication of divine favor for those who will be blessed in the afterlife — a clue to the predestination of individuals. After all, one may not know who will be saved, but if one acts as if they were one of the saved, chances are better. The fact that many Calvinists and Puritans were financially well-off could only have reinforced their beliefs.

In the end, there existed a clear-cut clash of ideological support to capitalistic and individualistic underpinnings of society. Protestantism supported change and the pursuit of

wealth and individual accomplishments — all of which are indications of God's favor and a hint to one's preordained position in the hereafter. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, preached a resigned acceptance of one's subservient position. "The fidelity demanded by the Catholic Church encouraged cultural resignation — an acceptance of one's place within a hierarchy — which destroyed the self-reliance required by American democracy and ... the ambition demanded of the middle class."⁷³ What should appear most astonishing is that the clash between Protestantism and Catholicism mimics the centuries old conflict between Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical doctrines. Plato suggested that everyone could be happy, but only when they become one with the heavenly empyrean of the Forms; Aristotle argued that happiness was accessible on Earth, but not to everyone.

As should be clear to the reader, the conflict between competition and cooperation takes similar lines of disagreement. For example, only a select few can win in competition; everyone ought to succeed in cooperative environments. It is because of this distinction that Aristotelianism and its many contemporary versions are unsuitable for global benevolence. Although I argue above that the attainment of moral virtue is dependent upon material resources, the limited amount of resources available makes only one of three things possible. Either only a few members of the global population can be virtuous; in which case, virtue will and must be defined differently by different societies with limited resources. Second, the notion that material resources are necessary for the attainment of virtue must be seriously reconsidered, if not rejected outright. However, if my argument above has any merit, the idea that levels of material resources could be separated from the attainment of virtue is implausible. This leaves us with a third possibility, that resources must be more evenly apportioned to assure the most people accessibility to similar levels of virtue. Virtues must not be considered scarce benefits (as they are traditionally perceived

⁷³ Baritz, *The Good Life*, 25.

in a competitive environment) but as universal benefits to which everyone can have access. Just as Gibbard suggested that communities are the result of learned and shared emotive responses, virtues and morality and ethics are all community-shared resources as well. Unfortunately, when economic resources are unequal, moral resources become unequal. There is then a tendency to (in fact, it is probably easier to) justify the economic inequalities rather than correct them, and to claim that unequal moral virtues could be alleviated if only the majority would adopt the virtues of the class which proved itself worthy by accumulating the most economic resources. In other words, Aristotelianism and social Darwinism merges and resurges.

Is Platonism any better, especially as it claims that universal virtue is possible only after death? apparently, neither Aristotelianism nor Platonism inspires much social change. However, universal virtue through cooperativism, unlike Platonism, can be fulfilled while individuals still live. The major objection to cooperativism has been the apparent impossibility of everyone being happy; at least competitiveness guarantees some happiness. Yet, the idea that cooperation cannot guarantee everyone happiness is based on individualistic and self-interested understandings of happiness. If happiness were equatable to communitarian pursuits and an understanding of the limits of resources, then successful cooperative communities would produce a far greater number of happy people than we could ever acknowledge in our present society.

* * *

RORTY

Confucius taught that each human being must cultivate such personal virtues as honesty, love, and charity. Moreover, Confucius encouraged the development of virtue

through study of the models provided in the ancient literature.⁷⁴ Similar to Plato's view of literature in the *Republic*, these models need to be carefully screened so that they embody only those virtues which are to be encouraged. William Bennett's *Book of Virtues* is a more recent example of this screening process. Most philosophers have agreed and continue to agree that literature holds a crucial key to moral enlightenment. But how so?

To recall the conclusion to our above discussion, a work of art exists somewhere between the status of entertainment, ideological exposé, and obscurity (perhaps political obscurity). What keeps a work of literature alive is its relevance to the audience, and this is only possible with the understanding which comes from a common, or linked, vocabulary. So Orwell's *Winston* is quite perceptive in his worry. What can literature say to the future, if there might be to be no common vocabulary between the two? At the very least, the work will be misunderstood (if it means anything at all) because meanings and nuances change over time even with the same word. With the creation and evolution of Newspeak and the concerted effort to eliminate all words of "thoughtcrime", *Winston* cannot write for the future; his future will not understand. So, it appears that Orwell has closed the door on the tenuous belief that emotions can withstand and transcend the test of time. However, Richard Rorty, in his work *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989), argues that even though language makes truth and emotion contingent on circumstances, pain, suffering, and humiliation exist and will always exist universally throughout humanity.

Having argued that language "took shape as a result of a great number of sheer contingencies ... of thousands of small mutations finding niches,"⁷⁵ Rorty moves through

⁷⁴ Confucius had a similar life to that of Plato. Both he and Plato wanted the opportunity to put their theories into practice; like Plato, Confucius insisted that rulers need to lead exemplary lives and be guided by moral principles if their states were to become prosperous and happy. Yet whereas Plato failed, Confucius — at age 50 — succeeded in the state of Lu. In Lu, the administration was so successful in applying his reforms that crime was practically eliminated. Unfortunately, jealous of the increasing power of Lu, a ruler of an adjacent principality succeeded in having Confucius, the minister of crime, removed. Confucius left in disgust and disillusionment, in search of another ruler to apply the teachings — a ruler which never materialized.

⁷⁵ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 16.

the thoughts of Wittgenstein, Freud, Nietzsche and others to theorize that we should "treat everything — our language, our conscience, our community — as a product of time and chance."⁷⁶ If this is the case, the quest for any sort of moral or ethical foundation seems impossible:

The process of de-divinization ... would culminate in our no longer being able to see any use for the notion that finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings might derive the meanings of their lives from anything except other finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings.⁷⁷

If morality is contingent, based on the happy and lucky convergence of people and events in the right places at the right times, then theological dogmatism or the philosophical rigidity to logical order are out of place, having no *a priori* status in justifying foundations, though their presence adds to the contingencies individuals encounter. Rorty agrees, claiming further that "a liberal society is one which is content to call 'true' whatever the upshot of [free and unrestrained rhetoric] turns out to be ... [Liberal] culture needs an improved self-description rather than a set of foundations."⁷⁸ But how does a society "describe" itself? By moving from philosophy to language to cultural narrative (a recollection of interrelated contingencies), Rorty arrives at literature:

An ideally liberal polity would be one whose culture hero is [the] "strong poet" rather than the warrior, the priest, the sage, or the truth-seeking, "logical," "objective" scientist. Such a culture would slough off the Enlightenment vocabulary ... It would no longer be haunted by specters called "relativism" and "irrationalism." Such a culture would not assume that a form of cultural life is no stronger than its philosophical foundations. Instead, it would drop the idea of such foundations. It would regard the justification of liberal society simply as a matter of historical comparison with other attempts at social organization — those of the past and those envisaged by utopians.⁷⁹

Considering that ethical codes are derived from the shared understandings of society developed through the thick descriptions of certain "agents of diversity" (like journalists and writers), if philosophers find morality flawed — because it is based on a consensus of popular moral opinion — it may be more appropriate for them to move out of the

⁷⁶ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 22.

⁷⁷ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 45.

⁷⁸ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 52.

⁷⁹ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 53.

universities and into the streets, rather than preaching the gospel to the pulpit. One philosopher put it this way: "When it comes to philosophy, there are no spectators, only participants."⁸⁰ If this is forgotten, the "philosophy that a man professes" will end up as something "other than the one he lives by; and in our time, professional philosophy is in danger if becoming more and more only something professed."⁸¹ The only way (and perhaps the most enduring way) to affect the contingency of moral foundations, then, is for "agents of diversity" to manipulate the contingencies which affect the designers of these foundations, the common person, so their "common sense" ideas best express what ought to be expressed. In the end, the merging of literature and philosophy means the eventual elimination of suffering and humiliation from our contingent experiences through the public representation of all their subsequent miseries.⁸²

To demonstrate his argument more vividly, Rorty looks to one of the "agents of diversity" within literature — especially the works of George Orwell, specifically the dystopian classic, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell still means something to today's readers for two reasons. First, we are still able to reconstruct Orwell's language and meanings so that they still make sense to us — though perhaps not in the same way as the original — but they will only remain significant to us "as long as we describe the politics of the twentieth century as Orwell did. How long that will be will depend on the contingencies of our political future."⁸³ Second, *Nineteen Eighty -Four* appeals to the physical

⁸⁰ Kaplan, *The New World of Philosophy*, 11.

⁸¹ Kaplan, *The New World of Philosophy*, 3.

⁸² However, "agents of diversity" are often viewed suspiciously. As these agents expose the tribulations of life, they are perceived as also somehow encouraging the type of behavior exposed. Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*, for example, was and still is reviled by critics who feel it is immoral (being a dangerous example to follow) to show adolescents engaged in reprehensible behavior without eventual punishment. What these critics fail to grasp is that the lives of the students are almost completely void of hope, of trust and faith, of any kind of youthful exuberance for the future or their own being. Their shallow existences, consumed by a nihilistic cynicism and a resigned pessimism, exemplify their punishment. They are no longer human.

Rorty may find the vigorous reader engagement with the book as vindication of his point, but the calls for banning the book (which has been quite vehement) as the wrong response. Effort is wasted shooting the messenger than in dealing with the increasing anomie of our youngsters.

⁸³ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 169.

manifestations of our existence — emotion responses which do not change even as we learn new vocabularies to describe them. We still feel the pain and the angst of lonely desperation, the pain of Winston's elbow being crushed by a truncheon, or the desperation to share his thoughts with someone. These are universal human attributes we have all experienced; and the work speaks to us just as strongly as ever because of this unity of human experience.

In an intricately interlocking philosophy of linguistic determinism (a vivid example of the power of postmodern theory), historical corruption (Winston's job at the Ministry of Truth is to "correct" the news releases of the past so they make the Party seem infallible), and mental gymnastics (doublethink), Orwell constructs a chilling interpretation of the near-future based on these aspects of social control. The war Oceania wages against Eastasia, and then Eurasia — a war which Winston's lover Julia perceptively claims is fictional, a creation of the Party — perpetuates wartime necessities involving shortages and civil violations, events familiar to many wartime populations. Clearly, the misery of shortages, the suppression of civil liberties during war, and the intensity of the pain and suffering remained significant memories to the survivors of World War II. However, what makes the work so frightening to us, is no longer the closeness to the reader which these events relate. To Rorty, Orwell's achievement was "to convince the rest of us that O'Brien was, indeed, possible."⁸⁴

O'Brien's significance rests in his joy and perfection of torture and the rational "irrationalism" of power. Instead of any good that may be of benefit to the masses, the whole point of pursuing power is a ultra-Machiavellian one — power is to acquire, accumulate, consolidate, and expand power. The only justification of power is more power; the object of torture is torture. God is Power! Asserting power over others, making them suffer, and in the end, eradicating all thoughts that could supplant the

⁸⁴ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 176.

thoughts inserted by the party — that is what counts. The ultimate power is the power to control thought: to get inside the brain and alter the emotions and the will themselves; to create a mind that lives only for the party and will do nothing to jeopardize that; to evolve from "Thou shalt not" to "Thou shall" to finally "Thou art." Love is only for the party, and can be for no one else. All art, literature, and science is for the party, and thus, the party determines what is art, literature, and science. The party controls what pleasure an individual has, what language one uses, and whatever pain one experiences as well. "Always, at every moment," says O'Brien, "there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless ... Imagine a boot stamping on a human face — forever." All truth is at the mercy and the power of the Party.

The ultimate in oppression through bureaucracy and political language tricks which portend the advent of doublethink and newspeak — not only in the totalitarian countries, but in the Western countries as well — is the domination of a person's thought. Sure, one can love a sunrise or sunset, can love another human or the caress of words on the tongue — for now. But not for long. If something is not done soon, there will be only one truth — that Power is God! O'Brien is exceedingly successful in achieving what Rorty thinks is the ultimate inhumanity and the greatest crime that could be committed to any human. By removing Winston's vocabulary and replacing it with the language of the state, O'Brien prevents Winston from describing himself in a coherent, consistent manner *to himself*. To accomplish this end, torture is an absolute necessity:

O'Brien wants to cause Winston as much pain as possible, and for this purpose what matters is that Winston be forced to realize that he has become incoherent, realize that he is no longer able to use a language or be a self ... [People] can, their torturers hope, experience the ultimate humiliation of saying to themselves, in retrospect, "Now that I have believed or desired this, I can never be what I hoped to be, what I thought I was. The story I have been telling myself about myself — my picture of myself as honest, or loyal, or devout — no longer makes sense. I no longer have a self to make sense of. There is no world in which I can picture myself as living, because there is no vocabulary in which I can tell a coherent story about myself."⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 179.

What is possibly most frightening with this description is that everyone of us has an over-arching fear of something and a particular selling-out point; to our own horror we all may have an O'Brien in our lives ready to exploit our fears, whether already accomplished in the merciless memories of our past or soon to pass in the unyielding and unforgiving contingent possibilities of our future. It is the depiction of this dread that Orwell achieves eminence in the literature of "diversity." Rorty, through Orwell, makes it clear that the emphasis of any liberal vision is to provide the necessary mental space to allow vocabularies of self-description to exist and challenge each other without the fear of being forced into re-description, whether through government or individual domination, which itself alters our description of ourselves. The fear of re-description is just as damaging as the real pain and suffering and humiliation being avoided.

It might be argued (and with some credence) that contingency can't be directed; for the whole thrust of Rorty's liberal utopia seemingly is that it can be, eventually reaching the point of self-perpetuation, as when he asserts:

My hunch is that Western social and political thought may have had the last conceptual revolution it needs. J. S. Mill's suggestion that governments devote themselves to optimizing the balance between leaving people's private lives alone and preventing suffering seems to me pretty much the last word.⁸⁶

Rorty appears to want the current conception of liberalism to continue, albeit with tinkering to smooth out the rough edges; yet accepting contingency at even the simplest face value, it would not be unacceptable to postulate that out of liberalism could conceivable come something akin to Stalinism. Most people would be appalled by the possibility of Stalinism, but strict contingency offers no solace to the visionaries; the future is guided by the luck of its past and the ingenuity of its present. People unfortunately often have too short a memory and will soon forget the barbarism of Stalin or Hitler, until it arises again in the future.

⁸⁶ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 63.

Is there any way out of this disturbing probability? Rorty is unclear about it. He envisions his liberal utopia as the best social state imaginable (in its acknowledgement of the universality of pain and humiliation arising from the forced redescription of oneself with a vocabulary reserved to the coercer), and that the current liberal state as the proper precursor to this utopia, but provides no assurance that it will remain so or will ever come about. However, since we are a part of the contingent system and can make changes now for our posterity, then contingencies might be harnessed or, at the very least, nudged in a certain direction. The ideal utopian goal might be to design systems that perpetuate a stable ideology in the midst of continual and contingent utopian changes. Is it too farfetched to imagine such a better world? It would be if individuals rely solely on the happy coincidence of history. Despite a seeming paradox, contingency needs to be directed, even if it simply means being prepared to respond and act on events; to say otherwise may frustrate the very liberal ideas and visions Rorty imagines. In fact, most people do believe they can change the world for the better; yet they remain uninvolved, not knowing what to do.

Despite Rorty's dubious reconciliation of contingency with the current liberal balance balance between freedom and privacy, after all is said and done, it appears that effective social change can and will occur only when *status quo* emotions and beliefs are replaced with different (*status quo?*) emotions or beliefs. Aligning ourselves with Rorty's argument, the poetic order of emotive language is all that is left to overcome differences in both language and time, especially when logic fumbles and meanings distort. Obscure and sometimes impenetrable logical argument rarely provide the necessary emotional replacement to evolving languages and worldviews. One must, therefore, look to methods more accessible and more meaningful. Moreover, if philosophical argument is to inspire a personal commitment within the reader, it must be placed in a contextual frame which excites the emotions. Put all together, the way to change society is through literature.

Literature makes philosophy understandable by reworking it with an emotional content and putting it in context. Literature makes logic meaningful to the heart and soul of the readers. Moreover, as the writer Jack Bickham explains, literature may even provide psychological sustenance to people searching for meaning in life due to a story's consistent cause-and-effect planning and presentation:

Because this kind of presentation shows a world in which things do make sense — in which everything isn't just meaningless chaos and chance — the resulting story also has the effect of offering a little hope to the reader: a suggestion by implication that life doesn't have to be meaningless, and that bad things don't always have to happen to good people for no reason [It is] a hint that maybe the reader can seize some control of his own life after all, and that good effort may sometimes actually pay off — and our existence may indeed even have some kind of meaning.⁸⁷

To a certain extent, however, reading literature can be construed as escapism. Individuals sometimes have to resort to fictional lands and events to witness lives that actually make sense and follow some logical pattern, whereas theirs may not. Such comforting feelings, however, can also lead to frustration and depression; for if these lives make sense, why does mine not? To some extent, it is this discomfort with literature which spurs the challenge to ideology that Jameson and others hoped would happen.

Granted, not all novels make sense. Kafka's works, for example, emphasize the randomness and meaninglessness of life.⁸⁸ In any case, Bickham seems to have stumbled upon a possibility even he does not see. Readers do wish things to make sense, and they do wish to see cause and effect played out with clarity. For what is more frustrating than to see problems without knowing whence they came or where they will head. An author, if he or she is good, will clear up the "whences" of causes. They will provide the reader an understanding of the causes. Some writers will also provide the causes of certain social problems. By knowing some of the causes of the ills of society, people can begin to grasp how these problems can be treated and eliminated. Without the author, the world appears haphazard and chaotic; so much so that people are paralyzed into inaction. Without

⁸⁷ Bickham, *Scene and Structure*, 13.

⁸⁸ *The Trial* and *Metamorphosis* are two examples.

knowing where to begin, it is impossible to know how to begin. By imposing an order upon the chaos, the reader can then not only seize control of her own life, but of the lives of others. Although Kafka may have written of the absurdity of modern life, and how effects may not have any knowable cause, many readers and writers reject such an acerbic existentialism. These writers and readers will instead sally forth trying to put together the puzzle of life, no matter how foolish a search for pieces in the meaning in life may be. Of course, the view of some is that there is nothing else a writer should or can do. Commenting on the purpose of literature, Albert Camus said, "We must realize that we cannot escape the common lot of pain, and that our only justification, if one there be, is to speak insofar as we can on behalf of those who cannot."⁸⁹

* * *

UTOPIANISM AS PHILOSOPHY

Literature's successes in prodding an individual's will to act are legion, especially in the field of utopian literature.⁹⁰ The founding fathers of this country were familiar with Harrington's utopian novel, *Oceana* (1656), which describes a multi-pillared government controlled by checks and balances between governmental groups. *Looking Backward* (1888) set the stage for social reform in the early twentieth century, promoting welfare and social security. Most New Dealers knew of or had read Bellamy's work. *Walden Two* (1948) was the blueprint for some of the most successful intentional communities in America, along with other works which spawned countless failed utopian enterprises (e.g., *Voyage to Icaria* (1848) by Etienne Cabet). Joyce Oramel Hertzler listed at least nineteen

⁸⁹ Safire and Safir, *Good Advice on Writing*, 112.

⁹⁰ Helen Keller once said, with poignant relevance, "Literature is my utopia."

specific contributions attributable to the French utopian socialists alone (e.g., Saint-Simon, Fourier, etc).⁹¹

The fact that utopias never existed, and the fact that the majority of utopian experiments have been notorious failures,⁹² does not nor ever has taken away from the innate value of utopian works, or the timeless nature of this dream of earthly happiness. Even the deeply individual interpretation and subsequent confusion of what a utopia is, whether it be "a source of hope, a guide to action, the embodiment of reason, the solution to social problems, the path to happiness, an ideal to be emulated, or the inevitable outcome of the process of history,"⁹³ does not weaken its import. Utopian novels, for instance, ostensibly about the fantasy worlds they depict, place our own world and reality in the pseudo-objective light of an outsider looking in. Bronislaw Bacsko agrees, as he writes:

Utopias are specific demonstrations and expressions of a particular era, showing its obsessions, haunting fears, and revolts; the scope of its expectations as well as the paths taken by the social imagination; its way of envisaging the possible and the impossible. Going beyond social reality, even if only in dream and as an escape, is part of that reality and offers revealing testimony about it.⁹⁴

⁹¹ 1) Assisted man of later generations in avoiding social disaster; 2) Possessed a commendable fearlessness — daring to suggest change; 3) Discovered a new criterion of human value — rejecting the individualistic standards of value and set up the conception of the social good, the development of society as a whole; 4) Anticipated other social reformers in their appreciation of social laws; 5) Offered a conception of the theory of instincts (Fourier), "passions" = instincts — "The master-task of civilized mankind" is to adjust social life to human nature; 6) Promoted scientific management and employment management; 7) Assisted in adapting social life to the times, or creating a perfect social life for all time; 8) Claimed society, by its own free will, could reconstruct its methods of direction and control; 9) Recognized the ability of men to surpass themselves. Happiness can be achieved if only man wills to do so; 10) There is nothing that cannot be done if we but strongly enough will to do it; 11) Became prophets of modern eugenics; 12) Advocated the equality of the sexes; 13) Advocated preventive medicine [see Sir Thomas More also] and advocated the playing of games as part of an exercise program; 14) Advanced religious toleration; 15) Advocated a Social Religion — "*Stressing brotherhood and socialized ethics - they sought universal happiness rather than universal conformity*" [290]; 16) Laid out a Social Theory of Property — the state ought to have ultimate domain over property; 17) Recognized the utility of social institutions — the most significant and most powerful institution for Utopians being Education. Also promoted was an institution for the advancement of knowledge, e.g. Salomon's House from Bacon's *New Atlantis*; 18) Provided the foundation for modern communistic and socialistic philosophies; and 19) Instituted the study of sociology itself. [Hertzler, *The History of Utopian Thought*, 279 - 300]

⁹² On the other hand, there have been some utopian experiments that have been quite successful.

⁹³ Tod and Wheeler, *Utopia*, 7.

⁹⁴ Bacsko, *Utopian Lights*, 5.

Sir Thomas More held the opinion that for social commentary to change a person's perspective, it must be presented in a way that will be most readily accepted. Thomas More justified this new form of social criticism, referring to his classic work *Utopia* (1516), as a form of edifying entertainment — a way to "sugar-coat" critical observations and suggestions so they can be more easily swallowed by the reader.⁹⁵ In other words, utopias might be construed as ideological assaults constructed so the less politically savvy of the population could become involved in the debate. Whether this interpretation succeeds or not is an interesting question. However, thinking back to the above discussion of hegemony, if literature (when initially presented) is innately critical of the dominant ideologies, then utopias were meant to involve the middle class in the debate, those perhaps most capable of political discontent and most eager for change. Utopias prod the readers into questioning the current *status quo*, or the new *status quo* (depending on who's writing) — readers from the very class that must be brought into the revolutionary movement.

More's *Utopia* might be seen then as the prototype of a new kind of middle class propaganda. This may also explain why utopian works rarely are viewed as art or great literature. Utopias, perhaps because of their optimistic outlook on human behavior and social engineering, could never garner support within the dominant *status quo*-affirming social classes (not having any reason to see their position threatened). Dystopias, on the other hand, have had more success in becoming works of great literature. These works do not promote overthrowing current social systems as much as they warn the reader of possible troubles in the future if conditions don't change in a certain way. This leaves a great deal of latitude for interpretations concerning corrective measures which permits utopian ideas to be absorbed by the ideological hegemony without its dominating influence threatened. In addition, many dystopias argue against the notion of a beneficent human

⁹⁵ Lamartine intuited, "Utopias are often only premature truths."

nature or that progressive change is even desirable, thus supporting the defenders of the *status quo* ideologies whom are willing to make incremental changes, but reject grand systemic changes as implausible or nonsensical.

In spite of the fact that some major philosophies, e.g., Existentialism, have had their accompanying literature, utopian study has unfortunately been frowned upon by academicians outside of literary fields throughout the twentieth century for several reasons. As Lasch described, there has been a significant undercurrent of anti-progress which has always existed in the general population — an attribute once scoffed at by intellectuals, but which has gained a substantial foothold in current philosophical discourse, beginning with Nietzsche's dismissal of Hegel's notion of the Absolute Spirit. Instead, Nietzsche wrote of eternal recurrence — "the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things."⁹⁶ This demanded a rejection of definite and linear progress, and any kind of plan or meaning that may be ascribed to history. The world he witnessed around him did not warrant such a belief in progress. Contemporary postmodernism rediscovered the philosophical rejection of progress by Nietzsche in its rejection of master narratives (meta-narratives) which tie the past, present, and future together and are embedded within the notion of progressivism.

Deemed 'science fiction' or 'fantasy,' it has been the vogue to dismiss the visions and recommendations suggested within utopian works as ... well, 'utopian.' But such an opinion is misguided, and we are the worse for it. Ashis Nandy counsels us that utopias are not just simple futuristic titillations:

Perhaps a part of the power of our visions comes from their very unrealizability — from their impractical, 'utopian' scaffolding and from their implicit, unattainable, normative codes. It is a creative tension with which some persons and cultures prefer to live. The gap between reality and hope which such a vision creates becomes a source of cultural criticism and a standing condemnation of the oppression of everyday life to which we otherwise tend to get reconciled.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 92.

⁹⁷ Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, 3.

Utopias, however, also provide more than an attack on *status quo* ideologies. Utopias direct our passage through across temporal oceans, as one writer suggested:

For alas! This world needs Utopias as it needs fairy stories. It does not matter so much where we are going, as long as we are making consciously for some definite goal. And a Utopia, however strange and fanciful, is the only possible beacon upon the uncharted seas of the distant future.⁹⁸

Although critics like Lasch and the Postmodernists may cringe at the unabashed glory of Progress, Utopias furnish a much needed direction for our endeavors — if we are to endeavor at anything at all — so we don't stagnate in a paralysis of uncertainty, of fear, or of obstinacy. Utopias offer us a clue to what we might want our future to look like; not only what we want to leave behind, but what we want to take with us as well. They make Progress less frightening, the Future more familiar, and Life more hopeful.

We also should not forget the value of utopian literature when it come to the question of hegemony. Paul Ricoeur argues in his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* that ideology is not as all-encompassing and all-dominating as Marx, Mannheim, or Althusser have insisted. Ricoeur rejects the ideology/science opposition promoted by Marxism and instead pursues an ideology/real social life *comparison*. Applying a postmodern (as opposed to Althusser's post-structuralist) interpretation of Marxism, Ricoeur initially agrees with Marx arguing that ideology is inherent within the social reality:

If social reality did not already have a social dimension, and therefore, if ideology ... were not constitutive of social existence but merely distorting and dissimulating, then the process of distortion could not start. The process of distortion is grafted onto a symbolic function. Only because the structure of human social life is already symbolic can it be distorted.⁹⁹

Being trapped within the social dimension of reality — a dimension symbolized and defined by language — there is no possibility of creating a dichotomy between ideology and anything else. Ideology, as well as Utopia, are both within what Ricoeur terms, the

⁹⁸ Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, xi [Introduction by Hendrik Willem Van Loon]. Samuel Johnson agreed many years earlier when he said, "It is reasonable to have perfection in our eye that we may always advance toward it, though we know it can never be reached." Or as Anatole France remarked, "Without the Utopias of other times, men would still live in caves, miserable and naked."

⁹⁹ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 10.

concept of *Cultural Imagination* — the constructive force of any and all worldviews. Ideology and Utopia are, therefore, both constitutive of social reality; as such, they both have positive and negative aspects. Our concern with hegemony involves negative ideology, which is the distortion of the real. (Utopia, on the other hand, is the escape to the unreal.) As we can see, Ricoeur's conception of ideology and utopia is a more radical but less encompassing version of ideology than Mannheim's or Marx's. In this case, the distorting function of ideology becomes only one aspect of a person's Cultural Imagination.

What are the positive and negative elements of ideology and utopia? According to Ricoeur, the role of ideology is to make politics function — thereby legitimating a personal need for authoritative concepts. He writes, "While ideology serves ... as the code of interpretation that secures integration, it does so by justifying the present system of authority."¹⁰⁰ However, the claim to the legitimacy of power (claimed by the power holders, that is) and the belief in the legitimacy of power (viewed by those under such authority) is different. This gap becomes the "surplus value" in the structure of Power. Negative ideology exists when the gap between belief and legitimacy begins to shrink and the distinction between authority and domination becomes less discernable.

At this point, the language constructing ideology and legitimation originate from the same location — the power elites; the language justifying belief in legitimacy and the justification of legitimacy are one in the same. When the worldview actually supports repression and inequality — as demonstrated in the caste system of India, for example — and especially if repression and inequality are interpreted as an inevitable part of reality, legitimacy can be granted to anything. Barrington Moore writes that even conceptions of justice and freedom, when couched in the ideology of the dominant classes, enhance the hegemonic sophistication of the legitimations:

¹⁰⁰ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 13.

Even fantasies of liberation and revenge can help to preserve domination through dissipating collective energies in relatively harmless rhetoric and ritual. For the dominant group such a phenomenon has the further advantage of justifying alertness, keeping the tools of repression in good working order and their own supporters in line. Among the leaders of both oppressors and oppressed there can be a tacit understanding that this is the way the system is supposed to work, that this is the form the social contract takes.¹⁰¹

The great responsibility of utopia — its inherent value, according to Ricoeur — is the critique of negative ideology and the direct examination of the use of power and who wields the power. "Utopia functions," describes George Taylor, "to expose the gap between the authority's claims for and the citizenry's beliefs in any system of legitimacy."¹⁰² Ricoeur also sees in the functional structure of Utopia a field to examine alternative ways of living. We ought to conceive of utopias as "an empty place from which to look at ourselves."¹⁰³ It is through this conception of utopia that we can attempt to get out of ideology.

But there is a negative view of utopia:

It is seen to represent a kind of social dream without concern for the real first steps necessary for movement in the direction of a new society. Often a utopian vision is treated as a kind of schizophrenic attitude toward society, both a way of escaping the logic of action through a construct outside history, and a form of protection against any kind of verification by concrete action.¹⁰⁴

This "entropic" view sees utopias as stifling anti-hegemonic causes by describing such actions for social change as utopian ideals. Furthermore, the entropic perception believes that utopias set up conditions inspiring inactivity; readers fail to act positively because of the hope that others will take up the cause.

Utopias can get out of hand in other ways, as well — by making gaps appear too narrow, if not eliminate gaps completely, simply by overexaggerating the problems. Negative utopias may carelessly conjure up domination and oppression where only legitimate authority actually exists.

101 Moore, *Injustice*, 459.

102 Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. xxii.

103 Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 15.

104 Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 1-2.

Yet the value of Ricoeur's interpretation rests in its insistence that ideology and utopia are two opposing possibilities within the larger context of Cultural Imagination. Ideology deals with power relationships and its state of legitimacy in society, while utopias provide the necessary place outside ideology from which to examine the legitimate state of authority. Political studies like John Rawl's *Political Liberalism* and Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* clearly represent the utopian impetus at work and the attempt to step outside of ideology even though they are not, unless referred to derogatorily, considered utopian works.

Be that as it may, I do not find it completely convincing that the sole point of utopian literature is to point out the faults in political legitimacy. Granted, many utopias throughout literature spend a great deal of time and effort configuring political/economic structures that withstand assaults on their legitimacy. It may even be one of the author's primary impulses, if not the crucial impulse, to write the work; and these stories have been classified in the past as either satires or allegories, like More's *Utopia* and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872). However, the majority of utopias during the twentieth century have become less interested in economics and more interested in psychological nuances — perhaps seeing the futility social change through literature.¹⁰⁵ The modern utopias may also emphasize the hegemony of social interactions and relationships as well as eco-political perspectives, as in *Pacific Edge* (1988) by Kim Stanley Gardner or *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) by Marge Piercy. Still other works may be classified as nostalgic — for instance, William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) — or as hope-filled romanticism designed explicitly to avoid politicization — exemplified by the recent cross-over success *Dinotopia* (1992) by James Gurney:

Dinotopia is an apolitical isle; Gurney seems content to keep it that way. "I make no political statement," he declares, "though I think there's a sense of hope in the idea that people and

¹⁰⁵ For example, Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) is subtitled "An Ambiguous Utopia" due to its equivocal juxtaposition and interplay of psychological justifications of two "utopian" worlds.

animals can get along and work together." Left and right have both found solace in Dinotopia, but Gurney disavows any message-mongering.¹⁰⁶

Consequently, Ricoeur's theory may explain whence the utopian impulse originates, it does little to explain the variety of guises in which such utopian passions dress. For this aspect, I again turn to Fredric Jameson. In his essay "Of Islands and Trenches," he expresses a different standpoint concerning the distinction between ideology and utopia when examined from its literary perspective. Unlike the position that narrative text is "managed" reality, in which there is a reality that lives apart from the world which bore the offspring (text vs. real life), the "play of typical illusion is structurally indispensable in the constitution of the utopian text as such"¹⁰⁷ and marks itself from other forms of fiction. Illusion, the complete disintegration of reality, is what utopias are all about.

Ideology, according to Jameson, exists objectively in the text — not in the form of text however, but reconstructed into a "textual" form.¹⁰⁸ If that is the case, utopias can also be reconstructed into a textual form separate from, while not contradictory to, ideology. Thus, utopias become not narrative texts *per se*, but objects of meditation, texts which stir the consciousness into unconceptualized flights of fancy; whereas traditional narratives operate to bolster a "political unconscious," a collective consciousness that represses historical contradictions to the legitimacy of hegemony. This only becomes obvious, however, if utopias are created as autonomous models; and this is only possible through the reconstruction of a hypothetical textualization of ideology. This reconstruction of the referential subtext is necessary; a reality-laced subtext would undermine the autonomous

¹⁰⁶ Jackson, "The man who draws dinosaurs all day," 78. Unfortunately, the various spin-off books and novels from *Dinotopia* have strained this apolitical philosophy. One book claimed that the island's economics were based on a sophisticated barter system. Even Gurney, despite his assertions, provided insight into the political aspects of the island — a collection of cities independently governed and loosely controlled by the island's capital city, Sauropolis. Furthermore, the sequels have corrupted the island's utopian innocence — introducing undercurrents of greed, corruption, and duplicity — effectively tarnishing Dinotopia's more attractive and compelling virtues.

¹⁰⁷ Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches," 3.

¹⁰⁸ Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches," 12.

representational quality of the utopia. Utopias are meaningless if they exist in the here and now.

But a question arises. How does an alternative representation come about? What prompts a reconstruction of the prevailing ideology into utopia? According to Jameson, utopias emerge from the gap left by two explanatory but contradictory explanations of social change. Utopias evolve from *conflicting and contradictory ideologies*. "What has been conceptually unformalizable becomes the raw material ... of a different type of mental operation ... the work of figuration."¹⁰⁹ Figuration — preconceptual thinking and discourse — is similar to a dialectic, but is not to be confused with one. Whereas a dialectic is the synthesis of opposing theses and antitheses, the figuration may or may not generate its reconstruction from the materials of either of the conflicting ideologies. In fact, in order for utopian thinking to break the bounds of ideological constraints, it is perhaps inherent to conceive of alternatives which are not associated with the constraints but from the remnants generated by the clash between ideologies.

An alert reader may already see a problem with Jameson's formulation of the origins of utopia. If utopias come from the abyss created by divergent ideologies, is Jameson claiming that these utopian reconstructions originate *de novo* — out of nowhere? Is not a third and alternative ideology being touted as utopia — an ideology which merely appears utopian in relative contrast with the former two opposing ideologies? I do not think Jameson is asserting this. Even though there is the difficulty of creation from nothing, Jameson might respond by saying such a reconstruction of ideology into a utopian figuration is possible because there is no accompanying body of belief which will turn the simple utopian thought into an ideology. Allow me to clarify.

To begin with, an inherent conflict exists in utopian literature — the conflict between narrative and description. Recalling Jameson's essay "Metacommentary," a coherent plot,

¹⁰⁹ Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches," 15.

one exemplified by a reality-based ideological subtext, reflects the reader's understanding of social conditions. When the standard cause/effect linearity of Bickham is thrown into disarray, however, the less cohesive plot breaks from ideological into utopian reconstructions, and is more at odds with the reader's desired conception of reality. These "plotless" works create new languages. New meanings are created from the old by this unique juxtaposition of languages inherent in literature. The larger the set of new meanings, the better (or more aesthetic) the literature.

The new utopias, being examples of "plotless" works, are constructed from bits and pieces of prior ideologies, whether currently in vogue, fighting for recognition, or totally forgotten. These bits and pieces are restructured and reconfigured — very much a type of linguistic *bricolage* — into a new conception of the world via a new language. Thus, utopias remain utopias only at the very earliest stages of invention. Once the "unconceptualized flights of fancy" have been successfully expressed through utopia, they immediately become part of the vocabulary of reality, creating a new language and a new conception of the world for society. At that point, the utopian fantasy is nothing more than a new ideological point of view, which in turn will spawn other conflicting ideologies leading to the next utopian figuration — all the while creating new languages, different worldviews, and challenging current states of hegemony in the process.

Ricoeur, however, though his utopian scheme appears inadequate for utopian literature, at least provides us a motivation for utopian thinking — political unrest. Jameson, though addressing literature, lacks a motivation for utopian thought except the vague notion that they emerge from divergent ideologies. That could mean almost anything, which may be the point. Jameson does not pin down the formation of utopia to a single justification like Ricoeur does. But by doing so, Jameson implies that practically everything can be a motivator for utopias. This hardly seems the case, considering the unique status utopias hold in literary history. It is a peculiar kind of writing prompted by a

peculiar set of contingent circumstances.¹¹⁰ However, perhaps all utopias are prompted by a desire for paradise and rest.¹¹¹

Still, perhaps we can reconcile both within one unified understanding of utopianism and literature. The model developed by Ricoeur would allow us to point to social conditions in the air which may have prompted a particular writer or writers into penning utopian works. After all, Jameson interpretation doesn't explain why there were over 100 utopian novels written in the ten years between the Haymarket massacre of 1886 and 1896 when the Nationalist clubs and the Progressive Party merged with the Democratic Party. That, of course, wasn't Jameson's intent. He was concerned with the creative process itself, after the initial prod provided by Ricoeur. So, though they have differing conceptions of utopia, ideology, and the relationship between them, Ricoeur and Jameson can be reconciled once we realize that they are dealing with two different aspects of the creative moment. Ricoeur deals with everything up until the birth of the utopian impulse; Jameson deals with everything after.

Yet, in spite of the preceding explanation, perhaps the most important aspect of utopias is that they keep people alive — figuratively, if not literally. Emerson wrote, "Where there is no vision, a people perish." Moreover, Frederik Polak, in his essay "Utopia and Cultural Renewal," averred that since we are human, we are incapable of not thinking utopianistically. Humans are the only creatures that can think both of existent and non-existent things, including one's own existence or non-existence. Because of this capacity, humans have an insatiable desire to 'invent knowledge' of the future. This desire for future

¹¹⁰ Jameson, for example, mentions that Raphael Hythloday (of More's *Utopia*) remarks on two distinct causes for the collapse of feudal England: the obsolescence of the feudal patriarchy, thus casting thousands of serfs literally into the streets; and the Enclosure Acts, which forcibly removed serfs from their lands. These are the two opposing ideologies out of which Utopia supposedly arose. In an ironic twist however, they also indicate economic and political shifts in power. Undoubtedly, there were questions concerning the changing legitimacy of the British Parliament versus the traditional monarchy.

¹¹¹ According to the German thinker Ludwig Feuerbach, from his work *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Christianity may have developed solely from a need for paradise. Man needed a utopia for he needed to conceive of a place where all human limitations were removed; thus Man created Heaven. At that point, Man had to create God in order to create Heaven.

knowledge and the solidity of existent knowledge results in the formation of *Time-schizophrenia* — the "dualistic mental capacity to imagine another and radically different world and time."¹¹² Polak lyricizes on how time-schizophrenia, with its spiritual and visionary messages, is embraced by the population:

They create positive images of a future better than the present. Certain of these images, which happen to combine intellectual insights and esthetic appeal in such a way as to strike emotional resonance with the social and mental needs of the time, arouse great enthusiasm in the masses. Society is then fired by the force of these dominating visions which draw men toward that other and better future. The promises inhering in the visions burst through the historical past-present and break open the hidden present-future. In the process, some of them are seized upon and, as it were, "chosen" by society out of a great many possible futures and harnessed to the present. These images of the future have formed one of the main driving forces of cultural dynamics and have been playing a preponderant role, through their alternating strength and weakness, in the rise and fall of civilization.¹¹³

Saul Bellow describes this innate feeling of humanity and its passion for advancement in his own inspired way:

The career of our specie ... is evidence that one imagination after another grows literal. Not dreams. Not mere dreams. I say not mere dreams because they have a way of growing actual ... No. Birds flew, harpies flew, angels flew, Daedalus and son flew. And see here, it is no longer dreaming and story, for literally there is flying ... All human accomplishment has the same origin, identically. Imagination is a force of nature. Is this not enough to make a person full of ecstasy? Imagination, imagination, imagination! It converts to actual. It sustains, it alters, it redeems! ... What Homo sapiens imagines, he may slowly convert himself to.¹¹⁴

However, as described above in detail, the present age seems to lack this desire for, or ability to capitalize on, future panaceas. Furthermore, our political pundits and intellectuals seem to have lost the capacity to create a vision of the world. From a political standpoint, long range plans do not win elections and seem to be of little interest to the general population. To repeat Erich Fromm: "People want nothing at all except to be governed decently" — a thought that concerns the here and now. From the intellectual standpoint, drawing upon Marshall Berman, vocal intellectuals ranging from Ezra Pound to Foucault have fallen into the abyss of cultural despair, where "all of modern life seems uniformly hollow, sterile, flat, one-dimensional, empty of human possibilities. Anything that looks

¹¹² Polak, "Utopia and Cultural Renewal," 288.

¹¹³ Polak, "Utopia and Cultural Renewal," 288.

¹¹⁴ Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King*, 244-5.

or feels like freedom or beauty is really only a screen for more profound enslavement and horror."¹¹⁵ Frederik Polak claimed that this stagnation of human society is due to a postmodern distortion of time-schizophrenia through its glorification of a present fragmented from the past and future:

The neurotic personality of our time is no longer schizophrenic by definition. There is a kind of splitting of time into work-time and leisure-time, mainly for escapist ends. The mass media are there to help kill the leisure-time. But this is the very opposite of the idealistic time-splitting among past, present, and future. Where does this repressive mentality leave us? Can we simply forget all about the future, burying our heads and losing ourselves completely in the immediate present?¹¹⁶

Postmodern society, according to Polak, has lost one of its main driving forces — "its dynamic images of the future."¹¹⁷ A society entranced by hedonistic alternatives immediately available for consumption has little interest in what *might be* better later on, so the market for future desires slowly dries up. With no calling for animated visions of the future, innate utopianistic urges remain untapped, if not actively squelched as being unimportant, inconvenient, or impractical. All that remains is the "virtually exhausted ... treasury of inherited utopian images"¹¹⁸ becoming more obscure as languages and social vocabularies change. In the end, Frank Manuel warned, we stand "naked and unprepared to meet the extraordinary requirements of the new automated society ... The forethought of constructive images is an absolute necessity lest we be overwhelmed by chaos."¹¹⁹

If politicians won't or can't envision a future for us, and a cadre of intellectuals are either resistant to progress or overly melancholy about human existence to find any hope for change, it must become the job of Utopias and Utopists to provide a possible answer to the question: How can we progress anywhere — or for that matter, how can Progress itself be defended — without knowing to where we are progressing? Utopias and the

¹¹⁵ Sarup, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 98. Sarup refers to Berman's work *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1983).

¹¹⁶ Polak, "Utopia and Cultural Renewal," 291.

¹¹⁷ Polak, "Utopia and Cultural Renewal," 290.

¹¹⁸ Manuel, *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, xx.

¹¹⁹ Manuel, *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, xx.

dreams spawned by utopian visions are the most easily recognizable (and perhaps the only) signposts of advancement we have. Thus it would behoove us, if we truly wish to be striving for something better than exists now, to progress towards a fulfillment of utopia, to always have in our minds a vision which our leaders and philosophers are unable or unwilling to construct.¹²⁰

With this in mind, the most appropriate medium that provides the most persuasive presentation to the widest possible audience rests in the medium of literature, a style that makes memorable what would otherwise remain mundane. While Alfie Kohn had great difficulty in convincing people to treat his book seriously while fighting off *ad hominum* attacks from people who have never read his work, literature furnishes a way to contextualize the arguments, to make them more realistic and convincing. A novel may not initially convince, but it doesn't have to convince right away, nor does it necessarily need to convince logically. Literature's effectiveness suffices when it is able to challenge the emotional and psychological underpinnings of a reader's cultural beliefs. All it need do is to supply more experiences for a person's worldview to assimilate, hoping that some new worldview will arise — and in our case, one that will make a little more room for the cooperative world than was there before.

However, some utopian theorists, like Martin Plattel, disagree with Polak and believe that the contemporary stage of our societal development may be an opportune time for utopianism to make a resurgence:

The increasing secularization of our contemporary view of man and the world serves to stimulate the importance attached to the function of utopian thinking ... The utopian imagination is born from man's desire to bring about his own happiness by his own creative endeavors. Utopian thought is essentially humanistic insofar as it implies an act of faith in man and doesn't start from the premise that man's life is immutably fixed. Utopian thinking is also demiurgic in the sense that man himself wishes to bring about a better world.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Of course, this is not to say all philosophers think this way.

¹²¹ Plattel, *Utopian and Critical Thinking*, 26.

A bittersweet statement — to admit that the need and passion for utopianism and social change is enhanced by the increased selfishness and self-centered positioning in the world — and one that seems to place itself at odds with traditional thinking that utopianism is most active in times of rapid and progressive social movements. Yet it isn't really at odds. Plattel speaks of the need for, not the production of, utopias. Our times desperately need utopias. Whether or not we get them, however, is another matter altogether.

Recalling the thoughts of Jameson, by masking the misery of existence readers experience and organizing it to preconceived conceptions, literature in a sense may actually make life more bearable. But how does utopian literature fit with this possibility? Do true utopian works hide some implicit notion of hopelessness within an individual? Do dystopias shield some inner desire for a better world? By expressing a possible failure, the reader will certainly know what not to do. But in either case, utopianism cannot be put aside so glibly, for it succeeds by disrupting the general ambivalence to *status quo* politics and economics which pervades society. It forces the reader to engage with the work and life in general, while the author sits back with a mixed sensation of satisfaction that her inner message may create the environment for a better world, and resignation that nothing much may ever come of it.

Still, the utopian writer hopes and persists. In my case, to witness and experience how an all-cooperative society might work when juxtaposed with a competitive society would certainly be a utopian novel that could provide nourishing food for thought. Such a book, as a permanent thorn in an ideological side, would expose a person's former worldview as insufficient. They can walk away from the message, or even ignore it, but as Charles Taylor correctly argued, the reader can never go back to the prior innocence within which they drew comfort. By stimulating "both the imagination and the critical and moralizing reflection of the readers,"¹²² Utopia's realism will forever haunt society.

¹²² Bacsko, *Utopian Lights*, 18.

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WHY COMPETE?

*A Two-Part
Philosophical and Narrative
Rebuttal to Competition*

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jeffrey James Gorbski
May 1999

Part Two:

***There Are No
Spectators***

a novel

Jeffrey James Gorbcki

In Memory of

Joseph Charles Gorbisky

1927-1995

*For a thought to change the world,
it must first change the life of the man who carries it.
It must become an example.*

Albert Camus

One

There was a knock on a door.

"Honey?" said a deep and calm voice. "Can I come in?"

"Daddy? Is that you?"

"Of course, it's me!" The man's voice turned suddenly harsh. "Who the hell do you think it is?"

"Um, you're home early. Just a second."

The man wouldn't wait. He flung the door open and stepped quickly into the room.

"Daddy?"

The young girl stood motionless in fear as the imposing figure of her father scowled at her. Almost six and a half feet tall with shoulders and gut almost as wide, he wore a blue flannel shirt, bleach-splotched blue jeans and mud-covered work boots. He breathed violently through his nose; his mouth clenched. The man's face reddened.

He looked around the room and hated everything he saw. He hated the pale red paint on the walls, the flower stencilling at the ceiling line, the pastel-colored furniture, the light blue bedspread with a gold-trimmed white unicorn embroidered on top. He hated the stuffed animals, the endless chatting on the telephone, and the silly books she would read.

He hated his daughter. She was prissy and frilly, pale, and frail — everything he despised. She was everything a son would never have been. Yet he lived with it and suffered through it, as only Job could understand. He grumbled of the cruelty of life — to be cursed with a daughter when he could have given his son anything and everything. There is no one to play catch with; no one to rough house with; no one to talk sports with. He would mutter to himself every night before his restless sleep, "A man needs a son to stay young."

But most of all, he hated his wife for dying giving birth to his only son. A son colored blue. A son who never cried or ever opened his eyes. A son strangling on his umbilical cord, while Clara bled to death from a ruptured uterus. The midwife and nurses didn't know. The massive bleeding was stopped up by his son's lifeless head. She had strength

enough for one last push, and from it, her baby and her life flooded out. The doctors in attendance scrambled with IVs and blood transfusions, and she might have survived if she had not seen her son's limp body whisked out of the room. She knew instantly her child was dead. She turned her head looking for her husband, forgetting that he was pacing in the waiting room. She called for Carl in a weak and failing gasp. "I love you, Carl," she said. She then closed her eyes and began her eternal sleep.

It had been months since his son's death. Months of grieving, of fighting the tears. Months of trying to accept his daughter when before only her mother had to. He looked longingly to his daughter for comfort, but she overcame the loss quickly. Too quickly. She recovered too soon. It wasn't fair. All too suddenly she started talking on the phone again, as if everything was normal. Then returned the incessant need for fashionable clothes. "Jeans will not do," she would insist. "I can't wear that!" she would blurt.

His construction buddies, once sympathetic, grew distant as his brooding increased. They whispered among themselves. He hated the whispering. He felt excluded, treated as if the aura of death was somehow contagious. Nor was he deaf. They conversed about sports, and hunting, and bringing their sons to the ball game on Saturday. Working on the site, he grimaced whenever he heard his friends talking about their sons trying out for the school basketball team in the fall.

This morning, Carl's fears finally materialized. Jokingly, someone asked Carl if his daughter was going to try out for the cheerleading squad, and wound up with a bloody mass of flesh and bone fragments where his nose used to be for an answer. Carl was given the rest of the week off.

Today, he had had enough.

And he smiled to himself. Now, he had time to act. To finally do what he had wanted to do for years.

It was supposed to have been a touching moment. A sagely father sharing himself with his daughter. He planned the whole thing during his drive home. He thought through his presentation, carefully crafted his lines. But it was not to be. As soon as he barged into the room, he lost control when he saw them on the bed. The bane of his existence.

The dolls.

It was the dolls which stabbed deepest at his soul. Everywhere in the house there were dolls. In the bathroom, in the kitchen, in the living room. For years they accumulated like dust and roaches. Movable, but never removed. Often, when he came across a doll while his daughter was out of the house, he would wrench out the arms and legs and snap off the head — twisting and ripping the limbs while tears streamed down his face. Yet as soon as

the sadism ended, his guilt forced him to the store to buy a replacement doll. He really tried to be a good dad.

Seeing the dolls, he charged to the bed and slapped them across the room as if they were annoying little gnats or crumbs of food lying on a table. The little girl had to shield her face as the dolls flew by her head.

"Daddy, what's wrong?" she asked. But she already knew. For years, she tried her best to be a good little girl, because she could never be a good little boy. He could never be satisfied, though; he would never be happy. She started crying as she picked the dolls up off the floor, crying the same type of tears that would bathe her to sleep at night.

"Put those down!"

She stood still, not knowing what to do.

"Drop it, I said." Dad was snarling now. Still she paused. Her father's brow furrowed and his hands balled up. He drew himself up to his full height. Instantly, the doll fell to the floor.

"I've had enough of these things."

He drove the heel of his boot through Barbie's face, crushing it into the floor.

"No, Daddy!" The sobbing turned into wails of anguish.

"Stop that crying!"

She did, but her fear couldn't control her shaking and sniffing.

"Stop that whimpering," her dad commanded. "I can't stand that sound anymore. There'll be no more of that in this house. No more dolls. No more crying. I have had enough!"

Towering above her, he raised a stiff open hand. Below, he saw a timid little girl, cowering in fear from her own dad. He stopped. He felt a poised hand hanging in the air ready to lash out. His mouth quivered. His whole body tensed up. He made a fist from his open hand and smashed it into his thigh. A rush of wind escaped his lungs when his chest deflated.

"I'm sorry," he said as his shoulders sagged. "This wasn't how it was supposed to happen," he continued. He collapsed into the bed and then bounded onto the floor. Sitting against the bed, he took several deep breaths and then started to cry. Controlled at first, but as the months of heartbreak and the years of disappointment crept upon and overwhelmed him, the pain ransacked his convulsing and inconsolable body.

The young girl stood by and watched, not knowing what to do. She had never seen him so distraught. Still afraid of his wrath, she remained motionless and silent. But inside, she cried a lot and died a little for her dad.

As the minutes ebbed by, the tears lessened and the mucus ran dry. He wiped his face and nose with his shirt. He looked up to see his daughter staring at him. He forced a smile, though he wasn't really ready for one. He lifted one of his arms and beckoned her to approach.

"I'm sorry," he said.

She leaped over to him and they hugged each other. She always found it easy to forgive him. And for the first time in months, perhaps years, he hugged her back.

They sat together on the floor for a while, but he was still anxious. He had important things to say, and important news for his daughter. He released his hold and gently stood her in front of him. He inhaled deeply, and began his rehearsed lines.

"It's time for you to start becoming somebody."

She cocked her head to on side.

"What do you mean, Daddy?"

"It is time," he continued, "that you started thinking about your future. About what you will do with your life. After all, you're going into junior high in the fall. You're getting to be a big girl. We must start preparing you for the future."

"Don't you think I'm kind of young, Daddy?"

"Nonsense. You can never be too young to think about the future. More so now, because you're a woman."

"Huh?"

He smiled. This was the most important part of his speech. His heart pounded as he hoped he will say it right.

"Honey," he said, its mechanicalness going unnoticed, "we are living in a very tough world. Everyone is fighting and clawing their way to the top and to be the best. And why? Because the view is much better up there on top. It's less crowded, less polluted, more relaxing. Only when you're on top can you be considered a success. Only on top can you look down and see what you have accomplished. Accomplishments mean nothing when you're in the middle or on the bottom of the heap, cause you're always looking up to see how far you have to go, and watching all the other people in front of you who are doing it better. It's frustrating and discouraging. The top is the only place to be. Anywhere else, and you're not even second best and never even noticed.

"But it's a tough fight to get up there. And because it is so tough, people have to be even tougher to survive. It's not so bad today cause so many kids are unwilling to work hard to make it in this world. They expect things to be done for them, as if the world owed them a living. So the good thing about all this is that there is less competition to succeed,

less things standing in your way. However, girls, simply because they are weaker than men, have it much tougher than anyone else. They have to work twice as hard just to make the same pay. It's not fair. It's not right. But that's the way it is. That's why you are going to have to fight so hard. For example, do you like being picked on at school?"

Well, she wasn't really picked on at school all that much, but she shook her head obediently. It seemed like the right thing to do. He, on the other hand, meant the question rhetorically, and didn't wait for an answer.

"That's why we are going to make some changes in this house."

"What kind of changes?" She was still curious, but increasingly concerned.

He smiled to himself once again. He was proud to have thought all this up, considering he barely graduated high school. He sat up on the bed while continuing his talk.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" This time he did want an answer.

"Um ... I thought I would like to be a nurse..."

"Forget it!"

She jumped at his sudden change of tone. He seemed not to have noticed either one, however.

"You're no going to think small anymore. You're going to think big. No nurse for my daughter. No cleaning bedpans, wiping vomit off people's faces, or taking orders from people who get paid ten times more for half the work. Only a doctor will do for you. No kindergarten teacher, either. Only a corporate executive. Small thoughts will lead to a small mind, dear, and you have so much potential that I would be a poor parent if I didn't make sure you got everything you deserved.

"I want you to grow up with confidence and spirit. I want you to be able to compete equally, if not better than the boys out there. I'm warning you. They're going to treat you like dirt. They think a woman is only good for cooking and cleaning and tending the house while the man works. No, that won't do for you. Not for my daughter. I want you to beat them at their own game. You are going to win your battles. Every single one. And I'm going to help you do it. I can't be with you forever, so I an going to teach you all I can about competing in this world. Some of these lessons may seem harsh, but remember. They already think you're inferior. They have already written you off. They don't care about you. They may be nice, and give you gifts and take you out for dinner, but they want something for it. Men are born competitors. They don't give up anything without a price — a price so high, you can't win. So don't think about them. Don't feel sorry for

them. You think about yourself, and your life, and your dreams. Don't let anyone get in your way."

He finally relaxed, and saw his daughter standing in front of him completely bewildered. He had made his point and had arrived at the moment he dreamed of every night, and choreographed in his mind since leaving work early today. So what if she may not understand everything now. In time, and with enough coaching he thought, she will come to learn how to play to win. She will soon realize it is the only way to play the game.

"In this world," he said, pointing a finger at her, "not everyone can succeed, but someone has to. So it might as well be you. The only alternative is failure, and my daughter will not be a failure. And to that end..."

He stood up, strode quickly to the door, reached back into the hallway around wall and pulled into the room a large paper bag that was hidden all this time. He spoke again, and this time his body and voice seemed to fill the room.

"Your quest for greatness and excellence all begins with this."

And from the bag, he produced a basketball.

TWO

"Come on in, Jesse. Have a seat."

The doctor pointed to the black leather lounge chair against the wood-paneled wall. Resigned to his situation, Jesse turned obediently away from the orderly who escorted him and sat. The cushion hissed under his weight. His head drooped and his body slumped into a semi-reclined stretch.

The orderly stood expectantly at the door, waiting for the doctor to say something to him.

"That will be all," she said. "We'll be fine. Thanks."

She smiled at the orderly, but it was one of courtesy rather than any sort of affection. He understood all too well that she would have nothing to do with him. The beautiful young woman just a few years out of the university whom he met every weekday showed no inclination to be anything other than pleasantly civil. She was both too busy with her case load and too concentrated in her career to have even the least little interest in a lowly orderly. And he was too worried about his job to risk any advances towards her. She would have nothing to do with him or any one else of his stature.

Still he hoped, even though the other orderlies were probably right about her. They said she hated men and tolerated their presence only in deference to professionalism. They rumored at her suspected lesbianism, yet no one ever saw her dating a man or a woman. She had been at the Eastland Children's Institute for several months and still she remained aloof and a mystery to the staff. Even her fellow doctors found her uncomfortable to be around. She never let down her guard, rarely discussed her past — and when she did, always described her life in a sketchy way composed of superficial details. She always talked shop, and repeatedly resisted invitations to non-business gathering. The entire staff wondered if she had any kind of social life at all.

The orderly sighed silently to himself, nodded a reply, and left the room closing the darkly stained door behind. Shuffling away to the dayroom, he thought of her flowing black hair and slim tanned body, and promised to himself that on the way home, he would

stop off at the adult video store. In the privacy of his apartment then, he will continue to think of her while thinking of himself.

The young doctor, dressed in a white coat, stood by the window when Jesse arrived. The sun shined crisply across the hospital grounds, but not into the office, which was shaded by the newly blossoming oak tree outside the window. The dew-covered grass shimmered as the breeze blew waves through the blue-green lawn. It was relatively early in the morning, so most of the patients were still in the wards, more than likely receiving their post-breakfast medications.

"Were you given medication this morning, Jesse?" the doctor asked without turning.

"No. But you knew that already."

She didn't respond. Instead, she returned to her desk and gathered up some notes. Quickly grabbing a pen, she rolled her chair from behind the desk into the room so she could sit facing her new patient. She sat, crossed her legs, and rested the pad on her thigh.

"That's right," she said. "You were taken off medication as soon as you arrived here at the beginning of the week. Do you know why?"

"I do. Though it could be because I am neither deemed a suicide risk nor violent, it's probably because none of the medications I've taken work." Jesse then grinned slyly. "And do you know why that is, Doctor..." Jesse leaned forward and squinted his eyes to make out the name on her badge. "Macy?"

"Yes. Doctor Macy."

Jesse leaned back into the chair and waited for an answer to his question, which was not forthcoming. Doctor Macy instead dropped her head down and reviewed Jesse Strich's file. Jesse took this time to admire Doctor Macy. This was their first contact since he was transferred from Bolling Hospital, and had to admit to himself, as much as he disliked psychiatrists, that she was very attractive. Her black hair tied up in a bun; her tall and muscular body left no doubt that she works out and was probably an athlete at one time.

"Doctor?"

She looked up. Jesse was staring at her with an almost quizzical look on his face.

"Doctor Macy," Jesse said, "if you want me to answer your questions, please do the same for me."

The doctor closed Jesse's file. She sat back on her chair.

"How old are you, Jesse?"

"Fourteen."

"You're very precocious for a fourteen year old."

"Maybe so. But I have lived a very unique life."

"That is true, Jesse."

She looked at him. Jesse looked at her. Each knew they were sizing the other up, like two wrestlers circling each other watching for the slow leg or guarded weak arm, the tell-tale signs of a possible victory, all the while hiding one's own weaknesses. Jesse spoke first.

"You're different from the other doctors," he said.

"Thank you, Jesse. It's encouraging that you think so."

Jesse arrived at Eastland anticipating another string of meaningless sessions, mind-numbing medications, and useless therapy. But Jesse felt there was something different about her — different from the other doctors. She exuded an unrepentant confidence and a purposeful passion that guided her and her work. If anyone would listen to him, and help him get out of the institutions, maybe she would. Although, he told her something different.

"All my other doctors were men."

Doctor Macy laughed to herself.

"I think, then, that our sessions will be good for you. Sometimes men have the wrong perspective on psychiatry and psychological differences and can't always grasp the nuances of the mind."

Doctor Macy, likewise, hadn't expected much from her first visit with Jesse, not at least according to his file, though so far he seemed friendly enough and willing for therapy. She examined in front of her an overweight kid with untreated acne over much of his face. He smelled a little, and it looked as if he hadn't washed or combed his hair for several days — perhaps since the weekend, she thought. His slightly swollen hands rested folded over his bulging belly and his eyes sunk back into his face turning their blue color into black. He didn't seem all that striking or unusual, except perhaps for his crooked nose.

Yet he was a very special case. One that stumped all of the psychiatrists at Bolling Hospital, especially when every medications they tried inexplicably failed. They couldn't figure him out. She liked that. She was confident she would figure him out. She reopened Jesse's file and took a deep breath.

"To answer your question," she said as she continued to look down into the file, "I honestly don't know why. No one knows why. Which is quite odd. The medications prescribed for you seemed to have had no curative or preventative effect on your condition. The clinical response has always been the same, regardless. Initially, the drug would have its normal effect, but when you suffered one of your many recurrent schizophrenic attacks,

it had no effect whatsoever. It was as if the drug was never taken. Perhaps you could tell me what is happening."

Jesse laughed.

"How many times do I need to tell you and the world what is happening? How many times do I need to tell you that medications will do nothing to cure me? How many times do I have to tell you and all the other doctors and psychiatrists that there is nothing wrong with me? I don't need medication. I'm not sick. I need to be released."

"Well, you are an enigma to us, nonetheless. From all accounts, you are extremely lucid and cooperative most of the time with no overt manifestation of your illness. According to your file, the doctors at Bolling were ready to release you." What she failed to mention was that he was also a steady drain on their staff and their doctor's time. Since they could not control the problem, they did not want to be saddled with him anymore. "But because your recurrent attacks were not under control, your father insisted you remain hospitalized until there is a noticeable change in your condition..."

"I know."

"... and you are not yet old enough to sign your own release papers."

"Age." Jesse spit the word out. "I have more maturity, more knowledge, and have lived through more experiences than even the eldest janitor here, and still people consider me too young to understand my own mental state."

Doctor Macy immediately disliked this child's self-importance.

"You are an arrogant and presumptuous young man, Mr. Strich," she said hoping to put Jesse back into place.

"A person is hardly presumptuous when stating facts," Jesse lashed back. "But you, Doctor Macy," Jesse's voice grew louder, "presume to know what I am like after only ten minutes of therapy. If you have already made your judgments of me, it appears that I have nothing more to say, then. Doesn't it?"

Doctor Macy wondered how it was possible to be humiliated by a fourteen-year-old, but that was how she felt. Jesse's furrowed brow made his eyes darker and more imposing. She kept her composure, not wanting Jesse to realize his effect on her. She skirted the question.

"Be that as it may," she said in the most official sounding way possible, "the laws of this state state quite clearly that you cannot be released without parental consent ... which has yet to be given."

She added the last part in another attempt to deflate some of Jesse's pretentiousness. It seemed to work. His shoulders sagged and his chest sank back into the couch.

"I know," was Jesse's monotone response.

Doctor Macy worried that her tactics might have been too overhanded this early in therapy. She couldn't help herself, however. She cringed anytime someone let their ego dominate a conversation. She despised such condescending behavior — to think that she, of all people, might be impressed with an overbloated self-image over substance.

But being professional, she controlled her anger at the affront. He was, after all, only an adolescent. This is the age when children test the boundaries of their environments, and start determining for themselves the moral and ethical parameters in which they will operate. She had to ease off Jesse. She took up a more conciliatory tone when she spoke once again.

"Well, you are in a new place with a new doctor. Perhaps in this new environment, we can break this chain of failures. What do you say?"

Jesse perked up. His eyebrows arched up as he pulled himself up from his slouch.

"Are you saying we ought to cooperate?" The lips showed the beginnings of a grin.

"Yes, exactly."

Jesse spasmed into laughter — into an almost uncontrollable fit of mirth which completely puzzled Doctor Macy and rekindled her ire.

"What is so funny?" She gripped her pen tighter.

"I'm sorry. I thought you said cooperate."

"I did."

At that, Jesse ceased laughing. He now glowered at the doctor. His demeanor expressed nothing mirthful anymore.

"Cooperate. Hah!" Jesse shook his head. "What a joke." He stood up and started walking towards the window.

"Please sit down, Jesse." Jesse ignored her and mused out loud.

"You know, people too often misuse the term cooperate."

"Jesse?"

"Teachers, for example, abuse it by saying 'Please cooperate' instead of what they really mean: 'Please be obedient and do what you're told, otherwise I'll punish you, thus making it harder on the both of us.' Employers demean it by saying 'Let's cooperate' instead of saying 'Do what I've told you to do, and make the company money, or you'll be fired.'

"Jesse, please ... "

"In every case, one person dictates behavior while the other is forced to accept it. Your understanding of cooperation merely legitimizes both domination and the people who wield this power."

Doctor Macy remained calm, though it was becoming more difficult. "Jesse, would you please sit down?"

"Why?" Annoyed, Jesse neither looked at her nor turned his head. Instead, he spoke into the glass while he looked outside. "Why should I? So it's easier for you to intimidate me? So it's easier for you to stare me into submission? What if I told you I think better walking around? What if I told you I think better pacing the wards twelve hours a day? Watching the sun rise and fall through dirt-streaked windows. Smelling the same people day-in and day-out, sitting on the same toilets everyone else does. Where every day is practically the same; the only difference being the doctors don't usually show up on the weekends."

Out on the grand lawn, something caught his attention.

"There's good old Jim out there playing Frisbee. He works in our ward, did you know that?"

Doctor Macy was silent, letting him say his peace. Jesse didn't expect a reply.

"Did you know he beats his wife every night when he gets home?"

This time, Jesse turned his head looking for a response. The doctor recrossed her legs, but aside from scribbling some notes on her pad, said nothing. Yet, she listened; and the more he talked, the more eagerly she listened. Jesse returned his gaze out the window to see Jim stumble running to catch the Frisbee. The disk sailed past him and landed a half a dozen yards away. Jim got up slowly, a big smile across his face, and limped to retrieve the errant toss. Grass and dampness stained the knees of his wrinkled, light green scrubs.

"I guess it's not his fault," Jesse continued. "He's half drunk when he gets home anyway, tanking up at the Pink Pussy — it's a topless bar, you know — squeezing the waitresses butts as they walk ..."

"Jesse, will you please sit down." Doctor Macy interrupted with a more authoritative tone of voice this time. No matter how entertaining, his wandering thoughts strained her patience.

"Losing control, Doctor?" Jesse walked back to the chair, and stood next to it. "Losing this necessary doctor-patient relationship? Losing this invaluable master-slave relationship?" Jesse's voice evolved into a snarl.

"Jesse, I hardly think that I can anyway be considered a master to you."

"You don't think so?" Snapped Jesse. "Who among us in this room can walk out that door right now, walk down to their car and drive home to their three bedroom townhouse next to the lake, pour themselves a glass of Chianti, kick off their shoes, sit down in their Strato-lounger, click the remote to CNN and watch the business report to check on how their stocks did today. All before they get dressed for dinner at Chez François's to indulge in fine continental dining.

"Or be manhandled into an faded white painted concrete cubicle with a square window perched over a square desk next to a square bed made up with square hospital corners. They taught me how to do that here. Did you know that ... Doctor?" Jesse paused for a second. "You don't say much, do you, Doctor? That either means you already know about everything I'm saying, in which case I'm wasting my breath. Or you don't really care one shit about anything I'm saying, and are just letting me engage in this cathartic release while the blinders of objectivity are thrown over your ears as well as your eyes. In which case, I am still wasting my breath. But still I ramble on. Apparently, I have plenty of breath to waste."

Doctor Macy lifted her head and met Jesse's eyes as he remained standing next to the couch.

"You seem to be a very bitter and very cynical young man."

"And why shouldn't I be?" Jesse shot back. "I'm the one who has been locked away from society like a prisoner without so much as committing a crime. No wait, that's not right. I did commit a crime. I became different from everyone else. No, more than that. I became different to those people in positions where their authority could lock me away with impunity.

"You tell me what's wrong when I, who has never hit or stuck anyone during my supposed illness, am incarcerated; whereas someone like Jim, who is drinking his liver into disintegration and beating his wife into submission, can frolic in the sunshine. What's wrong with this picture?"

"How do you know that Jim is abusing his wife?"

"I've seen it."

"You mean you *feel* he's a wife-beater."

"No, I've seen him." Jesse was defiant. "I've seen him drag his wife to the bedroom, screaming at her for not having dinner ready for him, and not wearing that special outfit he likes before sex, and not having a higher paying job to help pay the rent, or any number of other excuses that just blur all together."

Suddenly, Jesse composed himself, closed his eyes and tilted his head up, as if looking into his mind to remember more.

"I can see him slapping her into bed, then pulling out his Swiss Army knife. She lies there terrified, trying hard to stifle her trembling body. He cuts off her panties — I guess he gets some sort of thrill doing that — and nicks her in the process. She bites her lip, holding back the screams as the blood oozes onto the bed sheets. Then he rapes her. Being half drunk, it takes a long time for him to have an orgasm. And every time he thrusts, he rubs that cut until by the time he's through, it's a gaping and excruciating sore. He's so blitzed, he doesn't even see the tears streaming from his wife's eyes, flowing down her temples, over the bluish bruises into her ears. She flings her head side to side, looking from one wall to the other, avoiding his face as best she could. Finally, after he's satisfied, he vomits all over her chest and face. He sees the mess and goes into the living room to sleep on the couch, leaving his wife to clean up the mess and attend to her wounds. But only after she finishes crying."

Jesse opened his red, water-filled eyes. He sniffled and wiped the tears from his cheeks. He looked at Doctor Macy. Doctor Macy gazed back at him, speechless and insatiably curious, and thought she saw a man full of mourning, with sadness the only remnant left in a face drained of youthful innocence. She had stopped scribbling almost as soon as he began. His telling of the scene mesmerized her.

"You are so amazingly eloquent so young in life."

Jesse relaxed, straddled the cushioned arm of the couch and sat there facing the doctor.

"I have a good teacher," Jesse said.

She licked her dry lips. She almost believed that he did witness this tragedy. *But that's impossible. No, no. Come to your senses, Susan.* She shook herself out of her trance, and regained her composure.

"Well, Jesse," a skeptical Doctor Macy said in her most reassuring manner, "that was a very interesting story. But, of course, you must realize you didn't really see any of this. You're a smart kid. Think about it. You've just arrived at the hospital, and you have yet to be released, so you couldn't possibly have ever been ..."

Jesse's rising frustration at this sickening condescension. He stuck out his finger and poked at his file still on the doctor's lap, almost knocking it off.

"Haven't you read my file? It's all there!"

"But I am new to your case," she replied. She stayed calm despite the outburst, being more accustomed to this kind of behavior. "Everything is not here on paper. What one

doctor thinks is unimportant may be crucial to me. What I may need to know might never have been written down."

Jesse thought about it, and it did seem to make sense.

"True," he said as his head bobbed in agreement. He slid off the arm of the chair and on to the large leather cushions which again hissed from his weight. "Where would you like me to begin?"

The doctor looked at her notes. "Why don't you begin at the first time you felt something was wrong."

"You mean, at the baseball game?"

"Yes."

Again, Jesse dutifully nodded in agreement. He settled into the chair, inhaled deeply, held it for a moment, and let it rush out, slightly rustling the papers on the doctor's lap in front of him. Doctor Macy waited patiently. Jesse closed his eyes and began his story.

Three

It was hot.

The one thing Jesse couldn't forget and the first thing Jesse remembered was the stifling heat. After he remembered the heat, he remembered everything else. It must have been over a hundred degrees on the field, and the humidity was just as high. There was no blue in the sky, no outline of clouds. Instead, it was awash with hazy heat, a blazing white canvas that made people squint and forced their eyes to the ground.

The outfield grass cooked to a deathly brown that almost blended in with the warning track and crackled when the outfielders walked on it. The rising heat blurred the stadium outlines; from the dugout, the green outfield wall looked like it was floating under water. A mirage of a lake flooded center field. The infield dried into a huge sand box. A cloud of smoke erupted from the dust with every step. Without any wind, the dust floated upward with the rising heat and lingered in the air. Soon, players tasted the dirt in their mouths, and felt the gristle scratch their skin as they wiped the sweat off their faces.

Because it was built of cinder blocks and had a freshly painted red wooden roof, the dugout was the only shaded place around. The players flattened themselves against the cool bricks for just an inkling of relief as intense heat radiated down from the baking rafters. The dugout cooler was useless; though the players gamely tried to refresh themselves with Gatorade soup, they ended up with a puddle of Gatorade spit under the bench. The sweat seeped through Jesse's cap. But then again, everyone sweated. No one could avoid it. Everyone was crabby as well.

"Play ball!" The umpire commanded the game into life. It was an impatient yell and had a mean snarling sound to it which seemed to curse both the heat and the slowness of the game.

The game did begin slowly — very slowly. The teams had remained inside their personal concrete saunas for at least an hour waiting for the dedications and announcements and speeches to end. Jesse's team had home field advantage for the first game of the state championship tournament this year, and every local politician looking for a photo

opportunity showed up and proclaimed their unfailing love of baseball and for the Bridgedale Raptors as much as any of the die-hard parents who attended every game throughout the season.

The Bronson Giants had their representatives at the game as well. The Bronson's deputy town mayor spoke briefly and said much the same as everyone else, except he included — proudly, he stressed — that the Bronson Giant's have never lost a state championship game. Most of the audience chuckled. They knew this was Bronson's first appearance in the state tournament, as well as the Raptors. He certainly expressed his pride at having thought up that joke, telling everyone he could corner into listening of his self-control throughout the speech so as not to spoil the punch line.

After the dignitaries had their say, Bridgedale Mayor Paul Stafford, a man with an overdeveloped gut and underdeveloped legs, walked onto the field dressed in an old-time baseball uniform. To the surprise and delight of the fans, and to the groan of the players soaking their uniforms from the inside-out with perspiration, he recited "Casey at the Bat" while members of the Lion's Club, all appropriately attired and with imaginary ball in hand, re-enacted that famous scene in Mudville a century ago.

Peter Strich, Jesse's dad, who manages the Bridgedale Chevrolet dealership in town, convinced the dealership's owners to fund the exhibition and rent the costumes and equipment. Peter, himself, played the part of Casey. At six foot-five, Peter Strich towered over practically all of the other Lions. Possessing a broad chest and boyish face decorated by an imitation handlebar mustache he had carefully glued on for the occasion, he embodied Casey — a role in which he obviously revelled. With dramatic sweeping gestures of his arm, he not only quieted the confederates in the stands — who were also dressed in 1890s garb and screamed their lines at appropriate times — but the entire stadium as well. Transfixed, the spectators sat through the afternoon steam bath watching Casey himself play out his brief and egotistical existence for all to see.

When the play ended and Casey finally struck out, the booth started announcing the individual players of the game, including Jesse as the starting pitcher for the Raptors. When they heard their names, they had to run out to the foul line closest to their dugout and line up, starting at home plate and extending into the outfield. Now, the players had to stand in the unshielded sunlight for twenty-some minutes — considering each team dressed about twenty players, one coach and three assistants. Also announced were the team sponsors and all the other contributors who helped make this event a truly spectacular blah, blah, blah — every comment separated by generous applause from admiring parents and dutiful employees.

Finally, the VFW color guard, featuring soldiers-at-arms so mottled with wrinkles one couldn't tell in which twentieth century war they might have fought, crept in with frustratingly tiny strides from center field to home plate for the playing of the national anthem, which was actually a tape recording played through the announcer's microphone. The players fidgeted in line.

"We'd be done a lot sooner if they'd just keel over and get buried right now," whispered Tom Sundy, the left fielder, who was standing next to Jesse in line. "They'll be dead before they get here."

"We'll all be dead before they get here," replied Jesse, laughing at his joke. Jesse and Tom clamped their mouths shut trying to squelch their snickering.

The umpire's "Play Ball!" ignited a roar from the crowd and — along with the *fwish* of pull tabs from beer cans smuggled into the stands — skyrocketed everyone's spirits, including those of the now dehydrated and impatient athletes. But as soon as the first pitch had been thrown, tempers and the afternoon's sweltering heat started to rise. In the distance, the colorless expanse of haze blended into a darker and more ominous colored cloud. Most of the audience ignored them, however; their sights fixed towards the field.

* * *

"Alright guys! Good defense! Let's go!" The Raptors's Coach Lyons clapped his hands and exhorted his players.

It was the top of the fourth inning. Neither team has been able to score despite opportunities. In the first inning, Jesse allowed a lead off double on the very first pitch of the game. The ball slipped off his fingers and into a marshmallow hanging curve which was ripped down the left field line. Jesse called time and asked for a rosin bag from the dugout. With it, his hands no longer felt sweaty. Jesse settled down, intentionally walked the next batter, got the number three batter to hit into a double play, and caught the clean-up hitter looking at a high fast ball third strike.

"Looks like a large strike zone today," Jesse thought after his strikeout, which is good and bad. There's more room to play with as a pitcher, but as soon as the hitters figure it out, they'll be swinging more. Jesse wasn't sure if he liked the umpire dictating the kind of game to be played. He preferred a rigidly prescribed strike zone. "At least you and the batter know what to expect from the beginning," he would say.

In the bottom of the second, Joey Atherton beat out a drag bunt to first and made it to third on an opposite field single by Jesse. Unfortunately, Jesse assumed the right fielder

had a weak throwing arm (as most right-fielders do) and was tagged out at second base for his bias. Still, a man on third with only one out was not bad. Tom Sundy, a left hander, flew out to right field as Joey waited at third for his dash home.

Joey beat the throw home, and it was 1-to-0, Raptors. But it wasn't. The Giants tossed the ball to third base and Joey was called out. Supposedly, he left the bag too soon.

"What the hell's wrong with you?" yelled Coach Lyons. "You could've crawled home."

"It's impossible," Joey pleaded. "I was looking right at him when he caught the ball. I couldn't have been off the bag."

Coach Lyons didn't care. Instead, he stuck his finger in Joey's face. "You cost us a run. Enjoy the dugout the rest of the game."

"Coach, I—." Joey started to protest; but Lyons's scowling eyes squelched any protest. Joey's back arched downward from the weight of the stare, the guilt, and the humiliation.

"Hopefully Thompson won't screw up as badly as you," said Lyons. Then the coach added a quick and sneering afterthought. "I doubt if anyone could." Coach Lyons walked down the dugout and informed the assistant coach of the change to the scorecard and then signaled to Cindy Thompson to stretch out. Joey stomped to the opposite side of the dugout.

"Hey, don't worry about it, man," said Jesse as Joey walked by. He wasn't sincere although. It was just something you're supposed to say to a fellow player. Jesse actually thought Joey messed up royally and was being a real whiner about it.

Joey said nothing and sat in the corner. "It's not fair," he whimpered to himself. He sulked for the rest of the game.

"Oh, grow up," Jesse thought.

With the called third out, the inning ended, and the Raptors fans vented their rage at the third base umpire. They hurled boos and insults at the hapless man. A crushed soda cup landed a few feet away. The umpire appeared unaffected by the uproar. However, he grimaced when the crushed cup bounced past him. He tensed up, waiting for the soda or beer cans to follow.

Thus, each opportunity to score fizzled into nothing. Jesse pitched smoothly and felt stronger each inning, and the game remained scoreless into the top of the fourth inning. By this time, however, the wind had increased alarmingly, the heavens darkened, and the infielders rubbed their eyes and spat out sand that came from the swirling dust. At least the heat was tolerable now.

Jesse stood on the mound, squinting at the catcher, Billy ... somebody (He was forgetting these names), trying to catch the sign.

Two fingers. Curve ball. His best pitch, despite what everyone said about ruining his elbow. Coach Lyons loved the way is dived down and left. His dad didn't care, as long as his son won games. Besides, the season's almost over, Jesse thought, and he could spend the rest of the off-season recovering.

Jesse nodded his head and stood erect. He spun the ball in his glove and placed his fingers on the laces. Billy settled into his crouch and patted his glove. That was a signal to Jesse that the glove will be placed on the wrong side. Billy lifted his mitt for a target. He placed the glove to Jesse's right, trying to trick the right-handed batter into thinking the ball was going inside. Jesse began his wind-up.

Suddenly, life changed.

The world blurred together into a syrupy mix of wet colors. Everything was gone. No more batter, no more catcher. The backstop disappeared. Even the stadium vanished. His mind felt like mud sloshing around his skull. Riding those roller coasters with the corkscrew turns was nothing like this. He could deal with dizziness; he's had that. Vertigo would have made sense.

He stumbled through his throw, and only by sheer luck and the constant muscular training that turned his wind-up into a reflex did the ball come out of his hands and head in the general direction of the backstop. Still, the ball sailed ten feet into the air and five feet behind the batter. Billy didn't have a chance to catch it and just watched the ball fly overhead. The Giants dugout filled with derisive laughter.

"A little too much spit?"

"Wanna try for the bleachers this time?"

He heard all the insults. For just as suddenly as it occurred, the world flashed into focus, as if he had just taken a picture. His head cleared in time to see the ball hit the fence.

"What the hell happened," he thought to himself.

The Raptors were more sympathetic. Coach Lyons called out to Jesse.

"What happened? You get dirt in your eye?"

"Slipped out, Coach."

He lied. He had to. The insults didn't phase him; he was accustomed to them. His mind turning to mush, though, was something he became desperate to understand and get a hold of. But he also wasn't ready to leave the game yet; he was pitching so well. He could give up one pitch. He hoped it was a fluke.

Hoping, however, is different than knowing. Would it happen again? A cold sweat began oozing out of his forehead. He heard his heart pounding in his chest. His neck stiffened up.

"Maybe it's the weather," Jesse said to himself, trying to control his anxiety. "I gotta drink more water, too."

Jesse relaxed some when he saw Billy beaming huge teeth at him through the face mask as the slightly rotund catcher tossed him a new ball. Jesse smiled back, but he still needed a little more time to settle down and think. Walking to the back of the mound, he reached down and grabbed the rosin bag. He bounced it off the back of his pitching hand a couple of times, with more dust carried off in the breeze. He threw the bag down and breathed as deeply as he could without coughing.

He turned back to Billy as he climbed the mound, which seemed a bit higher than usual now. He lifted off his hat and cleaned the sweat off with his forearm. The wind felt good and cool. He head cleared more and his confidence returned.

He signalled to Billy, who was standing behind the plate waiting for Jesse to prepare himself, that he was ready. Billy crouched down again, lifted his glove to shield the signal from the third base coach, and from his fist pointed his index finger to the ground.

Fast ball. Jesse agreed. Where? Billy placed his glove to the inside of the plate. Inside fast ball. Billy didn't pat his glove so there would be no fake positioning this time. Jesse gripped the ball in the glove, firmer than usual. He began his wind up, hoping that nothing would happen this time.

He was wrong.

Once again all the colors of the world swirled around his eyes like a pinwheel. Top and bottom, up or down, left, right, north, south — all meaningless. He floated in an oblivion that caused everything, if anything could have been seen, to move in slow motion. It seemed as if time itself stood still. Nothing in the world mattered. The world no longer existed.

Yet it was only a few seconds before he snapped out of his delusion once again, just like before, instantly, and with no lingering effects. It was as if nothing happened. But two things did happen.

First was the unforgettable suction into la-la land.

Second was the unforgettable jolt back into reality where everyone seemed to be booing and screaming ... at him.

"What's going on?"

His eyes darted around the field. The first thing he saw was the batter getting up from the ground, the whole back of his uniform was covered with dirt and starting to pat himself clean. The batter looked up at Jesse and mouthed obscenities at him.

Jesse scanned back to the umpire who had walked several steps in front of the plate and was poking the face mask in his left hand at him, his face also contorted in anger.

"Pull a stunt like that again, mister, and I'll throw you out of the game!"

Jesse next heard his coach yelling at him.

"What the hell are you doing out there? Billy, go find out what's wrong."

Billy hustled up to the pitchers mound, the smile gone. His face had a quizzical look to it this time. His dirty blond hair flipped around in the wind.

"Why did you throw a bean ball?"

Jesse's eyes shot open.

"Bean ball?"

"Boy, I tell ya," Billy's friendly grin reappeared, "I've never seen you throw a ball that fast. You almost took the guy's head off."

Jesse half heard Billy. He continued to look around the stadium. To his left, the entire Giant's bleacher seats were in an uproar. Arms waving, a wall of screaming sound assailing him. Many called for his ejection from the game. Others called him worse.

"Look Jesse," Billy said, interrupting Jesse, "you're supposed to wait until I get the signal from coach, okay? We've wasted one beany already. You've only got one more before they'll throw you out. Just wait for the signal, all right? C'mon, Jesse, get in the game."

Jesse nodded, but it was a reflex, much like how a boxer keeps claiming readiness despite scrambled Jello for brains. Jesse was still confused; and now he was scared. Jesse next heard a rumble from the clouds. Both Jesse and Billy looked up. Blue-black clouds were creeping in, visible above and beyond the right foul line bleachers.

"Let's hurry up and get out of this inning before it rains. I don't like lightning."

Billy shoved the ball into Jesse's glove and trotted back to his spot behind home plate. Jesse peered at the ball, studying it, trying to mentally re-focus and get himself back in the game. He furtively glanced over at the Raptors's bleachers trying to spot his dad in the stands, who wasn't hard to spot. Peter was standing up, staring at him, as if he were hoping to determine what was wrong from forty yards away. Jesse smiled, silently lipped, "I'm okay." Peter let out a huge sigh, smiled back, extended a thumbs-up sign, clapped his hands and resumed his cheering. Those sitting around Peter, seeing him relax, began cheering as well. Soon, the entire bleachers responded with a sudden roar of support,

inspiring Jesse. His strength grew once more, and his confidence returned once again. And with the confidence came a solution.

"That's it. I've been drugged," he said to himself. "There must have been something in the Gatorade." He bore down into his glove even harder knowing the awful truth. "Should I tell coach? No, he'd just take me out. That wouldn't have proven anything to them." Who 'they' were, Jesse assumed were Giants supporters.

He saw Billy waiting for him. "Well, screw them all. No matter what was happening to me, I'm going to beat it, and the Giants, all in one day."

Jesse stepped back up on the mound, kicked some dirt off the rubber, and placed his cleats on top. Jesse hunched over, peering for the sign.

One finger. Glove on left side of the plate. No pat.

Outside fast ball.

"C'mon Jesse. Concentrate this time. Fight it off." He grabbed a hard, deep breath. "Let's go."

Jesse encouraged himself, blocking out all the noise.

"Basic motions, Jesse. High knee kick. Good leg extension. Just get the ball across the plate. Let your defense do its job."

His focus narrowed to the catcher's mitt. He saw Billy's eyes inside the mask, clear and intense. Jesse smirked. Billy winked.

"I'm going to blow this fast ball right by him."

Jesse wound up ...

The pitch ...

All of a sudden, the air went cold and dry and dark.

All of a sudden, the baseball stadium vanished. Instead of outfield walls covered with advertisements, instead of thirty tier bleachers filled with maniacal fans, instead of clammy sweat and choking dust, he found himself surrounded by shade, standing on the edge of a quiet grassy field ringed by tall pine trees. Jesse no longer stood on the pitcher's mound. Underneath him now was the sun-flecked ground cushioned by fallen pine needles. The wind, and the heat, and the thunderstorm disappeared. Above him, a infinitely blue sky of crystal clarity in which mounds of creamy clouds hung motionless.

His breathing stopped. He collapsed to his knees, his body shook uncontrollably.

"NO! Make it go away!" His anguish pierced the silence around him.

"Dad!... Mom! Make it stop!" Banging his fist into the soft mulch, his eyes slammed shut, squeezing out the tears. His mind smashed apart. Only one thought remained to grab.

"I want to go home!" He repeated it over and over, until his pleas warped into little more than gibbering convulsions.

"Hey Jesse, over here!"

A voice. My name. Someone knows me. I'm not alone.

His head jerked up but couldn't see anything through his water soaked eyes. Still on his hands and knees, he wiped away the fluid and looked out across the sun-lit field again. Coming onto the field through a small path at the far side was a person waving an arm gesturing for Jesse to come over.

Who is that?

The person, seeing that Jesse was not getting up, began jogging lightly over the open expanse of grass.

"You mutha f—!"

Instantly, a searing pain filled the left side of his face. At the same time, his mind boomed with an explosion of noise. He instinctively grabbed his jaw as he tumbled to the ground filling his mouth with dirt. Out of nowhere came another blow to his ear, blasting bells through his skull.

"I'm gonna f— kill you!"

Another shot to the back of his head sent his face into the clay mound.

What's going on? His mind raced to make sense of things, but he ran out of time. He was soon underneath a pile of writhing bodies, often kicking him and stomping on him. He tried to get up, but the crush of bodies was too great. He opened his eyes only to see foot shovel sand in them. Jesse screamed in pain, his hands grabbing at the stinging granules.

Jesse's body reeled again as a light flickered through his eyelids and the sky crashed. The rain gushed out of the clouds and saturated the earth. He rolled around the mud in utter misery, pulling himself into a fetal ball for protection, as the chaos proceeded above and around him.

* * *

"What the hell were you thinking?"

A glum Jesse sat despondent as he listened to the rhythmic thumping of the wipers. Jesse's uniform was covered in dried or drying mud, the dirt on his face streaked by a combination of rain and tears. He shivered in his damp clothes as the car's air conditioner

roared to keep the windows from fogging up. Jesse rode with his head down, not saying a word, accepting the scolding from his dad in stoic silence.

"It was bad enough throwing that first bean ball, but to follow it up with a second, that was just plain stupid."

While his father harangued him, Jesse pieced together what happened during and after his brief episode of insanity.

It seems that at the moment his imagination unhinged, he sent a blistering fast ball at the batter's head once again. However, the hitter didn't duck fast enough this time, and the ball deflected off his helmet, hitting the screen protecting the press box.

"But the stupidest looking part was when you just stood there, oblivious to everything, even when that kid threw his helmet down, charged you, and socked you right in the chin. I mean, you didn't move at all, didn't fight back, didn't even put up your hands block. Just stood there like a wuss. I'm surprised you weren't picking your nose or scratching your ass at the same time. And, like an idiot of course, you got pummelled. Christ, Jesse, you didn't even defend yourself. That kid must've got two or three punches in before your teammates rescued you. Boy, that was embarrassing."

Billy was the first to reach Jesse and dived at the irate assailant, sending his face mask into the back of the kid's head. The entire Giants bench cleared on to the diamond and sprinted to the mound. The Raptors infielders converged around Jesse to protect him but were overwhelmed. The Raptors dugout emptied as well.

The coaches and umpires could do little to stop the riot. The best idea they had was to wade through the flailing arms and legs throwing bodies off the mound. This might have quelled the fight if it weren't for some well-meaning Raptors parents who climbed atop the dugout roof and jumped onto the field to help out.

"Too bad what happened to that third base umpire, though, getting that can of beer in the back of his head" said Jesse's dad with a smirk.

Mistaking these good intentions for an escalation in the melee, some of the more drunken Giants fans scrambled over their dugout. Soon, the stands drained and all across the ball field adults wrestled each other, some trying to stop the fighting, others enjoying it.

"The only good thing that happened," Peter continued, flexing his bruised and swollen right hand, "was that lightning strike at the center field flag pole. That and the rain sent everyone scattering."

The crowds quickly dispersed, but not without taking a few more cheap shots at a prostrate Jesse. As the din subsided, Jesse could faintly hear his dad yelling, working his way through the mob. His attention was focused on the approaching voice until a painful

kick to the gut had him gasping for air. He curled up like a pill bug, guarding what he could, attempting to roll away. It didn't help. The kicks continued. The next one hit his shoulder. He pressed to his hands and knees in hopes of crawling out of reach, still begging for breath, when a violent boot in the rear drove him back in the mud.

"Hey, pick on someone you're own size, asshole!" It was Jesse's dad. He was much closer now. Jesse then heard a smack.

"Ahh, my nose!" someone cried.

Jesse felt someone grabbing hold of his body. He couldn't see who it was, still partially blinded by the sand. He struggled to free himself, but his captor was much too strong, and Jesse was much too weak.

"Please, no more," Jesse begged, his moaning pitiful.

"It's me, son. I've got you now. You're safe."

"Dad!"

Jesse wrapped his arms around his dad's neck and squeezed into his chest, clinging in desperation. Mr. Strich carried him off the mound and through the fence to his car. All Jesse could think about now was home, where he was safe, and where the pain would stop. Peter reached his car, opened the door, and set Jesse into the passenger's seat. Finally sitting down, out of the rain, raised Jesse's spirits. It perked him up knowing he was going home.

Then Jesse heard someone calling his dad's name. His eyes cleared enough to see Coach Lyons run up to the car just when Peter was about ready get into the driver's seat.

"Pete, tell your son he's off the team."

Jesse's dad raised himself to his full height in hopes to intimidate Coach Lyons. He didn't realize how comical he looked with a fake mustache hanging half attached to his upper lip. Coach Lyons held back the laughter. He was hardly frightened by such a ridiculous sight.

"Bullshit, he is," said Peter. "He's the best pitcher you've got."

"That don't mean squat. The umpires ordered a five game suspension for Jesse, which effectively takes him out of any post-season play."

"There could be more than five games in the tournament, and you know it."

"He's not pitching on this team again, and that's final." Jesse saw his dad's right hand ball up and harden. "He disobeyed his coach and almost got the team disqualified. You saw what he did, Peter. He could've sent that kid to the hospital."

"Hell. As if my kid is in the pink of health."

"Yeah, I noticed." Coach Lyons snuck a peek through the rain-speckled windows. Jesse turned his head away. "He sure throws a mean face."

"Piss off, Lyons."

"Oh, come off it, Strich. It's your kid's fault we had a riot. He damn well deserved everything he got."

Peter took a large breath and forced his hand open.

"I'm taking my son home now so he can rest," said Peter in a pinched voice, his teeth clenched. "As for you, asshole," Peter's voice deepened, "don't ever come around my dealership again."

"With what your kid did today," said Lyons, with a grin, "I doubt if anyone in town will buy a car from you."

A slap in the back of the head awoke Jesse from his reverie.

"Aren't you listening to me?" chided his father. "What the hell happened out there?"

Jesse sighed. "I got really dizzy," he said.

"Dizzy? What?... You didn't drink enough water?"

"Well, the first two times, I was just dizzy."

"Hold it. You were dizzy three times?"

"Well, there was the air ball in the fence, and the first bean ball. Each time, I got dizzy just before I threw the ball, so I lost control of the pitch. But I didn't feel sick or anything, or lose my balance like at an amusement park. Everything just went fuzzy."

"Fuzzy?"

"Yeah. But the third time, I don't know what happened."

"What, were you dizzier?"

"No, no. I wasn't dizzy at all that time. It felt like I just wasn't here anymore. I mean I was gone, like I was transported somewhere. One minute I was pitching, no problem, and the next minute, I was somewhere else. Some place. I don't know where. For a while there, everything was gone. No more stadium, no crowds, no nothing. All of a sudden, I saw trees, and blue skies, but no baseball field. It looked like I was out in the middle of a camp somewhere."

Jesse's dad stared at the road. He licked his lips slowly. "Yeah, it was probably the heat," he said, "and not enough water. Probably the pressure affected you, too. Hell, I know what it's like to be out on the field in a crucial game...."

"Not again," Jesse said to himself. It was a familiar scenario. His dad was going to spout off about how when he was a player, he would have done X, Y, and Z, or this, that, and the other thing, *et cetera*. Jesse had heard all about his Dad's years at State playing

football. Jesse knew every play in the play book, every tackle his dad ever made and how they felt.

But he did remember one especially entertaining night when his dad had drunk a six-pack in celebration of Jesse's award as Bridgedale's Junior Athlete of the Year. Although he has probably forgotten telling Jesse about it, Peter revealed an amazing story of how once, as a freshman, he smuggled marijuana into teammate Brice Gearson's room, then called campus police. They arrested Gearson later that night at his apartment when they not only found the stash, but Gearson having sex with a minor — a burgeoning local prostitute Peter hired to feign being seduced in exchange for season tickets. The head coach, with the help of some influential alumni, arranged for the charges to be dropped, but Gearson lost his scholarship and never played football at State again. He transferred; was asked to transfer, according to Peter — school administrators felt Gearson's continued presence at State besmirched the university's reputation. Gearson went to some second rate college in the Northeast where he eventually dropped out and faded from everyone's memory. All this just so Peter could start as outside linebacker.

"... Your stomach's jumping, your heart's pounding away. But you control it, you deal with it. It's what makes the game exciting, and makes you feel alive..."

But most of all, Jesse was getting sick of hearing about the should-haves and the could-have-beens. Peter had been scouted by a half a dozen NFL teams, and was a sure draft pick. He could have been playing in the pros, if he hadn't been hurt. He could have been an All-Pro player. He could have been somebody.

"... You take a few deep breaths and move on."

"No, Dad, it wasn't like that at all." Jesse interrupted his dad, getting pretty fed up with the diatribe anyway. Peter said nothing, holding his breath. His rigid head faced forward, his hands clenched the wheel tighter, his eyes following the car in front. "It had nothing to do with the heat or pressure. This was something completely different. Look, Dad, I know you think I'm crazy, but ..."

Out of nowhere, Jesse is whacked in the mouth. Blood started drooling heavily from his split lip. Peter returned his right hand to the steering wheel. In a dry and matter-of-fact manner, Peter started speaking.

"First, don't you ever raise your voice to me again, young man. Second, don't you dare interrupt me when I'm trying to make a point. And third, no one is to ever hear that story, you understand? My kid is not cracking up. He's not flipping out, losing his marbles, or going insane, or anything else. You weren't used to the heat; the pressure got to you; you didn't drink enough water. Hell, there are a thousand reasons, but I will not

tolerate you blaming some psycho-babble crap for your stupidity. Do you take me for a fool? What a moron you are to think I or anyone else would sit for a shit excuse like that. Do you hear me?"

Peter looked at Jesse, anticipating a response. Jesse heard it all but he couldn't reply. He was clutching his uniform shirt to his mouth and rocking back and forth in his seat trying to ease the searing pain. Unaffected, Peter kept talking.

"You let everyone down. Your team, your coach, and especially me." Fresh streak marks appeared on Jesse's cheek.

"It was humiliating watching you pitch like that. You can't imagine the creepy feeling of everyone staring at me, as if I were some kind of child abuser or created some kind of monster. I can hear them talking behind my back already. 'There goes poor Peter Strich. His jerk son caused a riot at the state championship.' You disgraced me and my reputation. And today of all days, when I was the center of attention, after all that work putting on that show. How could you?"

Jesse remained silent except for a weak and muffled, "I'm sorry, Dad."

"Damn you," said his father. "I thought I raised you better."

He returned to his driving.

"Wuss."

For the rest of the drive home, nearly a half an hour, neither spoke to each other. Jesse nursed his purple lip, while his dad never wavered from watching the shiny pavement pass under the car. Once the pain subsided, Jesse was able to think, and he thought about many things.

Am I really a disgrace? Was it just the lack of water? Or the pressure? I'm sorry, Dad.

Jesse was worried about his father's job, and whether or not Coach Lyons was right about his dad not being able to sell any more cars.

I guess I could get a job. I could be a good paperboy. I've got the arm for it. Maybe I could work at Buy Right. Tommy Grant lied about his age and got a job there. He's making over a hundred dollars a week.

But mostly, he thought about the visions.

They were so real.

Riding in the car, feeling better now that he was going home, he tried to relax. He pulled the lever at the right side of the seat cushion and pushed the back down, shutting his eyes as he reclined. He felt reassured for some unexplained reason that his mind wasn't going to snap again. The drone of the road noise lulled the images back from memory, slowly reconstructed themselves for him to see again.

He thought he remembered the clouds, but the more he pictured the scene, maybe they were snow-capped mountains in the distance. No, he was sure it was a mountain. He could see it vividly now. The white craggy top jutting above the trees, the snow line cutting off at the top branches. He spied other mountains behind the first, smaller and better hidden by the trees, but they could all easily be mistaken for far-off clouds. As he surveyed the sky, he realized there were no real clouds, just a grand expanse of blue, with no haze or humidity to dull the image. Next, he looked down and saw the grass-filled field again, emerald and lush and healthy. He smiled as he remembered the cool air enveloping him, and the feeling of the pine needles were back in his hands as he crouched down to the ground. Now that he had time to think, the vision seemed so peaceful.

He laid down resting his head on the soft ground, his hands folded on his belly. He heard the birds whistling and watched the sun sparkle through the leafy canopy above. For the first time, he actually heard himself breathe. It surprised him how soothing a sound that was.

Then he recalled that person he saw. Was it a man or woman? He wasn't sure. The person was too far away to tell. Jesse remembered the dark blue color of the clothes, but it didn't look like jeans. And when the person ran, there was something graceful about it, so it could have been a girl. But there was strength in the movements as well, so...?

"Hey Jesse, over here."

He remembered the voice, and it sounded like a young woman. He looked up from the ground, and he could see her waving her arms, and start running towards him. He was certain it was a girl. Swaying behind her as she ran was long black hair, braided in a single thick rope that extended down to her waist. She looked very pretty.

He laid back down on the ground, and closed his eyes. Moments later he heard footsteps approaching him. He groaned as he propped his body up on its elbows, disappointed that his respite was interrupted. He lifted his groggy eyelids which popped open once he saw the girl standing directly in front of him. She looked to be about seventeen or eighteen years of age, and she rested her hands on her hips, her clear amber eyes and unblemished teeth both smiling at him. Her face was smooth and shiny and lightly tanned. Her rapid breathing caused by the light jog was still as delicate as the spring air around him. She wore what appeared to be a dark blue body suit, like the leotards his mother wears at the gym, though this fabric wasn't shiny. It was soft and dull, almost like cotton. It hid none of her outline which, as Jesse was embarrassed to admit, would have been a shame.

"Hi, Jesse." She spoke with a pure and musical tone. "We're really glad you could join us." She reached down and offered her hand to him. The hand looked delicate, but her forearm flexor muscles appeared strong and well-developed. He twisted to one side to free one of his arms and reached towards the hand.

"Wake up, Jesse. We're home."

Peter shoved Jesse hard against the door and his head banged against the car frame, causing an instant welt to appear.

"Rats. I must have been dreaming," he mumbled to himself. "God, she was beautiful."

He rubbed his head, and through the front window, he could see his home. It wasn't much of a house, and wasn't much to look at. Just one floor with orange-brown cedar siding. On the front lawn, a couple large oak trees grew amply shading the house, providing two sturdy posts for the relaxing summer hammock slung between them, and were cursed at by Jesse every fall when he raked the leaves. A six-foot high wooden fence wrapped around the backyard, which extended about twenty to thirty yards beyond the house, and where nothing much ever happens. In the backyard stood a weathered badminton net, a rusty grill covering an empty propane tank, and some discolored plastic lawn furniture. Years ago, these items were used often. Now they just get in the way of the mowing, which he also dreaded having to do.

But it was his house, and it was the only place he could call home. The only place where he could find a semblance of peace, despite his parents's endless bickering.

The rain had stopped in this part of town — dry spots appeared on the pavement — but the sky was still composed of differing shades of gray. He was chilly in the car. Once outside, however, in the oppressive humidity, the climate shock sucked the air out of his lungs. He coughed a little as he followed his dad on the concrete sidewalk leading to the front door. Once inside, he proceeded towards his room to get changed, but his mother, who called out from the kitchen, made him stop and wait for her greeting.

"So how'd it go?" she said.

Jesse didn't know how to answer. He didn't have to. His dad responded instead.

"Oh, the game was called because of the rain. They don't know when they'd re-schedule it yet." Any re-scheduling that took place didn't make that much difference to Jesse. His Little League days ended an hour ago.

Linda Strich walked out from the kitchen into the living room and was shocked by what she saw. She rushed over and started cleaning Jesse's face. Jesse jerked away, wincing in pain.

"Dear, what happened to you?" she asked. The stinging cheek slowed him down, so by the time Jesse dropped his jaw to reply, the answer came out of his dad's mouth.

"There was an altercation at the game. One of the kids from the other team charged him," he said while going into the kitchen.

"Why was that, Jesse?" Linda emphasized 'Jesse' this time and scrutinized his face. Jesse waited for his dad to answer again, and he did when he came out of the kitchen, popping the tab on a can of beer.

"Oh, Jesse threw a ball high and inside. The other kid probably thought it was aimed at his head or something. The kid over-reacted and lost control." Peter took a big gulp, and then continued. "But you should've seen what the other kid looked like."

Peter chuckled to himself. Linda just stared at him, and then turned back to Jesse, her blue eyes silently imploring him to say something. "Are you okay?" she asked.

"Well," he began, "I got really dizzy, and ..." Jesse trailed off when he saw over his mother's shoulder his father's face secretly grimacing and warning him. "I guess the ball slipped out. My hands were sweaty, and the Gatorade tasted terrible, and there was a lot of pressure, and..." He mumbled other comments which were incomprehensible when he lowered his head and headed down the hall to his room.

"Jesse?" his Mom called.

"He's okay. Probably just a little shaken up by the fight." Linda bristled at the constant unsolicited commentary by Peter. Peter often interrupted her conversations with Jesse, and this situation was no different. Jesse never came home from a fight before, and she wanted to know what happened. She hustled past Peter and caught up with Jesse in the hallway. She tugged on his grimy shirt. Jesse stopped and paused before he turned to face his mother, occasionally glancing at the flecks of dirt on the carpet left by his cleats.

"Are you okay, Jesse?" She raised his head with a delicate finger under the chin. Jesse looked at his mother, but could feel his dad all around him.

"I'm okay, Mom. Thanks."

Susan sighed out of resigned frustration.

"Go take a shower. I'll fix you up some dinner."

"No thanks, Mom. I'm not hungry. I think I'll just rest in my room for a while."

With that, Jesse slipped away from his mother's gaze and into his room. As he closed the door behind him, he heard the muffled arguments he had been raised on start again.

"Peter, what the hell happened out there?"

"Hey, it was like I said. There was a fight, and Jesse got the brunt of it."

"Something happened. Normally, he would talk incessantly about his ball games, but not this time. This time he's not saying anything."

"Maybe he doesn't want to talk about it. Have you thought of that?"

"Plus, they don't usually end ball games because of passing thunderstorms. What are you two hiding?"

"Oh, so now you're going to accuse me of lying, eh?"

"I didn't say that."

"Shit, you might as well have. You haven't trusted me for years."

"You don't give me any reason to trust you. You hide things from me. You intimidate our son into submissiveness. Everything about you is some sort of domination game, some sort of mind game. For all I know, you probably beat him up because they were losing. I wouldn't put it past you."

"Go to hell."

"Don't like his grades? Pow. Don't like his performance on the field? Pow. Don't like his shirt untucked? Pow. Pow. Pow. Don't think I don't know about how you intimidate Jesse behind my back.

"And what of it? A kid needs discipline. Better a few whacks from his dad than jerking off at school or doping up with a couple of strangers. Better to set him straight now rather than let himself ruin his life forever. A little pain now will save him a lot of pain later."

"Wonderful speech, but he's still just a kid."

"Not for long. He'll have to take care of himself longer than we've taken care of him. Toughen him up now, and he'll survive this dog-eat-dog world a whole lot better. Mamby-pamby him, and he'll turn into a daisy people will pick apart at a moment's notice. Just like a bone, when it breaks, it fuses together stronger than before. The same with Jesse. Tough love will force him to grow stronger than before. In the end, he'll thank us for it.

"I can't do that. It's against everything in my body. I can't hit my son."

"That's fine. I'll take care of him."

"Bull crap! He's my son, too."

"You'll only soften him."

"Damn you! Don't leave me out of his life. Everything I've learned about important incidents involving this family, I've learned from friends and strangers. When I see Mrs. Millerson at the store tomorrow, she'll probably say how she's so sorry about what happened to Jesse. And I'll nod my head like a moron, dumbfounded as usual. You

know, I've gotten very good at probing acquaintances for information about my son without looking like a damn fool. You know how humiliating that is?"

"F— you and your humiliation. You have no idea how humiliating it was for me to watch my son get beat up out there today. But, of course, why should you care? You weren't there. And why not? Oh, that's right. You had to go out to the middle of Slumville downtown somewhere to help build a house for people you don't even know in a part of town even the police avoid."

"It was you who wanted me to do volunteer work. I promised them I'd be there."

"How many other people were there? Forty? Fifty? Would they really have missed you if you went and saw your son play ball?"

"I made a commitment. Something you seem to have no interest in."

"My son is my commitment. What's yours? It seems to lie everywhere but here."

"My commitment is this family, and improving our community is one way to benefit this family."

"Blow that bunch of crock out your ass."

"On the other hand, your commitment, since you're too stubborn and dishonest to admit it, is yourself."

"Oh, f— off!"

And from then on, the argument degenerated into the familiar script of insults and accusations. At this point, Jesse's interest in their conversation flagged, and he stopped listening. He knew the drill. But he still has yet to understand why. Why the hatred in their voices? Why, if they despised each other so much, stay married for fourteen years? Why stay together if they can't stand each other?

Jesse slipped into the bathroom while the yelling and insults continued. He stripped naked, placing his filthy uniform in the hamper, and turned the hot water on. While the water temperature rose, Jesse looked at himself in the mirror. He removed a wash cloth from a brass ring hanging on the wall next to the sink, wet it, and carefully wiped the dirt off his face.

"Man, I got wailed on." he said, when at last, he could see the extent of the damage — a purplish bruise that covered almost the entire right side of his face, extending from the base of his right eye, down to the corner of his mouth, and all the way back to his ear, which was itself bulbously swollen. His bulging lower lip didn't look so bad in comparison. He cautiously moved his jaw up and down, left and right.

"Well, it doesn't seem to be broken," he said to himself. "Well, I survived."

The mirror soon fogged up from the steam in the room. He took his shower, being very careful not to allow the stream of water to contact the injuries. He dried off, again with care, noticing this time less severe bumps and scrapes on his legs and arms. Just for a moment, he derived a sense of pride from them, almost as if they were war wounds he could tell his friends about, and they would listen with awe and fascination and respect. He couldn't help but laugh at the sight of himself.

"I probably would've looked better if I fell down a flight of stairs."

But he couldn't tell anybody. There was nothing glamorous about these bruises. He was the one who got sand kicked in his face. He was the one wallowing in the mud like a lethargic pig. He was the one begging for mercy. Instead, all the injuries just showed the world how incapable and how much of a child he still was.

"My life is ruined," he thought. His face sagged. "This town won't forget what happened. Dad was right. I let everyone down. Now, everybody's going to look at me wherever I go. I'll be marked for life. What am I going to do? What will the kids in school say?"

He wrapped a towel around his waist, sneaked back into his room, and put on his underwear and some sweats over top. He yearned for a glass of water, having dehydrated at the game, but he didn't want to walk into the argument. He listened, but heard nothing. "They must have stopped." He cracked the door to his room open and peeked down that hall, again listening. No sounds, and no one in the hall. He crept down the hall and into the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator and pryed a can of root beer from its plastic ring. Leaving the kitchen with his drink, he heard his mom crying in her bedroom. He has heard her cry like this throughout his entire life.

He guessed that Dad had left the house. He probably drove down to the dealership. No, not dressed like Casey. Jesse wondered where he might have gone then.

Why? Why do they put up with each other?

Jesse considered visiting his mom, but he turned away and went back into his room. He had talked to mom before when she was upset, but it just wasted his time. He would describe his day, how he had trouble at school, how his baseball game didn't go well that day, and on and on. All his mom could provide were facile platitudes like, "It's only a game," or "Don't worry, son. Things will turn out for the best," or "You're a smart kid. You'll do fine." Mindless drivel which offered no solutions and very little comfort. Plus, hardly any of her advice could be put to practical use. How does "It's only a game" help him work out of a batting slump? How does "Try to look at things from their point-of-view" help him avoid bullies who methodically seek him out?

Not like his dad. He saw things clearly, converting the complicated into well-defined blacks and whites, which yielded practical solutions. He told you what needed to be done, and then told you how to go about doing it. No indecision. No hedging. No doubts. Jesse liked that. It made things simpler to understand, and life more orderly.

He left her alone.

I can't help her anyway.

I have my own problems.

He sat the soda on his nightstand and then laid down on top of the old flannel and canvas sleeping bag covering the bed. The thunderclouds rolled in again, and Jesse's room dimmed, but not enough for Jesse's current mood. Although the dark gray curtains helped some, he stood up on his knees in bed, reached for the dangling cord, and pulled down the shades. He leaned back, twisted in bed, and flipped on the light sitting on the nightstand. It had a faded yellowish lamp shade and a 75-watt bulb which cast just the right amount of a self-pitying ambiance.

He explored the shadows of the room while sipping on his soda, looking at his computer desk cluttered by a couple of dictionaries, a thesaurus, a Guinness Book of World Records, a dozen or so Kull and Conan comic books, all flopped on top of each other on top of the hutch protecting his computer monitor and CPU. Along side the computer were rusting vegetable cans filled with pencils — some dull and others with broken leads and none sharp — and pens — which all work fairly well — and markers — most of which are almost dry since their caps have been lost in and among the messiness. On the corner of the desk were various books by R. L. Stine with little slips of paper sticking out. On the other side rested a plastic bag with brand new notebooks ready for ninth grade to start in a couple of weeks.

School. Shit. What was I supposed to do?

A ninth grade reading list hid somewhere in the darkness. He knew it was around somewhere, but he decided to look for it tomorrow. He leaned his head back against the wall above the headboard and remembered how he scanned through the list and searched the library computer catalogue to find out how many pages these books had. He didn't have to read all the books on the list, and since the literary quality of each book had already been determined for him, he made his reading decision based on quantity. He checked off the books with the least pages.

He purchased one at the beginning of the summer, hoping to be better prepared this year than in previous years. But study habits are hard to break, and this year was no exception. Baseball distracted him again. So the book list found itself shoved aside, and

his sole purchase resting on the nightstand untouched. He put his can down and reached for the book.

"*Brave New World*. Hmm." He opened the book and skipped past the title pages to the epigram.

"Les utopies apparaissent comme bien plus... French? Oh, God, forget this stuff." Jesse flipped to the Forward and read the opening paragraph.

"Chronic remorse, as all the moralists are agreed, is a most undesirable sentiment. If you have behaved badly, repent, make what amends you can and address yourself to the task of behaving better next time. On no account brood over your wrongdoing. Rolling in the muck is not the best way of getting clean."

Jesse smiled to himself. "Yeah, I know what that's like." Jesse scanned the Forward and another section caught his eye.

"Churchill? What's it say about Winston Churchill?" Jesse wrote a biography report on him for Mr. Harton's Eighth Grade English class and found his fall from power fascinating. "England was so stupid. He leads them through World War Two, and then they vote him out of office. Dumb. Anyway, what's this say?" Jesse read the excerpt.

The greatest triumphs of propaganda have been accomplished, not by doing something, but by refraining from doing. Great is truth, but still greater, from a practical point of view, is silence about truth. By simply not mentioning certain subjects, by lowering what Mr. Churchill calls an 'iron curtain' between the masses and such facts or arguments as the local political bosses regard as undesirable, totalitarian propagandists have influenced opinion much more effectively than they could have done by the most eloquent denunciations, the most compelling of logical rebuttals.

"What the hell does that mean?" Jesse skipped the rest of the Forward and went to the beginning of Chapter One.

"A squat gray building of only thirty-four stories," he read aloud. He continued in silence. Jesse labored through the first few pages at first, but soon the effort eased. The book peaked his interest by the time he finished Chapter One. He turned the page to begin Chapter Two, then sucked in a huge yawn. He closed the book and returned it to the nightstand next to the soda he had forgotten. He shimmied down the bed until he could place his head on his pillow. He closed his eyes, put his hands behind his neck and stretched. Lying on his back, he ran through the day's events in his head. Eventually, his thoughts narrowed to that large patch of flawless grass surrounded by pine trees, further centering on that beautiful girl who was glad he was there.

"I wonder if I'll see her again in my dreams," he said as he fell asleep.

Four

As Jesse slowly woke up the next morning, he thought the bed harder than usual and the room somewhat draftier and cooler. He turned on his side still groggy from sleep only to realize his pillow was gone. He reached around for it, but instead grabbed pine needles and shoved loam under his fingernails.

His eyelids sprung upon. Everything was there. The trees, the sunshine, the grassy field, the cloud-mountains in the distance. Jesse sat up, stiff and anxious. The rush of adrenalin took his breath away. His heart throbbed in his chest, and his stomach felt like Jello. He forced his lungs to inhale and exhale. "Relax," he kept telling himself, "It's just a dream." Even so, he had to hold his hands to keep them from shaking.

But just as suddenly, he stopped shaking. His breathing slowed and deepened, though his stomach still churned and his heart still pounded.

There she sat against one of the trunks. She had her legs curled up to her chest, her forearms crossed on her knees. The side of her head rested on her arms, and her black braided hair draped over her shoulder and down the side. He remained motionless and silent while studying her.

"I never had a girlfriend before," he admitted to himself. "I wonder what she's like in bed." Then he shook his head. "No, she's nothing but a dream. Something like this would never happen to me in real life." He sighed. "Still, I wish she was real. She is so beau—."

She stirred and her chest heaved, filling with air. Jesse held his breath, suppressing any sound which might wake her. He wanted to look at her at leisure, to ingrain her completely into his memory, to caress her with his eyes.

In spite of the fact that this young lady was only a mental creation, pondering the future with her both calmed and excited him. He marvelled at the way he felt gazing at her. These new sensations thrilled him, and were nothing like anything he had ever expected or experienced. He never imagined love — *Am I in love or just infatuated?* — could feel so wonderful. He won many sports contests, but no amount of victories could compare to the

restful bliss of just being next to her. The world's greatest sports triumphs, he concluded, pale in comparison to the love itself.

She stirred again. This time her eyelids flicked open.

"No, don't wake up," he said softly by mistake. What would she think of him? Would she feel the same way he feels? The possibilities scared Jesse. All of a sudden, love became very complicated.

Wait. Snap out of it. How am I supposed to fall in love with a dream?

She heard Jesse's whisper, and lifted her head smiling at him.

"Hi, Jesse. I'm sorry I fell asleep."

"No, no. Don't be sorry. You were probably tired. That's okay." Jesse fumbled with his words.

"How are you feeling, Jesse?"

"I feel great."

"Are you sure?" she pressed him. "You're not saying that just to be polite?"

"No, I ..." Jesse paused. He noticed a genuine concern in her face. Jesse leaned back on his hands and re-evaluated his condition. "Well, I did have a couple of dizzy spells before, but I feel okay now."

"That's good."

Odd. That was all she said. It was almost as if she expected it.

The young woman stood up, took a stride towards Jesse and extended her arm to him. He grabbed hold of her firm grip and stood up. They were about the same height, eyes level with each other. She then hugged him.

This dream has gotten a whole lot better, he thought.

She was warm and restful, and he didn't really mind even though he acted a bit stiff, still recovering from the surprise. She released Jesse, though he was more reluctant releasing her. She seemed to fit.

"My name is Catiana," she said.

Catiana. A beautiful name.

He didn't ask how she knew his name. He assumed that since it was his dream, why shouldn't she know his name.

"I was sent ahead to see how you were doing," said Catiana, "and to make sure everything was okay. The rest of the helpcrew will be here in a few minutes."

"Catiana!" called a voice from across the field. Catiana raised her eyebrows.

"If not sooner. That sounds like Ymo."

Upon hearing the male-sounding voice along with the name, Jesse's chest quivered with worry. He felt his hopes for some time with Catiana slipping away. He ventured a question.

"Is Ymo a friend?"

"We're all friends."

Switching hands, Catiana turned towards the grassy field and began walking across it, drawing Jesse along with her.

"No, that's not what I mean," Jesse said. However, Catiana continued walking, unaware of his meaning. She considered the statement answered and continued on to a different topic. Jesse also dropped the subject, uncomfortable with it as he was.

"Once we're all here," said Catiana, "we'll continue on together to our project. I hope you're physically fit."

"That depends on what I have to do."

"Well, don't worry. We all work together, and everyone does what they can for the group. No one ever feels they are unable to assist, nor does anyone feel they aren't doing enough or doing too much."

"What are we going to do?"

"Should I spoil all your surprises?" Jesse's eyes squinted at the evasiveness. Catiana giggled and squeezed his hand.

Both she and Jesse followed the voice to the edge of the field where the grass met the trees. A stocky blond-haired man waited for them at a point where a small path begins weaving its way into the shade of the forest. A huge grin occupied most of his boyish face, a face which seemed to radiate an almost naïve glow of contentment. Just like Catiana, he wore a cotton-like body suit, though this one was dark brown in color, and on his feet heavily-used black boots. Jesse looked down at Catiana's feet out of curiosity and noticed a similar pair of boots, though less used. But more surprising, Jesse finally realized that he too was wearing a short-sleeve cotton body suit — his, a dark purple — and brand new black boots. The lightweight boots felt more comfortable than his sneakers, yet appeared as durable as the army boots his father likes to wear.

He also noticed his arm was much hairier than he thought it should be. His fingers were thicker as well. He balled up his hand and rotated his wrist, watching the muscles undulate under the skin on his forearm. *An arm like this could cause some damage*, he thought. Yet he didn't give the transformation of his body much thought. After all, strange things happen in dreams.

Catiana spurred Jesse to a light run, and soon they arrived at the beginning of the path. This close, Jesse could see the young man was in his teens, probably around sixteen. But for only sixteen, he possessed an impressive musculature.

Jesse's wandering attention arrested itself on the youth's perpetual grin. It was a smile he had rarely, if ever, seen. To the highest degree, it was a smile absent of any bitterness. A smile reserved only for people who are independently wealthy, eminently healthy, with a Christmas tree in every room of a house surrounded by carrot-nosed snowmen next to a frozen lake lined with hay bales and pulsating with the dark figures of skaters, and a fire warming the interior of the house filled with a perfect family and cherished and impossibly loyal friends. It was a smile from a person that had never known suffering nor lived with an uncertain future. It made him immediately suspicious. That smile represented everything he ever dreamed of; everything he had ever hoped for. Jesse despised it.

Without hesitation, Catiana hugged the young man. After hugging Catiana, Ymo turned his attention to Jesse, as she introduced him.

"Ymo, this is Jesse. Jesse, Ymo."

Jesse was about to offer his hand for Ymo to shake when the teen took a couple of large quick steps and hugged Jesse instead. Surprised that a man was hugging him, Jesse stiffened up, not knowing what to do with his arms. His body shivered with discomfort, and Ymo sensed it. He released Jesse.

"I'm sorry, Jesse. Forgive me for forgetting that you may not be accustomed to such a greeting. I hope I haven't offended you."

Jesse shrugged off the incident, and felt a bit uncomfortable with the apology.

"Forget it."

"So," said Ymo, placing his hand on his hips, "you're Jesse."

"Yes." Jesse puffed his chest out and stretched his back trying to gain a few extra inches in height. He sized up his opponent as Ymo was probably sizing him up — he was probably Catiana's boyfriend — but lacked any confidence. For Jesse, it was all show. Ymo, on the other hand, hardly noticed the pretentiousness.

"We're all pleased you're here to help."

"We? Are there more coming?"

"Our helpcrew."

"What's a helpcrew?" Jesse asked.

"A helpcrew," interrupted Catiana, "is a group of people who volunteer to work together on particular community projects."

"How many are on a helpcrew?"

"That depends on the size of the project," said Ymo.

"And what is this project?"

Before Ymo could answer, as if on cue, the noise of fallen twigs and branches crackling under feet accompanied by frequent laughter emanated from beyond the shadows down the path. In a few seconds, the first of a half a dozen teenagers appeared from the forest. Jesse made a quick count. Three boys, three girls. Looked bad. Catiana and Ymo made the fourth pair. *Oh, well. Not all dreams work out.*

Each wore the same style of short-sleeved cotton body suits, all in varied shades of blues and reds, with the skin-tight pants extending down into their black boots. There were hugs all around. But when the other adolescents approached Jesse, Ymo intervened, indicating to the group that Jesse was uncomfortable with hugging.

"But we are at a loss," said Ymo, looking back to Jesse. "If you are uncomfortable with hugs, how would you prefer to be greeted?" said Ymo.

"A handshake?" Jesse proposed.

"Hand-shake?" Ymo thought for a moment. "Oh, you mean like a wave." Ymo waved his hand at Jesse. Jesse laughed. Ymo stopped waving, confused. Jesse lowered Ymo's arm and then clasped his hand, shaking it up and down.

"That's a handshake," said Jesse.

"Oh."

Soon, the entire group were shaking each others hands. Caught up in the commotion, Jesse forgot all the introductions; they all went by so quickly. Moreover, the awkward and exaggerated shaking motions of the group's attempts at shaking hands reminded him of little kids who have just learned something new. But whereas children become mindlessly gleeful and experiment to the point of silliness, this group's experimentation appeared more critical. Apparently, they attempted to understand the significance of the handshake, and soon bombarded Jesse with questions to which he had few answers.

"Does the up and down motion signify a mutual desire for action or purpose?" asked a buxom girl with red-freckled hair and face. *Wait a minute. Was that Sunas?*

"What does the other hand do?" asked an Asian looking young man.

"Doesn't the angle of the handshake, which would interfere with an embrace, create a symbolic barrier between people?" *Who was that?*

"Does the unused open hand allow additional handshakes to occur with other people, thereby increasing the interconnectiveness of community?"

"It's just a handshake!" Jesse's shout silenced the questions. "It's just a way of greeting someone."

"Perhaps," Ymo offered his interpretation for the group's and Jesse's appraisal, "the squeezing of the hand is a smaller scale version of hugging?"

Ymo's suggestion sparked a new round of discussion. Jesse rubbed his head in disbelief and groaned. "Not again."

Seeing the frustration of Jesse's face, Catiana directed the group's attention towards him. "Jesse," she said, "tell us what the symbolic significance of the handshake is?"

"I don't know. It's just a greeting." Jesse took a couple of breaths. His agitation subsided. "We shake hands whenever people meet ... and after every baseball game."

"Baseball?" the group whispered. Jesse thought harder.

"Sometimes, handshakes were used as a way of sealing agreements between two people. I think they were called gentlemen's agreements."

"Hmm." Ymo played with his lips. "A handshake seems to have many uses and meanings. A lot to think about."

"Oh, Christ." Jesse hoped he wasn't heard, but he saw Catiana wink at him.

"Friends," said Catiana, again speaking to the group, "I believe Jesse is eager to continue with the assignment."

"Whatever that may be," Jesse said under his breath. Again, Catiana smiled. *She's got good ears*, he thought. *I better be careful what I say around her.*

The group agreed to reserve the discussion on handshakes for another time. But Jesse remained befuddled by the intensity and seriousness of discussion concerning something as insignificant and commonplace as a handshake.

This is a strange place, he thought. *I wonder where I am.* Then he realized that people who dream don't usually know they are dreaming. But he did that constantly. Yet he must be dreaming; only a dream made sense. His mind flip-flopped trying to reconcile what he saw with what must be.

"Come on, friends," said the lanky black youth in a strong voice, trying to infect his enthusiasm on the others. Jesse was grateful for the interruption. "Let's get out into the middle of that field under our beautiful sun for some warm-ups."

With a light-hearted cheer, the crew jogged out towards the center of the grassy area.

"Before we begin any assignment," explained Catiana, stopping Jesse and tugging him aside, "we always engage in warm-ups."

"Hey, that's fine with me. Finally something I'm used to."

Catiana cleared her throat.

"I don't believe you'll be familiar with our warm-ups."

Jesse peered at Catiana, trying to figure out the enigma. Catiana read the concerns on his face.

"Don't worry. We're not here to hurt you. The warm-ups are necessary for the assignment."

"Yeah. What is this assignment anyway?"

"Catiana. Jesse. We need you," Ymo yelled from the field.

"You will know soon enough. Let's go." Grabbing his hand, Catiana pulled Jesse with her as the two ran to catch-up with the group already milling around in the center of the field, some with arms outstretched basking in the sunlight, others lolling the grass smelling the cool vibrant air.

Yeah, just like children, he remarked secretly and almost contemptuously. For only children, he ruminated, have such an innocent passion for nature and an unaffected love of life. But soon, they'll grow up. They'll forget their childish toys, their simple games, their pristine faith. In the end, they'll have to replace them with the responsibilities of adulthood, a resigned acceptance of reality, and cultivate an insensitivity to the world necessary to cope with the brutal cruelty of real life. One cannot walk past drunks lying on the street without breaking stride or hang up the phone on telemarketers hawking charities without it.

They'll figure it out soon enough — instead of babbling about handshakes. What a waste of time.

But one thing troubled him and gnawed away at his intuition. He remembered that every time he asked about this elusive project they would be engaged in, he never found out. Either his question was put aside, or it was interrupted. It frustrated him not knowing. Something was up. Although it seemed a picture-perfect day spent with a bunch of kids, a tiny speck of anxiety gelled in the back of his mind. If only a miniscule hunch, it slowly grew. *They're hiding something from me*, he thought. *Even her*. He was desperate to trust Catiana, but could he?

* * *

Catiana and Jesse arrived at the middle of the field where the rest of the helpcrew is soaking up the inspirational sunshine. Before calling the group together, Ymo spoke to Jesse.

"We're not sure if you know the warm-up we use, so if you are more comfortable standing by and watching, feel free to."

"I know how to do warm-ups. Our team used to do them before every practice."

"Excellent."

Ymo was elated, but Catiana still asked Jesse if perhaps he ought to watch for a few minutes.

"I'm not a baby," Jesse said. *Not like you wimps*, he continued to himself.

"Why don't you start off in the middle, Jesse?" said Ymo. *Great. I'll be leading the stretching*. Jesse looked back to Catiana with a smug smirk. He walked to the center of the group. He was about ready to sit on the ground when he was surrounded by seven members of the group standing less than two feet away from him.

"No, wait a minute," said Jesse, a bit confused. "Spread out. You're going to need room."

Now the others glanced at each other. also confused.

"We need to be this close," said the Asian boy.

"No, no. You're too close. You can't stretch out this way."

"Stretch out? What do you mean?" asked Sunas.

The others began murmuring with bewilderment. Catiana, almost as if she knew this would happen, couldn't decide whether she should laugh or shake her head at the result of Jesse's impetuosity.

"Look," said Jesse, trying to regain control of the situation, "just spread out and do what I do. Okay?"

Tentative, the group shuffled outward from Jesse, yet he had to keep prodding them to go further away until they were at least six feet apart. And though it didn't seem relevant at the time, he did notice that the group impeccably maintained its circular symmetry as it expanded.

Once Jesse was satisfied with the separation between the individuals, he sat on the ground and signaled the others to imitate him. Jesse recalled how Coach Lyons taught the stretches to him and his team. Coach Lyons could also reach deep down for his booming commands whenever he wanted. Jesse's body would shudder from its shock waves. Sometimes, when they practiced at the middle school baseball field, he thought he heard the chain link backstop fence jingle from his bellows.

"First, I want you to extend your left leg out and touch your right heel to your left knee," barked Jesse. He mimicked his coach, but his authoritative tone sounded tinny and unconvincing in the open field, seemingly sucked up and disposed of by a petulant tranquility.

Jesse looked around the circle and waited until everyone completed that part. "Now, I want you to lean forward towards your left toe and try to touch your nose to your knee, and hold it there for at least twenty seconds." Everyone's knee, except for Jesse's, came up to meet their noses halfway into the lean.

"No, no. You're supposed to leave your left leg flat on the ground, and only move your body down to the knee. Here, watch."

Jesse struggled to get his nose near his knee, unable as he was to touch it. When he looked around, he was surprised to see not only the women but the men touching their knee with their noses with apparent ease. *Not knowing how to stretch, they're pretty flexible*, he grumbled to himself, feeling slightly embarrassed.

"What do you do for the twenty seconds?" asked Ymo.

"Well, nothing except stretch," said Jesse. He remembered something Coach Lyons once said. "Stretching is useful as a mental transition between life and games." Then, thinking himself clever, Jesse continued, "Much like these warm-ups are a transition between life and work."

The group cut short their stretches. Half of the group stood up. All of them had faces contorted in some combination of fear and pain.

"What's wrong," said Jesse, surprised.

"We're sorry, Jesse," said Ymo, "We don't wish to 'stretch' any more."

"Why?" Put off by the group's actions, Jesse worried he had done something to offend them. But that worry didn't last long, being soon replaced by indignation. *They're all a bunch of spoiled, bratty children. Refusing to learn anything. Like Arthur.*

Jesse almost forgot about Arthur, a prospective Little Leaguer who was placed on Jesse's team by the league president without a try-out. Coach Lyons protested but was ignored. Instead, the coach learned that Arthur's dad pledged ten thousand dollars to the Little League program. In exchange, Coach Lyons was to teach Arthur not just how to play baseball, but the values of sportsmanship and teamwork. Coach agreed and Arthur stayed.

At the first practice, the team learned how miserable a player Arthur was. Arthur, a thin and pale eleven-year-old with thick dark rimmed glasses — a classic nerd, except his clothes matched and were always clean — couldn't field to save his life and couldn't catch to save the world. It was sheer luck if he could throw a ball within a hundred and eighty degrees of where it was supposed to go. He was petrified as a batter, terrified that the ball might hit him, prepared not to swing but to duck.

Coach assigned some of the players to work with Arthur, but they all grew frustrated and refused, threatening to quit the team if they had to help such a "loser." Next, the assistant coaches had their chance, and ended up equally frustrated with equally empty results. Soon, Coach Lyons himself took Arthur aside for private instructions. After all, ten thousand dollars was at stake. Coach Lyons was patient in the beginning, but it was only a matter of time before even he lost his temper — which was not a pleasant sight. Coach would stand nose to nose and yell so hard with that deep resonant voice, a person's hat and hair would flutter in the breath. Arthur stood stoically and took it all, always coming back the following practice just as inept.

Arthur turned out to be a boy that all coach's dreaded — he had no desire to learn or to play sports. At best, he had a half-hearted ability to catch a grounder, but he had no interest, no care, no motivation whatsoever to play the game. He didn't want to do anything associated with baseball. Nor did he talk to anybody or try to make friends. Instead, Arthur snuck books to practice and read them while sitting on the bench, oblivious to the coach and players on the field. Science fiction books mostly, by only the best authors — Bradbury, Zelazny, Vonnegut. Just the classics.

Because of his isolationism, Arthur suffered humiliating taunts and vicious pranks, including syrup in the hair and eggs in the shorts. Arthur put up with most of them, and returned dutifully the following practice, only to sit by himself with his books and invite more reprisals. The only prank that seemed to affect Arthur was when water coolers were dumped on him. Arthur would jump up, frantically protecting the books from damage by water, or Gatorade, or whatever was in the cooler at the time. When a book did happen to get ruined, only then did Jesse ever see Arthur cry. And even then, Arthur's tears dripping on the water-logged book was the only thing heard.

The last practice Jesse saw Arthur was when George Turkenston shoved a live bee into his shirt. Arthur sprung out of his seat and vigorously shook out the back of his shirt. A bee fell out, twitching and spinning around the ground as it slowly died. Then Arthur sat back down. The entertainment concluded, the team returned their attention to the practice. About a half an hour later in the middle of a double play drill, Coach Lyons made a wild dash over to Arthur, who was now gasping for air. His face, neck, and hands were swollen. Lyons screamed over to Jim Voren, the assistant coach and a police officer, to take Arthur to Northside Medical. Jim, who was about six-four and carried the obvious remnants of his beer and donuts around his gut, carried Arthur in his arms like a pillow, ran up the hill to his car, and peeled out of the parking lot with sirens blaring a path down the road.

Jesse never saw Arthur again; nor did the coaches discuss Arthur or what happened to him. Jesse was glad; no more distractions at practice. Arthur was a nerdy snob who didn't belong with them anyway, he would say. The league never received its ten thousand dollars either. This irritated Coach Lyons to no end. "After all the time and effort we spent," Jesse heard the coach mumbling to himself at the next practice. "It was if he had no stomach for competing." Jesse considered his coach's sentiments and agreed. As Jesse remembered, Arthur never even defended himself.

What a brat. He wouldn't do anything he was told. Kept his nose in the air, just like these people.

"Why don't you guys want to stretch?" Jesse asked again, this time with a sneer.

"We don't want to work," said Sunas. Her voice was hesitant. "If this 'stretching' leads to work, we would rather do something else."

"What do you mean you don't want to work?" said Jess, incredulous. His private epithets became public. "What a bunch of wusses. You guys are the most pathetic group of people ... "

"Now Jesse," interrupted Catiana, " I don't think you understand what we mean...."

"I understand fine," said Jesse, his voice deepening. "Everyone's got to work. Work gets things done. But obviously you guys don't want to do anything productive. Instead, you prance around the field like a bunch of babies, afraid that a little stretching might hurt you. Goo-goo, ga-ga."

Some of the group began turning away in despair from Jesse with their heads down watching the grass flatten underfoot. Sunas and Ymo remained along with Catiana, and all walked up and stood next to Jesse. Jesse backed away from the trio, not wanting to be hemmed in.

"But Jesse, we do things all the time," said Catiana.

"Yeah, sure. I didn't see you stretching."

Which was true. Catiana stood throughout observing Jesse's instruction.

"Not everyone has to participate if they do not wish to," said Catiana, trying to remain calm. "Participation must be voluntary if the activity is to have any positive value to the individual."

Jesse heard none of Catiana's comments. His growing anger shut down his hearing. All that concerned him was her not wanting to stretch, and when she would finish talking so he could make his next statement..

"You think you're better than all of us, don't you?"

"Jesse, try to relax," said Catiana in a soothing lyrical voice. For a moment, Jesse started breathing slower. "Let's play something." Catiana condescension re-ignited Jesse's anger once again.

"Is that your answer to everything, to play a game?"

"Well, I was going to suggest that we continue with our warm-ups."

"What the hell do you think I was doing?"

"But ..."

"And what if I don't want to join them?" Jesse grew more bold in his defiance.

"You don't have to join us," said Sunas. Catiana's eyes flamed at the interruption. The action surprised Sunas, but it effectively silenced her, forcing her to drop her head and move a little behind Ymo. The glare was short and almost imperceptible to Jesse, but he witnessed enough to know it happened. He now knew Catiana was reaching a breaking point. Her pleasantries and rational demeanor would only hold so long. He determined to push her off the edge. He would enjoy this game.

Catiana continued more calmly with Jesse, "But it would certainly help you understand us better..."

"Oh now I see." Jesse orchestrated a callous face. "I have to understand you but you don't have to understand me? Well, that's bullshit. You treat me like a baby. You don't do what I suggest, yet you're always telling me that I ought to do what you want me to do. Well, I'm not a baby, unlike you guys. Grow up. Get a life. You are the most childish people ..."

"I don't think you understand the significance of what you're saying."

"What do you mean I don't understand what I'm saying? You're the one who didn't join the group. You're the one who thinks she's better than us. You're the elitist. You're the one being anti-social."

"Let's not be insulting, Jesse."

"Snob! You don't seem to know how to cooperate."

Catiana face hardened, turning red. Her voice lost its lilt and became firm and punchy. Sunas and Ymo also noticed the change. They turned troubled looks towards Catiana. "You do not understand us," Catiana said. Her voice filled with efforts to control it.

"Oh, I understand you fine. I know plenty of people just like you. But this was the easiest thing you could have done, and still you didn't want to do it. You're just like a girl, weak and timid...."

"Jesse, please stop."

"...You want all your cake and none of the responsibility of getting fat. You want to be a part of something, but you want to take the easy way out, maybe let some guy do all the work...."

"Jesse."

"...When things get tough, you probably get all teary-eyed, grab your ball and cry all the way home so mommy can tuck you into bed with some warm milk. Boy, wait 'til real life hits you in the face with the fact that you have to work hard, compete hard, and win big in order to succeed."

To the shock of Ymo and the shriek of Sunas, Catiana wound up and swung an open palm into Jesse's face. For a moment, as his eyelids involuntarily clenched for protection, all he could hear was the echo of the slap reverberating throughout the open glade. He opened his eyes and saw Catiana pleading for forgiveness, her face swelling with tears and regret. Her body shook with remorse, and she staggered forward towards Jesse as if the blow aged her a hundred years. Her mouth moved, but a tightening neck choked off any ability to speak.

Jesse no longer cared what she had to say, as he touched his swelling cheek. The game was almost over, and he determined to win it. All he saw in front of him was the person who had just hit him, and firmly replied by sending a fist into her mouth.

Catiana's head whipped to the side, yanking a reluctant body along behind. She went sliding into the grass. Her hands, now red and syrupy, covered her face as she fell. Sunas and Ymo, still not comprehending what just happened, ran to Catiana's side to comfort her. The others, who had previously walked off in disappointment and had stood by at a distance as the argument played itself out, were just now running up behind Jesse, their eyes bulging with horror. Jesse, fearing violent retributions, began sprinting for the safety of the shaded woods.

"Jesse! Wait!"

He heard Sunas's voice from behind urging him to stop. He lifted his knees higher and pushed harder into the darkness of the pine forest, and her calls faded away. Once inside the tree line, he maintained his speed, dodging left and right, jumping roots, ducking low branches.

"Got to get out of here. Got to get away," he recited to himself. "God, I wish I would wake up."

He hurdled a fallen log, but since his eyes had yet to fully adjust from the bright field to the growing darkness, he didn't see that gray angular rock. He stepped on its hidden edge, unable to avoid placing all his weight on a badly pronated foot. He heard a snap. He

tumbled into the ground, bouncing his hip off a protruding and pointed root. Grabbing his left leg stopped his rolling, but did nothing to extinguish the fire blazing inside his ankle sparked by a couple of ruptured ligaments dangling in pieces.

He screamed in pain, but nothing came out. He opened his eyes and saw around him his desk, dresser, closet to his left, a closed door to his room with his raincoat and black Members Only jacket hanging on hooks which were themselves hanging on the door. The window shades shielded him from the star-speckled night sky. The dim light on the nightstand still shined though, while the can of soda stood sentinel next to it. Thirsty, he took a swig of the drink. It tasted lousy. The soda was warm and going flat. He scrunched his face and his cheeks puffed out as he looked for a place to spit it out. Finding none, he reluctantly swallowed and nearly gagged.

Now he was thirsty with a bad taste in his mouth. He wondered how long he had been asleep. He turned the clock/radio in the nightstand towards him to see the red LED numbers.

"One o'clock in the morning?" Jesse hardly believed it. He had been sleeping since late afternoon.

He rolled out of bed to retrieve another can from the kitchen. However, when he put his weight on his left foot, a sharp pain stabbed upwards into his shin bones. He muffled a scream, hoping not to wake anybody, while the ankle buckled and he collapsed to the floor.

He climbed back on bed and placed his foot under the dim light. He didn't see any bruising or swelling, nor did he feel any pain when he poked around the ankle joint. Puzzled, he lowered his foot back to the floor and slowly stood up, gingerly testing the ankle. This time, there was no jabbing pain. The ankle acted normally. *Weird.*

Still, the painful memory made him limp slightly to the door. After opening it, he noticed the living room lights on and what sounded like an infomercial on the television. He inched down the hall, being as quiet as possible, and peered around the corner. There, sprawled out on the brown velour lounge chair in front of the TV, was his snoring Dad. Peter's head drooped to one side, and a dark spot of wet drool under his open mouth was visible on his uniform shoulder, which he still hadn't taken off yet. On the end table next to the chair were nearly a dozen open and empty cans of beer. At the base of the end table, lying on the carpet, were two white plastic six-pack rings.

Unaffected, Jesse continued on to the kitchen where, emboldened by his Dad's condition, he grabbed and opened a can of beer from the refrigerator. He also searched the fridge for something to munch on, having not eaten since lunch the previous day. Jesse

smelled food spoiling in the cold interior and hoped what he chooses won't be it. He guessed it was the week old chicken haphazardly wrapped in cellophane on the bottom shelf, and so took out some pizza from two nights before. He wanted to heat the slice up in the microwave but was afraid doing so would wake his father.

It made little difference. As Jesse turned around, with the beer in one hand and the cold slice in the other, his Dad was teetering in the doorway, staring at him with empty eyes. A sober Dad would have terrified Jesse. Peter would have punished his son by taken the can out of his hand, holding it in place against Jesse's forehead and then smashing it with his open palm. The blow would have sent Jesse reeling backwards, tripping over a kitchen chair and landing on his back with a thud. His head would have snapped back into the wood floor, given him headaches and dizzy spells the rest of the day.

However, his Dad was not sober, and Jesse wasn't really there. Peter was so drunk, he couldn't possibly have seen Jesse clearly enough to tell him apart from a mural. All that his Dad saw now was a prospective drinking buddy.

Jesse calmly placed the can and the pizza on the kitchen table. True to form, his Dad obliged and stumbled up to Jesse, nearly falling through him. Jesse caught him as best he could and guided him to an adjacent chair around the table.

"Did I ever tell you what we did during football season?" said Peter, or at least that was what he thought his Dad said. Most of the words just slurred together.

"Every year, the first team players would challenge the scrubs to see which group could f— the greatest number of fat women on campus."

Peter, however, wasn't really speaking to his son. It is doubtful whether Peter ever remembered the conversation. The only thing Peter cared about was that someone was in the room with him. Who it was didn't matter.

"To prove that we screwed them, we had to bring in a picture of them naked. The losing squad had to hire prostitutes for the winners..."

His Dad rambled on, yacking in mostly incomprehensible gibberish while Jesse ate his pizza and drank his beer. Jesse didn't mind. In fact, these drunken moments were the only moments he relished with his Dad nowadays. Whether drunk or sober, Peter loved to brag, but without booze, the stories he told were boring, full of obvious and jejune moral messages that failed to inspire an increasingly recalcitrant Jesse. At one time, when Jesse was younger and more enamored with life and his Dad, these stories offered something to strive for. Now, only the stories stripped of inhibitions and colorfully marinated by a liquored mind entertained Jesse.

"It was all her fault!"

That striking comment came through the inebriated daze and caught Jesse's attention. He looked up. Peter's cheeks glistened with watery streaks. Peter's shoulders hunched over the tabletop as he stared unfocused in Jesse's direction. He saw something other than his son.

"I could have been a pro — swimming pools, million-dollar contracts, travel, autographs, everything. I could've had it all. But no. She had to call my name. She had to be so beautiful. I wish she never called my name. I wish I never met her."

Jesse could smell the rank odor of alcohol as Peter breathed heavily, seemingly wheezing and gasping for life. Then, in a sudden flash of lucidity, Peter's eyes focused on Jesse and spoke. "I'm an old man, Jesse, tortured by dreams that will never come true."

His Dad plopped his head into his folded arms resting on the table. Jesse hardly paused in his eating while he pondered his Dad's comment. Sure enough, it was an odd statement, thought Jesse, but it meant nothing to him. He was more curious about who this mystery woman was; and deep down he knew it had something to do with the hatred both of his parents felt for each other.

Soon, however, Jesse would realize that his father had fallen into a deep slumber and probably would not awaken until morning. Jesse would then return to his room, turn off the dim light on the nightstand, get back into bed, and for the remainder of the night suffer through a dreamless and restless sleep.

Until then, he finished his pizza, drank his beer, and rubbed his strangely sore hip.

* * *

"That was very good, Jesse."

Jesse heard Dr. Macy's voice and awoke, not surprised that he may have dozed off. However, he was never really asleep. He spoke while he was in what could best be described as a self-induced semi-trance. He remembered the doctor asking him questions, but they never seemed to intrude into the story he told. He weaved his responses into the exposition.

"You did a lot of work today, Jesse. I'm proud of you." Dr. Macy sported the look Jesse knew all too well — that facile smile, the banal compliment, that false sincerity.

"You must be hungry," she said. Jesse nodded obediently. He was tired and wanted to leave. "It is lunch time. The orderly is outside the door waiting for you. I'll see you again next week, okay? In the meantime, relax and enjoy the facilities."

Jesse got up off the couch and walked slowly to the door. He grabbed the knob and began to open it when Doctor Macy slid up next to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"You've accomplished a lot today. I think we're going to make tremendous progress, you and I."

Jesse looked at her and saw her smiling, again with that mock friendship. The smile meant nothing to him. His face remained blank. He looked down at the knob, pulled the door open, and muttered under his breath as he left the office, "Yeah, right."

Five

"Can't you turn the heat up any more, Dad?"

Crusty snow and ice crackled under the weight of an old Ford pick-up truck sputtering home desperate for the protection of its garage. It was December, and the first stinging winter air and snow had arrived with a vengeance before people or machines could acclimate. The temperature quickly dropped, squeezing out of the ground whatever warmth the daytime sunshine might have created — which wasn't much. The brunt of one of Nature's macabre tortures, tree limbs frozen into position by ice as they reached for the sun stood helpless to stop what meager remaining heat drifted up through their shimmering branches into the cloudless night sky.

A shivering teenage girl sat on the faded and cracked vinyl seat. She had pulled her legs up to her chest and tried to wrap her coat around them, but the jacket had no lining left and the warm-up pants she wore were too thin to help. The truck heater worked anemically even when operating at full-blast. Instead of comforting heat, the fan circulated a cool draft around the cab which worked its way through every article of clothing the young woman wore until it reached and instantly chilled her once sweaty skin.

"It's good for you," said her dad, Carl, with hardly an inflection in his voice. "The cold will toughen you up."

She plopped her head onto her knees and sighed into her open jacket in hopes her warm breath would alleviate some of the cold. It didn't.

"You know, we really ought to fix the heater," she said, trying to get some sympathy. "They say it's going to be a very cold winter this year."

"Good," said Carl, speaking in a monotone. "Misery builds character."

She smiled and looked over to her dad, who wasn't smiling. Seeing this, she stifled a laugh. She couldn't tell if he was joking or honestly believed in what he said, and she didn't dare take a chance of making light of his comment. He seemed to be in one of his more introspective moods.

Carl continued navigating the choppy road and struggled to control the steering wheel twisting harshly left and right. He wore no gloves, and the skin on his hands was white and scaly. She also noticed reddish crack lines on his knuckles. She felt sorry for him.

"Aren't you cold, Dad?"

"I don't feel it," he replied. "I probably have more fat than you do." She giggled openly at that comment. But his mood swings were disconcerting. Ever since her mom died several years ago, her dad had become increasingly erratic, almost eccentric. "Considering the trauma I endured," he said in response to a question she once asked about his absentmindedness, "I think I'm entitled."

"Are your hands cold?" she said, knowing they had to be.

"No."

"Don't they hurt?"

"You get used to it. You get numb after a while." Carl took a strained breath. "Pain is something everyone gets used to — something everyone *has* to get used to." He paused to swallow. "I learned that the day your mom died."

"You loved her very much, didn't you."

Carl remained silent. He bit his lip, scraping and peeling off its chapped skin.

"I'm sorry, Dad."

"Forget it," he said. He sat up in his seat and cracked his back in the process. "Besides, I've got you." He then leaned over towards his daughter. "And let me tell you something else." Realizing a secret was to be revealed, she expectantly leaned towards her dad. "Just between you and me, things are beginning to hurt again."

She wanted to say something, but didn't know what to say. He wanted things to hurt? How does one actually respond to something like that? The hope of some meaningful secret, rare with her father, made his comment all the more disappointing. He grinned slightly and winked at her. Apparently, he was proud of what he said, which confused her even more. She expected some comment about her, or about how she reminded him of Mom, or of how Mom would be so proud of her, or any number of other possibilities that seemed so touching and fulfilling whenever she read it or saw it played out on television. Instead, she received some enigma about the joys of pain — and how she might be the cause of it? That sounded terrible.

She yearned for a dad who could express his emotions more, openly and unashamed. He never told her he loved her, although she knew he did in his own silent way. Yet she was tired and frustrated with his expressions of love always being couched inside of riddles and some sort of philosophical babble, as if he were hiding behind the words.

"Just come out and say you love me, Dad," she screamed in her head. "That's all I want." But her father never heard the words. She just couldn't say it to his face and she knew it. He intimidated her, and maybe she was a bit afraid of him as well. Instead, she remained disconsolate, cherishing whatever he would give to her of his love as she once cherished her dolls — protecting them, dressing them up, creating stories around them. From all her stories, she envisioned a gentle man cursed and made hard and tough by a cruel past. Burned on the outside by the fires of life raging too hot, his insides still remain soft. All that has to be done, all that she has to do, is to cut through the crusty exterior to reach it. After contemplating all this and making great plans, she would then shove her head into her pillow to blunt the harsh noise of her wailing as she excoriating herself for being unable to do just that.

She leaned back into her side of the cab and just looked out the partly fogged side window at the trees passing by, faintly thinking about how pain could be good. Soon, her dad spoke again, distracting her from her reverie.

"You played a good game tonight."

"What do you mean 'a good game'?" She cringed at its memory. "It was miserable. Didn't you see the score? Didn't you see how badly we lost?"

Carl saw. He knew. And he grinned as he thought back to the game.

His daughter's team was playing an away game at the neighboring city's Granville High School, the number two ranked women's basketball team in the state, and the game wasn't going very well. Actually, it never went well from the start. Near the end of the second half, the score was 100-35, with Granville comfortably on top and still working hard for more. A 65-point margin wasn't enough. Records were to be broken tonight.

The home town fans were besides themselves with glee. They waved their paper pom-poms on a stick, bought heavily from the concessions and souvenir stands, feverishly stomped the bleachers, and prodded their children and coach to keep the pressure on and run up the score, all to the accompaniment of the Granville High pep band dressed in mustard yellow blazers and black pants which made them look like a Century 21 convention.

Carl sat a dozen rows up in the middle of the hard wooden bleachers right at mid-court, straddling his butt over an uncomfortable pair of metal rivets, surrounded by enthusiastic locals. To his right, a pudgy, ruddy-faced gentleman with popcorn remnants in his beard dressed in a tie and sweat-stained shirt exhorted his daughter ("She's number 12 out there, the six-foot senior forward, the one with the great outside shot. Stamford is recruiting

her.") and waved an empty box of popcorn, his second of the half ("I always eat more when we're winning.").

To Carl's left, separated by the tiny gap between bleacher sections, was a black woman with dark frizzy hair sitting on a yellow and black colored Granville High souvenir seat cushion. Her dark blue satin pant suit reeked of stale cigarette stench which had Carl coughing and gagging for breath whenever he caught a whiff of her. She, in turn, said nothing to Carl, unlike the gregarious man on his right. It seemed as though she absolutely detested Carl, but why, he had no clue. Yet he really didn't care about the woman; nor the overweight talker on his right, thought he politely tolerated the him. He stayed mostly to himself, focusing his concern with his daughter in her first season as a high school player, wearing the maroon and white baggy shorts and ill-fitting sleeveless T-shirt with the number 10 on the back, and sat beaming the entire night.

Carl sat beaming in the car thinking back to the game. If his daughter said anything, he didn't hear it.

"Dad, aren't you listening? It was terrible. 110 to 40. God, it was so embarrassing."

"Why are you embarrassed?" Carl asked. "Because your team lost to a better team? That's nothing to be ashamed of. It's to be expected."

"But we lost so badly." She plopped her head onto her knees again. "I guess what bothered me most was the score."

"Why's that?"

"Didn't you see?" She uncoiled from her balled-up position. She spun in the seat to face her dad, arms waving to emphasize the point. "Even when they were so far ahead, they just kept going. They never let it go. They never let up. Stepping on our faces the entire game. It was humiliating, them running up the score."

It was an oddly touching sight for Carl — her daughter's ferocious eyes filling with tears. However, he had decided years ago she would never lose that edge because of some sappy father. He held back his sympathy. It was for her own good.

"What did you expect?" was his flat response. She slumped dumbfounded. Could her dad be that insensitive? Deflated, she tried again.

"I was expecting a little common decency from the other team, a little respect, a little sportsmanship ..."

"Bullshit. You would have done the same thing if you were in their shoes."

"I would not have."

"You damn well better!" Carl quickly put an end to her daughter's back talk. She looked down at the floor. There was nothing there to see but oil stains, sand, and yellowing unopened junk mail. But at least her father's eyes weren't there.

"Granville was doing exactly what they ought to have been doing," Carl said. "If you're trying to be the best, then you must play the entire game, every game, at your best. There is no room for slacking off, for letting up, or any of that crap. As far as I'm concerned, giving people breaks just makes players cocky, which is far more insulting."

"But that doesn't sound right."

"Doesn't sound right? Are you saying it is somehow not right to try your best all the time? To not try to be excellent at every moment of the game? I'm sorry, but people who play sports voluntarily place themselves into the position of maybe being beaten to a pulp. You don't sacrifice the pursuit of excellence just because you feel sorry for people who chose to be in the situation in the first place. All that matters in sport, and life in general, is the pursuit of excellence — being the best, being proud of being the best, and demonstrating that to the world. There is nothing morally wrong with always doing your best. Slacking off is condescending to your opponents, a betrayal to your teammates and fans, and a disgrace to the mission of sports."

Carl paused to see if his speech was having the proper educative effect, which apparently it wasn't. His daughter sat still, head down, turned off to his rhetoric, trying to read the return addresses on the mail aging on the floor.

"Remember, little girl," continued Carl. He emphasized 'little girl' by dragging it out and playing with it demonically. He knew she hated being called 'little girl,' and she despised it even more when he made a point of it. But it always got her attention. "All who compete voluntarily accept the pursuit of excellence as the foundation of sport and, in turn, accept the possibility of being crushed to pieces. For excellence, if that is truly what sports are all about, cannot be stuffed away so easily like unwanted clothing. By not playing hard all the time, sport becomes simply something we play to win. Once the score is high enough, we stop playing because we've already won. Is that what sports and life are all about? Why bother playing if the justification of sport is so arbitrarily based on the situation or the moral background of the players? Excellence as an entity would have no more meaning. What would that be telling us or the world? That excellence isn't the ultimate goal of sports, or competition, or of life itself? That the pursuit of excellence cloaks sport with some intellectual rationale to hide the simple reality that winning is everything.

"As far as I'm concerned," said Carl, breathing more heavily — the speech was taking a lot out of him, "any team that coasts to victory is a bane on the true meaning of sport and excellence."

He looked at his daughter.

"Do you understand what I said?" he asked. She nodded to appease her dad.

"Always do your best," she replied, as she returned to her balled up position with her legs against her chest and wrapped under her jacket. "Never give up. The score doesn't matter. What counts is how you play." She always repeated her dad's little phrases whenever he asked if she understood. All his speeches were pretty much the same and she knew the aphorisms would satisfy her father's question and get her off the hook. She could then be left alone to go back into her own thoughts.

"Fine," Carl said, nodded in understanding and trying to hide his disappointment. He knew she wasn't listening. But he let her think she succeeding in deceiving him. He would try a different tact to penetrate that stubbornness.

"How many points did you score tonight? Do you remember?"

"I don't know," she said, talking into her jacket opening. "I don't care." *Just leave me alone*, she thought.

"You scored 25 points."

"Yeah, so?"

"Think about it. You scored over half of your teams points against not only one of the best teams in the state, but a team that was geared up to stop you from scoring. And you still scored twenty-five points. Considering who you were playing, and how they were playing you, twenty-five points was a great effort. Be proud of yourself."

"But it's no fun losing, no matter how well you play."

Carl smiled. He had drawn her out once again.

"That's true, but it's good to hate losing. It's that hatred that'll drive you forward to bigger and better achievements and successes. Never accepting second best; never thinking that you don't deserve the accolades. People who don't care about winning or losing are essentially losers at heart who can't face the possibility. They rationalize away winning so they don't have to deal with losing. These kind of people get nothing done, expect to receive things they haven't earned, put a drain on others and society, only to end up wasting their lives away without producing a damn thing.

"No, my daughter is not going to be one of those ugly creatures who place all their future hopes on lottery tickets or gambling or dead relatives. Without that urge to win, they

become parasites feeding off the successes of others. Take my advice: Hate losing, and you'll be a winner; hate winning, and you'll always be a loser."

The young woman listening to him remained still and silent. When it was over, she continued her motionless pose, almost as if she were trying to read her dad's mind. She then tilted her head away to stare blindly out the front window while she thought to herself. Carl heard her pensive hum, and became quite proud of himself and his little speech. He was getting good at it, he thought; and this time, he got through. Having said what he had to say, and all that apparently needed to be said, Carl returned to his driving, much easier now after he reached the salted and snow-free main roads.

A few moments later, his daughter spoke up.

"I wish I was more like you, Dad."

Carl puffed his chest out. "How so, dear?"

"Well, it hurts to lose. I wish it didn't hurt. I wish I was numb to the pain."

"NO!"

She would have jumped out of the car at her father's sudden anger if the roof wasn't in the way. Carl's bulging eyes, however, pushed and squeezed her against the door. He quickly stopped the car and pulled to the side of the road.

"No. That's not what I said. Don't you ever mask the pain," said Carl with a voice that chilled the air more than December did. "It is the only thing that makes someone hate."

"I'm sorry," she said automatically.

"Don't be sorry, damn it. Just promise me you'll never become numb to losing."

She relaxed a little thinking he was done.

"Promise me!" he screamed.

"I promise."

She blurted out her pledge in self-defense, and it worked. Her dad calmed down, lowered his shoulders, and began breathing deeper. He looked at his side view mirror and began pulling out on to the road.

"That, my dear, will be the best thing you have ever done." Carl spoke deliberately in an almost sagely voice, as he tried to recapture his monkish serenity. "Become numb to losing, and you might as well give up. There is no more incentive to fight, and your struggle for success dies in vain, with you along with it."

"But it still hurts to lose." She still seemed to be grasping for sympathy.

"Yes it does, and it should. Plus, it's also mixed with anger. You're mad at your teammates, because they didn't pull their own weight. Dragging their ass up and down the

court, playing with the mentality of a loser. Just going through the motions. But you've never done that, and you've always made me proud."

"Like tonight." Carl's voice became more animated. "A classic example. Your team was losing big-time, and everyone gave up. Sloppy passing, half-hearted defense. But not you. You kept fighting. And you fought harder the further down the team sank. I especially liked the time when you charged the basket in the beginning of the second half, and that other girl got in your way. Not only did you get the basket, and the foul, but you were able to sink your elbow into her gut when you fell down together."

"As you said, Dad. Accidents happen."

"Yes, they do."

They smiled at each other. Her spirits lightened.

"In any case," her dad continued, "the athletes and players I respect the most are those who, even when there are losing badly, continue fighting. And when there is no chance of winning, they are still fighting, even harder than before. As Jimmy Stewart once said, and I always liked this line, a lost cause is the only cause worth fighting for. When people hate to lose, they fight hard all the time — and they'll fight even harder when there's more to lose and more at stake because there's more to hate.

"On the other hand, I have no use for those people who, even when they lose, are happy that they played well. Those are the ones who avoid the pain — the ones who rationalize being second best. But there is no second best. You're either the best, or you're not. Those people who try to blur that distinction sicken me. If only more of your team were like you — composed of people who didn't give up in order to alleviate the pain of loss. You need a team which spurs itself on with the possible anguish of losing and fights to the bitter end. Only this type of scrapping and clawing earns the most respect and causes the most fear in opponents. But no matter, you just keep playing your game, and maybe the rest of your teammates will come around. If they don't mind losing, that's fine. But God forbid you ever getting used to losing."

Carl looked at his daughter. She wore a puzzled look.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I thought basketball was a team sport."

Now Carl wore a puzzled look. "Of course it is," he replied.

"Well," she began in a tentative manner, both straining her brow trying to figure out the right way of presenting her argument, and constantly examining her father's face for hints about how he is going to react to it. "If basketball is a team sport, then shouldn't losing, just as much as winning, be a team effort. I mean, this is what Coach told us. Doesn't that

kind of thinking make us all equally responsible? Wouldn't that then inspire teams to, you know, work together more if they know they all going to sink or swim together?"

"Oh, that's crap." Carl hardly restrained his disgust. "How dare she expect you to be responsible for the poor shooting of Barbara. Or the inept passing of Sally. Or how about what's-her-name ... number 15?"

"Brenda."

"Yeah. What about her foul shooting? If it weren't for gravity, she'd miss the Earth. To expect you to be responsible for everyone else's lousy play is ridiculous. Even recruiters have to separate the great players from the poor teams, and they do that only by treating players as individuals."

"But what's all this talk about 'team playing' then?" she asked. Her mind raced trying to salvage something of her coach's philosophy. How could she have any respect for her otherwise?

"Just a euphemism. A team is merely a composite of individuals. The idea that a team is greater than the sum of its parts is a myth."

"But won't that lead to a whole bunch of hot shots hogging the game? If everyone thinks of themselves ... "

"No, no no no." Carl stuck out his finger to cut off his daughter's comments. "That's not what it means. Great players are the ones who don't have to accomplish everything their sport demands — only everything that their *position* demands. That's the difference. A basketball forward, for example, has to know how to work inside, charge the basket, score points, draw fouls, et cetera. But to be a great forward, they also have to know when to pass the ball when they have no shot, how to play defense when other players are caught out of position, how to set picks for another player. The great players even have a keenly developed sixth sense and know where other players are at all times, what they have in mind, and when they are going to act. The great players seem to know what's going on around them even if they don't know anybody. In the end, a forward will do everything, but only those everythings required of them as a forward."

Carl looked into his daughter's blank eyes. She wasn't quite getting it.

"Look," he tried again. "If a football running back, for example, ran with the idea that their teammates were going to make perfect blocks, they would be useless. They would never know what to do when their blocking failed. The great running backs know it's their job to get yardage. If the blocks are there, great. If not, they must adapt or die. They must do what a running back does, whether their teammates succeed or not."

"Take my advice. You are responsible only for your own playing, and that's how it should be. If everyone does their individual best, then the team does its best. If you do your best, excellence is achieved, winning is something to be proud of, and losing is someone else's fault. Always do your best, and you will never have to worry about feeling bad about losing, or ever feel sorry about losing, because it will never be your fault."

"But that's not what coach says," she resisted, although weaker this time. "I wish Coach were here. She could say it better. It always made sense when she talked about teamwork."

"I could care less if your coach was here. She's wrong." Carl began raising his voice. "Now you listen to me. All those great clichés about team work, team effort, and team spirit are just things coaches say because that all they know. They were coached that way, and they will coach you that way. But it's not true. Team playing is too abstract for athletes, and it's certainly not what they're thinking about when they're in the game. They can only comprehend, and only need to comprehend, whatever their position requires. That may involve knowing what the other players are doing, but only in that knowing these things makes you a better player at your position.

"Furthermore, a good team can only be made with good players. The notion that a good team can be constructed from derelicts and misfits is something for the fantasy world of writers and movies. In all my years, I have yet to see that ever happen outside of Hollywood. As far as I'm concerned, it never will. Remember, movies deal with escapism. If this stuff actually happened in the real world, what escapism would movies provide?"

Carl took his eyes off the road and turned his head to look at his daughter. His face solidified. "So you get this idea of team work out of your skull. It'll only make you a poorer player."

An exasperated gasp came from his daughter, almost as if she were holding her breath the entire time he spoke. It caught Carl off guard which irked him.

"What do I tell Coach?" she mumbled.

"You know, I'm getting pretty damn sick of this coach thing." Carl had a thunderous voice which wasn't necessarily loud, but it was dense, and he could bring it out whenever he wanted to. This time he did, and inside the small two seat cab, it was deafening. All around her, the air turned into a thick fluid of sound that weighed upon her and pressed upon her more and more. The wall of sound penetrated her body and filled her head. She didn't need to hear the words. The were becoming part of her, and she couldn't stop it. "Do you tell her everything about us?"

"Well, no ..."

"Then , fine. Don't tell her squat about this. If you do what I say, you'll be a great player, and you'll look like one of those team players. Your coach will be happy as a clam, and never know anything."

He returned his gaze to the double yellow lines. He was finished talking for now, and she felt it. She looked at her dad's profile, yet she couldn't say or think of anything. Her mind stopped working. Yes, she concluded that this was how it would be from now on. This young lady, number 10 on the floor, would go to practice and listen to her coach and effectively ignore all the tripe little sayings. Number 10 would run through the drills and scrimmages and games thinking only of herself, for she no longer thought about the team — the team being non-existent. Number 10 would eventually rise up through the high school ranks to be a great player, wined and dined by a dozen schools, offered scholarships to dozens more. And in the end, Coach would never know number 10 no longer cared about the team or her. Nor would her coach ever know that all the sports philosophy she dutifully explained to the team was worth little more than a maggot-infested pile of dung.

She leaned against the car door. She just watched his face blossom a ghostly white from the on-coming street lights, then instantly disappear leaving only a shadow and a twinkle in his eye where his profile was. It went on for miles. An ashen face would grow from the sparkle in his eye and then go black again and again. She glanced at her father's skin-cracked hands, but still nothing came into her mind. She then rested her forehead on the frigid window and stared at the lifeless trees whizzing by. She realized the cold didn't bother her anymore.

Six

"So, Jesse, what shall we discuss this morning?"

The rain streamed down the window to Dr. Macy's office creating an impressionistic kaleidoscope of the giant oak tree outside flapping briskly in the gusty wind. The clouds were dark that day, accented by an occasional flicker of light and reinforced by a dull subdued rumble passing through the walls. The fluorescent ceiling lights cast a penetrating brightness around the room that made the stormy exterior appear even darker. Yet, oddly enough, it also made the brownish-black bookshelf at the other end of the office, filled with thick and dusty books and bound volumes of journals, seem gloomier — almost as if the light were evaporating from the air the closer it got. Her office was chillier than usual this morning — the air-conditioning worked more efficiently on cloudy days — but the doctor seemed not to notice as she sat in her chair opposite Jesse.

Jesse, on the other hand, who was pondering the strange absence of light near the bookshelf directly opposite his seat on the couch, noticed right away the temperature of the room. The faded blue jeans and short-sleeved shirt (He wore no T-shirt underneath) offered little protection to the cool air mixed with the gloomy dampness. Goose bumps appeared on his arms immediately upon entering the room.

The ward, on the other hand, was rarely cold. It was humid, and the air was filled with a musty odor — a unique combination derived from infrequently vacuumed carpets and furniture saturated with summertime dampness. But mostly it was from the body odor of several dozen patients. Showers are not mandatory on the ward, and many of the patients have either no energy or no desire to cleanse themselves. The medications they consume, including drugs like phenelzine and doxepin, or stronger ones like thiothixene, have this effect. They suppress the life of their victims, and bog down their thoughts in a mind-turned-molasses. Teens who were once vibrant and energetic now walk around slowly, shuffling their feet on the carpet (which kicks additional dust up in the air). Even his lean and muscular body, once full of intensity, was now flabby with a pudgy middle that had difficulty getting out of bed in the morning. The medications slow people's metabolisms

and make them perspire more, so the kids get fatter and sweatier with no inclination to do anything about it. Even if one showers regularly, what few clothes a patient has can't help but stink after soaking up enough sweat.

"Is there anything you would like to talk about, Jesse?"

Jesse also grimaced when he thought about the activity room with its ping-pong and pool tables. He never saw any of the patients playing ping-pong. Few had the motor skills necessary to play the game even without the handicap of being doped up. Occasionally, visitors would pick up a paddle and try to encourage their patient-friends in a game, but it usually ended with the hosts performing ineptly and embarrassing themselves. It is especially disheartening if the patient can still remember through the haze of drugs what it was like to play ping-pong well. Most of the time, the attendants used the ping-pong and pool tables, to the humiliation of the on-lookers. In a different time and a different place, they could have joined in, but it was impossible now. Instead, the patients would just roam around aimlessly and bored and unable to alleviate it.

"Is this is a bad time? We could wait until next week ..."

"No, I'm okay," said Jesse. He had no desire to go back into the ward. At least here, with the doctor, he could talk about and discuss things that no one in the ward cared for or understood. The patients had their own problems, and the attendants had their own problems as well. This doctor, whether she cared or not — and most doctors didn't — had to listen to him. This was his time.

"Are you sure you're all right?" asked Dr. Macy.

"I was just thinking to myself. I'm sorry."

"No problem," she said, being the consummate professional, able to hide her displeasure with Jesse. She was very annoyed that he ignored her. He wasted not only his time but hers as well. But other things were consuming her time as well. She could live with the staff inspections — they were part of her job description. However, the national accreditation board arrives in a couple of weeks, so she has to prepare reports — one justifying her position and research staff, one for the child psychology clinic. Inevitably someone else will demand a review. What a pain in the neck.

"Then there's Dr. Earnhart's Resources Committee for the hospital," she thought to herself, "half-filled with men spouting vacuous promises of love and divorcing their wives if only I would go to bed with them." The worst of the bunch, according to Dr. Macy, was Earnhart himself, a paunchy man with a poorly trimmed beard hiding his acne-scarred face. "How romantic," she continued her musings, "and how asinine. Do they think I am that naïve? At the very least, if they are so willing to leave their wives now, what prevents

them from leaving me later? Of course, the other half of the committee consists of jealous and embittered women who wish they were the center of attention. Isn't anyone satisfied with their lot in life?"

She had no time for this interpersonal game-playing and social politics. Little of it would have helped her career. She wanted to get back into her computer to finish her article for *Child Psychology* dealing with the distinctions and relationships between mental illness and Attention Deficit Disorder. In the brown envelope on her desk is a NSF grant application and at home are materials for NIH, both of which she needs to get out soon. Her current funding will end at the end of next year, and the government review process and bureaucracy takes at least 10 months. Her throat tightened at the thought of the approaching deadline. She doesn't want to postpone her vacation in Arizona. She desperately needed the break.

She had always loved the mountains and trees; she also demanded solitude during her time-off and wanted nothing to do with tourist traps. So at a conference at Flagstaff, while all the other participants hopped into their rental cars and caravaned north to see the Grand Canyon along with thousands of other tourists, Dr. Macy spoke about her preferences to one of the hotel maids. The maid, a Navaho woman named Nioki, directed her south to a little place off of Highway 209.

After turning off the highway and driving along some winding back roads, she reached the end of Rockledge Road. Following the maid's instructions, she got out of her car and hiked southeast for about a half-mile. Shortly, she arrived at a spot which made her stop and smile. She stood on the shore of Mormon Lake, looked across its cold, steel-like reflections, and saw snow-capped Hutch Mountain in the distance. She sucked in the dry chill air and said to herself, "Yes. This is where I want to be." Since then, she had saved her money and had meticulously arranged her schedule to clear out a block of time in her life for a return trip. Finally, all that planning paid off and she was able to swing a vacation out there this coming fall. She looked forward to it, almost pathologically.

"Doctor?" Jesse's voice startled her. "Are you thinking to yourself as well?"

Dr. Macy reddened realizing she herself was day-dreaming. She lifted her pen, crossed her legs, and readjusted the note pad on her thigh.

"I'm sorry," she said. "That was very unprofessional." She looked down at her notes from the previous session.

"That's okay," said Jesse. "I'm sure we would both rather be elsewhere than here." Then with a verbal wink, he added, "Perhaps camped around some mountain lake?"

Macy's head snapped up. She leaned forward and peered warily at Jesse. Her patient sat nonchalant in the couch with a nondescript smile on his lips, yet somehow satisfied with himself about his comment. "How does he know?" was her initial thought. But she dismissed that. She determined that it must have been a coincidence. "Many people like traveling to the mountains for rest and recreation. It was just a lucky guess," she concluded, though not absolutely.

She regained her composure and sat back on her chair. She was about ready to speak when Jesse spoke for her.

"I suppose you want to talk about the dream?"

She closed her mouth. Jesse went on.

"That's what all the other psychologists went over in their second interview."

Dr. Macy laid her pen in her lap and folded her hands over it.

"Is that so?" she said. Dr. Macy was intrigued by what other psychologists have done — but more importantly, what they have failed to accomplish in doing it. After all, Jesse was still hospitalized. Apparently, their techniques were unsuccessful. She made a mental note to herself, not to do it *their* way.

"Oh, yes. They asked me whether or not the water was poisoned — which, of course, it wasn't. Hell, no one else was affected. That seemed pretty obvious." Macy silently agreed. "Then they suggested that maybe it was the dehydration which brought on the delusions. What did one call them? Narcoleptic seizures, he said. I was somehow more sensitive to water and mineral loss, he concluded. After the doctor guessed at that, they ran me through a whole battery of tests. You know — CAT scans, MRIs, ultrasounds, EEGs, cerebral arteriograms, the entire gamut. Not surprising, everything came up normal."

"Except for the EEGs if I recall from your file," said Dr. Macy.

"Except for the EEG." Jesse sighed. He remembered that night vividly. He was lying on a cot, his skull wired with sensors, in a sparsely furnished room within the university sleep research department. On the wall a large darkly tinted glass window behind which the university researchers monitored his readings. The doctors wanted to get a baseline sleep and REM sleep EEG. Everything was normal, until his brain waves flatlined. "That was a nightmare."

"I can imagine."

"No, you can't." Jesse jerked himself up to the edge of the couch, furious. "You have no idea what it's like to be awakened by a defibrillator ripping your heart out of your rib cage. And then to sit by helpless for days as the university physicians give you more injections, cut out little parts of your body for biopsies, and perform a spinal tap, all while

anonymous people in white coats sipping coffee and sitting around a nicely polished cherry wood table in some private office, seriously consider a lobotomy as a viable solution to my problems." Jesse breathed slower and tension eased out of his body. "Once my parents put their names to the hospital admission forms, they signed away all my dignity. You have no idea of the pain and suffering and humiliation I endured completely powerless to persuade the doctors to leave me alone."

Jesse sniffled slightly as a tear streaked down his face. Dr. Macy, too, felt a tingle in her nose. She coughed, and then took a deep breath.

"I'm sorry that happened to you, Jesse," said the doctor.

"Everyone's sorry. But none of the apologies have yet erased the memories. On the other hand, I'm sure many of the doctors who treated me are sleeping quite well at night, having forgotten all about Jesse Strich. Soon, maybe, you too will forget me."

"I would like to think I won't," she said.

Jesse nodded in sympathy, knowing that Dr. Macy said just what people were supposed to say. Dr. Macy felt uncomfortable with her etiquette so easily exposed. For even then, her earliest cases had started blurring together. Individual distinctions had become less defined and more intertwined with each other. She had to admit, at least to herself, that given enough time, Jesse's prediction would probably be fulfilled. She cleared her throat and changed the subject.

"Instead of analyzing your first dream episode," she began "why don't we reserve judgment for now and continue on to the second dream. You were at school, weren't you? What happened that day?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Well, nothing as dramatic as the last time. It was just a regular day at school. Nothing special happened."

"I'd still like to hear about it from you."

Jesse sank back into the enveloping cushions of the couch. "Fine."

* * *

At the very end of Collard Street was a chain-link fence which cut the road off before it reached a cul-de-sac at the top of a hill around the entrance to Lynvern High School — a long, flat, brick-faced building with a bulge on each end and containing three thousand ninth through twelfth graders. The left side bulge was the gymnasium, with the school

mascot black bear emblazoned on the middle of the basketball court; on the right side, the auditorium, with its velvet curtains and thinning velour covered theater seats. In the middle of the building, glass walls rose up to form a second story behind the entrance letting light into the main foyer of the school. Polished red brick pavers lined the floor of the foyer which quickly reverted to a more traditional black-flecked white linoleum tile in the school's hallways. Located to the right side of the entrance were the main offices (visible through the glass front) with its full complement of secretaries, the guidance offices (located on both sides of a hallway behind the wall where the wall clock and staff mail boxes were), the nurse's office nestled in a room at the far end of the office, and the duplication/computer technology room on the opposite side of the office from the nurse. Directly above these offices, via a spacious oak wood spiral staircase or elevator, were the principal's and vice-principal's offices, each one with a large glass wall allowing its occupants to look over and down upon the interior foyer.

On the left side of the foyer was the library, filled with two floors of books; the top floor extended over the two hallways leading into the classroom area on this side of the building. In the library, aside from its tens of thousands of books, were the television lab, computer/multimedia center, video viewing room, two seminar rooms, as well as a small research center where honor students volunteer to teach and assist other students with research projects.

Directly across the foyer from the entrance was the cafeteria, tiled with white-flecked black linoleum, and surrounded by glass walls. 'Bears Rule' was painted in black on the glass panels flanking the cafeteria doors. To the right, upon entering, were two solitary doors leading to the stainless-steel kitchen facilities and food lines. To the left, hanging halfway up the glass, was the massive Lynvern High School banner made of black and white felt trimmed with red, which was removed only for homecoming and graduation. In the middle of the cafeteria was a small but substantial arboretum encircled by a well-manicured hedge atop a knee-high stone wall. And fifty yards beyond the glass wall straight ahead at the back of the building, and down a small embankment, lie the athletic fields: soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey, the fenced in baseball diamonds for baseball and softball, and in the distance, dug into a small valley, rests the football stadium, its bleachers barely visible through the trees.

Just before one enters the cafeteria, there is a hallway on the left which leads into the classroom section of the school. Hundreds of lockers colored with a dull sky-blue paint lined both sides of the hallway. The floor still had some shine left from the summer wax job, despite almost a month of student traffic. The halls were deserted, except for the

occasional roaming administrator, and the hall monitors — seniors who volunteered their study hall time — sitting in chair/desk combinations at certain points around the building, reading or doing their homework, and dutifully waiting to check hall passes.

Walking past one of the monitors squirming in their seats, a person realizes how these chair/desks always seemed so ridiculously small. In fact, it had always seemed silly that the available student desk space shrinks the further along in education one advances. In elementary school, the desks are spacious, with convenient room under the desk top for books and materials. In high school, the desk has shrunk to less than half that size, hardly enough room for a sheet of paper, with books being shoved under the chair. It became virtually impossible to follow the text and write notes at the same time. University lecture halls possess even smaller desk tops, ones that hide away into an unobtrusive slot next to the seat.

Continue beyond the hall monitor and turn left at the second intersecting hallway. There, one finds the math wing. The third classroom on the right is where Jesse Strich studies Freshman Geometry. Peeking through the narrow window in the heavy metal door to the room, one could see chalkboards lining three walls. In the upper left corner of the room, there is a closed door leading into the teacher's common area which runs between all the math classrooms in the wing. At the front of the class, just barely visible above the heads of the twenty or so students taking notes, stood Mrs. Dangrass, a short stocky woman (even in ninth grade, Jesse's shoulders reached the top of this woman's head) with pure white hair and wrinkles slowly etching themselves into her face.

On the board were the beginnings of one of the many proofs and theorems the class will learn throughout the course of the school year. Basic theorems like parallel lines never cross or the notion of the straight line (which never bends) that work fine in Euclidian geometry but not in Einstein's, where gravity warps the fabric of space so that straight lines do bend and parallel lines do intersect. However, none of the students thought to bring up these little quirks of natural law, a view of the world which seems to contradict a different view of the world. Perhaps a discussion might then have ensued exploring the contention that different world views require different evidence to prove certain truths, leading the students to the conclusion that truths are not always and everywhere true, and that different world views hold different truths to be self-evident. This, in turn, may have led to a discussion on multiculturalism and that tolerance must be the preferred form of interaction between cultures so different truths and different world views could be understood, reconciled, and assimilated.

But this didn't happen. A math class is strictly for math, and cultural awareness is to be left for another time. Of course, if the above observations actually took place, the students may have realized that the educational practice of compartmentalizing knowledge is also based on a particular world view which may or may not be the only one or the best way in all circumstances. Alas, another learning moment lost.

Fortunately for Jesse Strich, it was a moment about which he probably won't worry. In the third row lies a vacant desk five seats back from the front. On it rests an open math book with a pencil resting in the middle and a spiral bound notebook on top of that. This is Jesse's seat, but he isn't in the class. He left a few moments earlier to go to the bathroom. He got up from his chair, grabbed the laminated bathroom hall pass hanging on a hook next to the door, and took a left outside the door. He crossed over the main hallway into an adjacent hallway where the bathrooms were. Inside, he met Tom Sundy, one of his former Little League teammates.

"Hey Jesse. Got the my page, I see."

"Course."

Tom Sundy was a brawny, blond haired kid in need of a hair cut and sporting the beginnings of a pot belly. He had his own cellular phone given to him by his dad. Tom's dad and mom recently separated and were in the process of getting divorced. Though Tom lived with his mother, she insisted that his father get him a cellular phone in case she couldn't pick him up at school since, as a nurse, her schedule could be unpredictable. She could then contact Tom and let him know she would not be home on time and that he should go to his cousin Phil's house and wait there.

Tom found another use for the cellular phone. He suggested to some of his friend that they get pagers. Then he could call them together into the bathroom occasionally. Convincing parents to get pagers was easy. Most thought a pager would be a convenient way of staying in touch with their kids. Naturally, their sons agreed to wear one, after feigning some weak opposition to its discomfort.

A grunt came from one of the stalls. "Who else is here?" whispered Jesse, not wanting to be heard by any teachers roaming the halls.

"Bill's on the toilet right now..."

"What the hell's he doing there?"

"You know," spoke up Bill Vernon from behind the stall door, "some people go to the bathroom to go to the bathroom."

"... and Lou was paged as well," continued Tom. "Hopefully, he's on his way."

At that moment, a tall, thin boy with curly reddish-brown hair walked in. He wore a flannel shirt that appeared a size too big and tight jeans barely extended to his ankle. He wore no socks under his shoes. Tom smiled.

"Hey, Lou."

"We all here?" he replied.

"We're all here," Tom said.

Lou screwed up his nose in revulsion. "What's that stench?"

"That's probably Bill ... doing his thing."

"Man, what did you eat?"

"Your shit don't smell like roses either, you know," said Bill. The toilet flushed.

"You make it a point to smell his shit, Bill?" said Jesse. Everyone chuckled.

"Kiss mine," Bill said as he exited the stall. Everyone laughed again. Bill had short feathery black hair and a large body, slowly turning to the flabby side. After baseball season ends, he plops himself down in front of his computer screen and games his hours away. The inactivity and his puberty is making him plump. He was becoming more nearsighted as well. He washed his hands in the sink, but there was no soap in the dispenser. He wiped his hands dry on his jeans, because there were no paper towels either.

"Jesse, how's geometry?"

"Same as always. Ms. Crabgrass saying prove this, prove that. What a waste. Anyway, did you get the stuff?"

"Right here." Lou pulled out from under his shirt a small canister. "Compu-Dust they call it. It cleans dust off of computer parts. It's got this chloro ... floro ... something or other in it."

"Who cares what's in it," interjected Bill. "Let's have some."

"Who brought the bag?"

Each of the boys looked at each other and shook their heads dumbly.

"You morons," said Lou. "Didn't anyone bring a bag? Now how the hell are we going to get high?"

"Well," Jesse suggested, "it's not glamorous, but we could use the toilet. That's pretty enclosed."

"That's gross," said Tom, cringing at the thought.

Jesse snapped back. "You got a better idea?"

Tom had none, so remained mute. Jesse grabbed the can, placed the small red plastic tube in the nozzle. He walked into the far stall, the one for wheelchairs, dropped the seat,

kneeled over the bowl, and with his arms tried to seal all the gaps around his head. Underneath the seat, Jesse slid the tube and, while breathing deeply, filled the interior of the bowl with a sweet-smelling, cold and intoxicating chemical.

The other guys waited outside the stall for Jesse to get his buzz.

"Hey, did you guys see Sue Wilson today yet?" said Lou.

"No. What's up?"

"Half the men in the school," he replied, chuckling at his innuendo. "According to some of the girls I know, her bra broke during gym class first period, so underneath that white T-shirt, she's not wearing anything. Everyone's talking about how they're bouncing around. I've even heard some of the upperclassmen are planning to douse her in water outside during lunch."

"She's got the biggest tits in the ninth grade," said Bill.

"Yeah. And she knows it, too. God, the way she struts them around," Tom said, dreamily.

"She must like giving people hard-ons," said Lou. "Boy, I'd love to have them wrapped around my face."

Overhearing the conversation, Jesse, his face slightly flushed and grinning devilishly, stepped out of the stall. "I'd love to have her mouth wrapped around m—"

Just then, another boy entered the bathroom. Neither Jesse nor his three friends knew who he was except that this kid was probably the smallest ninth grader in school. The group shut up and milled about aimlessly. The kid timidly advanced towards one of urinals, his well-groomed coal black hair starkly framing a face slowly turning white. As the boy passed by, Jesse and his friends winked to each other.

The boy's large nose sniffed nervously and his receding chin trembled. He was having trouble urinating. His heart pounded too much and his body stiffened — and for good reason. As Lou went to the hallway door to act as a lookout, Tom snuck up behind the poor boy and wrapped his hand over the boy's mouth. Jesse and Bill quickly encircled the kid, who was now frantically trying to put his penis back into his pants but didn't have time. Jesse and Bill each grabbed one of the kid's arms preventing him from doing so.

Jesse whispered into the kid's ear as they moved him away from the urinal. "You make any noise, any noise at all, and you'll know how it feels to break your nose against a toilet."

"Hey, let's use mine," said Bill.

"Good idea," said Jesse, "but not enough room."

The three dragged the hapless victim into the handicap stall, his eyes exploding in fear, his penis still flapping outside his pants.

Jesse menaced the kid. "You ever been swirled? It's a wonderful experience."

They forced the boy down to his knees. Jesse continued his threatening tone.

"And if you tell anyone about this, anyone at all, we'll come after you."

"Have you ever had your locker filled with glue and shampoo?" whispered Bill.

"Ever have your underwear filled with roaches?" said Tom.

"We'll find you in school, and we'll find you outside of school," said Jesse.

"And we can't get in trouble outside of school, either," said Tom, still with his hand covering the boy's mouth. "We can cause you so much pain, you'd wish you shut your mouth, if you could still use it."

The boy's body wracked with convulsions, crying uncontrollably.

"Hey," said Tom, "you're getting snot on my hands." He removed his hand and wiped it roughly on the side of the kid's face. Then the three slowly shoved the kid's head into the toilet bowl until his nose was just above the level of the water.

"Hold your breath," said Jesse.

Then Bill pushed the lever and the toilet filled with with spinning water completely covering the boy's face. Tom put both hands on the back of the kid's pitifully squirming head to keep it from coming up.

As the water slowly descended, the boy began coughing and snivelling. Then, the three noticed a small yellow pool of urine around the boy's knees.

"Ew, gross!" said Jesse.

They released their hold on the boy and deftly stepped around the urine. Once outside the stall, Tom turned around and shoved his finger into the back of the boy's head.

"And you remember what we told you. Otherwise, you'd wish all you had was a swirly."

They began walking out of the bathroom.

"What was so gross?" asked Lou.

"He pissed on himself," replied Jesse, with a laugh. The rest smiled gleefully.

"Wish he pissed in the toilet first," said Lou.

"Yeah. That would've been a nice touch," said Jesse, as they all filed out of the room. From behind, they could still hear the humiliated boy's stifled torment continuing — of how he could possibly clean the urine from his pants, or face the embarrassment of soiling himself?

* * *

At this point, Jesse's narrative stopped. He sat in the couch waiting for Dr. Macy to finish writing her notes.

"And that's all that you can remember, right Jesse?" asked Dr. Macy, as she looked up from her notebook.

"Yes, except for fuzzy images and vague movements."

"So, everything that happened from that moment to the moment you leave the bathroom the second time you've only heard from other people's accounts of the events, correct?"

"That's right," Jesse said. "Look, I've admitted that it probably happened. In fact, I have no doubt that it happened."

"Well, that's fine, but let's try to piece it together ..."

"Oh, not again." Jesse threw up his hands in frustration and disgust. "I told you I don't remember anything. That's not going to change."

"Maybe, but humor me." Dr. Macy remained calm. "Psychologists are stubborn creatures, and we always hope that this time will be the time we break through." She smiled. "Don't worry. I'll help you through."

Jesse couldn't help but smirk at her comment. *I've heard that before*, he thought. "Why are you only concerned with what happened? I know how and why it happened, but no one seems to care about that part."

"One step at a time."

"You don't care either. You don't believe me."

"I want to believe you, Jesse," she said, but even she herself wasn't sure if it was a lie. She had responded that way so many times, it sounded hollow to her. Still, she said it, because it did work to bring out compliance in her patients. "But you must convince me. And to do so, we have to go through all the steps that led you here. Without a credible history, I have little in which to ground my belief. So please, bear with me."

Jesse stared into Dr. Macy's eyes. Something inside of him suppressed his skepticism. "Maybe you'll be different," he said. Jesse relaxed, but Dr. Macy's stomach tightened as she swallowed a pang of guilt..

"Well, if you truly want to believe me," Jesse went on, "then I'll do it. But this will be the last time."

* * *

As his friends returned to class, they never noticed Jesse standing frozen in the hallway just outside the bathroom door. Rigidly, as if his knees were locked, he turned around and hobbled back into the bathroom — all the while his head twitched and his vision vacated his eyes.

In the bathroom, Johnny Steinman sat on the toilet quietly crying, his face resting in his hands, his pant's crotch and knees still damp from the urine. He was miserable, not only because he was humiliated, but because he would have to explain this humiliation to his father and mother.

His parents had heard too many stories of Johnny being pushed around, wedgied, shaken down, and occasionally beaten up. He was short and anemic with jaundice-looking skin, thin, almost anorexic, with no muscle tone. He walked around timid and afraid because other people walked over and through him. He was always shoved into lockers; his locker door would often be slammed into his fingers as he reached for his supplies. His books were knocked out of his arms and kicked around the floor. He would be constantly late for classes after gathering up his scattered and trampled belongings. And the most amazing thing about his school existence was that almost all of these events were accidental.

So, if his books were bumped out, no one helped. If he was shoved into a locker, no one noticed. If he was beaten up, no one cared. He looked insignificant, people treated him that way, and eventually, that's the way he thought of himself. He had no existence.

His father and mother, however, were unpersuaded by his pleadings to be released from Lynvern to be sent to Aviest, a local private school where some of his chess buddies attended. It wouldn't have been a financial hardship for the family; since both his mother and father were corporate attorneys, they had more than enough money for tuition. Instead, they claimed that running away from the problem was no cure. Johnny had to learn to stick up for himself, to make his presence known and respected. This coming from a father who went to a Hebrew academy and told his friends that he wasn't going to pay twice, through taxes and tuition, for the same education; and a mother who was nominated in her graduation yearbook as most likely to succeed and most popular. "If public education worked for me," she commented once to Johnny, "it will work for you as well." Johnny shook his head in disbelief at how many adults think time has stopped since they were young, that institutions remained the same with only different faces involved, and yet at the same time wax nostalgic for a past that no longer exists.

His father brought him to the Tai Kwon Do center at the Plainville Mall. Tightly-packed trophies lined the store front window. The master was third-degree black belt John

Grady, a brawny and hairy man of unremarkable intellect, but with a knack for marketing. It was later disclosed several months later during depositions, when he and his martial arts studio was investigated for tax evasion and fraud, that he had bought many of those trophies himself.

But Johnny and all the other students and parents there at the time never knew that. They trained dutifully and strenuously in the Japanese art of self-defense. They learned their katas and techniques; they broke boards and sparred. And after the first few months of training, and especially after passing the yellow belt test, Johnny did feel more significant.

But all that meant nothing to Johnny now, squatting on the seat surrounded by the rank odor of piss. Master Grady will dismiss him as a failure. His father will castigate him for the money wasted on his lessons. And his mother will do nothing at all.

But he had earned that yellow belt, and he felt good about it. He had to redeem himself, but what could he do?

Nothing.

The stall door was closed, but he forgot to throw the latch. Jesse, who had weaved through the bathroom in a daze, jerked the door open, banging it against the wall bumper. It rebounded against his arm, but it had no effect. Jesse grabbed the top of the door and stumbled into the stall with the now horrified kid.

"I won't tell anyone. I swear."

Johnny noticed Jesse's blank stare and immediately thought the worst. He had imagined that this was the way crazed homicidal maniacs looked before they mutilated their victims. Glassy eyed, oblivious to reality, a mind and body possessed by insanity.

Jesse approached him, slowly and awkwardly, his muscles struggling and rebelling to perform even the simplest movements.

"Don't kill me. Please!" Johnny stood up and fell back against the wall, his legs straddling the toilet. His hand raised up to protect against any blows or knife attacks. His face and neck tensed up as his body slid down the tile wall. He was beyond shaking, his fear being so great. His eyelids crushed together.

Yet nothing happened.

For over a minute, Johnny, heart thumping furiously inside his chest, waited and agonized for Jesse's next move. But nothing came. He unsealed his eyes and looked up at Jesse. Jesse was hesitating, teetering above the boy. Jesse's head dipped forward and his eyes regained some of its focus as he looked at a terrified kid with wet pants, a shirt soaked

with tears, sweat, and toilet water, his back against the wall of a bathroom stall, praying he'll live long enough to hear the class bell.

Jesse's mouth moved to speak but out of it came such an indescribably hideous gnarling rasp that the young man thought this was the moment when the ice pick appears and is plunged into his skull, again and again.

Unconsciously, Johnny screamed and filled the bathroom with its blood-curdling echo. He didn't want to do it. It might have set-off this madman to kill him sooner. On the other hand, if someone heard it, he might be saved. Unfortunately, at the exact same time, due to some fluke combined twist of contingency and fate, a teeth-chattering buzz went off. The school fire alarm sounded, drowning out the scream and preventing anyone outside the bathroom from hearing it.

Distraught, the young teen cursed his dumb luck and, beaten once and for all by the whims of fate, realized he was doomed to die — and there was again nothing he could do. Soon, the school will be empty of students and he would be left to die all alone, bleeding to death in a pool of his own piss. He collapsed into distress and blubbered inconsolably. Jesse still growled, but never moved. Unfortunately, the young boy was not coherent enough to hear Jesse's guttural voice evolve slowly from its inchoate rasping to a meaningful sound.

"Aaaagghhellpp."

Wait. There was hope. Johnny's spirit soared when he realized that his teacher will come looking for him in the bathroom. It was only a matter of time before he'll be rescued. He had to survive for just a few moments longer. His renewed hope inspired him to talk and stall for time.

"Why do you want to kill me?" he asked.

But Jesse didn't understand. Instead, his mouth contorted trying to speak clearly.

"H-hellp."

"Did he say help?" Johnny thought.

Jesse staggered down to his knees on the bathroom floor. He reached for the toilet paper and unrolled dozens of sheets. He then picked up the tissues and began wiping the urine stain off the floor. The paper quickly shredded apart, but Jesse still wiped the floor, getting his hands covered with pee.

Though dumbfounded, Johnny was overjoyed at this delay. *Probably a pre-murder ritual*, he concluded. Thinking fast, he pulled more paper from the roll and gingerly handed it to Jesse. Jesse never acknowledged the offer nor raised his head. Mechanically, he continued wiping the floor with his bare hands. The boy dropped the tissues on the

floor in front of Jesse, directly in the path of the hands. Jesse grabbed the paper and continued cleaning up the mess. Jesse uttered another growl.

"Thu-ank youh."

But Jesse didn't see or hear any of this. He had no clue what he was doing. At this moment, his mind floated in a mental sea of fog and mist. He felt disembodied, having no connection with any part of his body. The best description he could come up with was that he was experiencing pure thought, existing in some psychic fourth dimension apart from all reality.

After a while, he began hearing noises, but didn't know from where they originated or what they were. Were they voices? Maybe, but by this time Jesse was panicking, and had little interest in garbled voices. It was happening all over again. The dizziness, the swirling colors, the lack of physical sensation. He thought he was heading back to the green field, the sunshine, the fresh air, and to Catiana.

But it didn't happen this time. He stayed in limbo, yet he had no idea how long it was. The longer he remained, however, the noises began to coalesce and he started making some sense of them. He determined that they were voices. But he still wasn't sure if they — whoever *they* were — were talking to him, or to someone else. He couldn't even be certain if it wasn't he himself who was talking.

The amorphous mass of wet colors slowly took shape as well. Yet, what little he could discern, it looked nothing like the tree-lined park of his former dreams. It looked flat, without depth, maybe even square and antiseptic. It seemed bright but a dull glow of artificial lighting rather than the sun. It seemed more like a white-painted room than the open expanse of outdoors. Yet it never did get much clearer.

So through it all, the screams and the fire alarm, the wiping of the floor, Jesse heard and saw and felt nothing.

Johnny's mind, however, raced through abundant possibilities to escape. Johnny, seeing Jesse kneeling on the floor and arguably insane, wondered if he could just jump on his back, and run over him out the door. But that would be too cowardly he thought, becoming braver the longer Jesse cleaned the tile.

"Maybe a kick in the head? That would feel good, especially after what he did to me. But that would just have him fall backwards. Getting around him would still be a problem. Plus, he'd be real mad. I might be just as dead, and a lot sooner."

Johnny decided to jump on Jesse's back. "Better a live coward than a dead hero," he said to justify his choice. He began to climb up on the porcelain bowl when he heard a voice in the room.

"Anyone in here?"

A teacher. Johnny wasn't sure who, but he didn't care. His heart surged with ecstasy, and swelled with new-found hope. He looked down at Jesse, undaunted by the teacher's presence and still mindlessly swishing the saturated tissues around. Hatred consumed Johnny as he claimed his redemption.

"I'm free, you bastard."

Supporting himself by placing his right hand the wall, his left clenching the top of the stall and his left foot stable on the toilet seat, Johnny sent his right foot into Jesse's face. The foot, monstrosly powered with vile revengeful malevolence, crushed Jesse's nose and sent his head snapping back and his body reeling upwards and backwards through the stall door.

Already the blood flowed profusely into Jesse's mouth and down his chin on to the floor. Jesse's body fell out of the stall, his skull hitting the floor underneath the sinks with a thump. He screamed in pain. His hands, still covered with urine-drenched tissues, wrapped his face.

Johnny ran out of the stall, being careful to step on Jesse's crotch along the way. Jesse once again bellowed in agony.

The teacher, standing in the bathroom doorway, the fire alarm blaring in the hallway, watched in shock at the scene. He saw Johnny running out of the stall towards him.

"What the hell happened?"

"He tried to kill me!" yelled Johnny, pointing to Jesse, now groaning piteously and balled up on his side. One hand was squeezed between his legs cupping his testicles while the other hand, covered with a combination of blood, urine, and shreds of tissue, held what was left of his nose together.

* * *

"As soon as that kid smashed my nose, I came to."

"And what happened after that?" asked Dr. Macy. "Do you know?"

"Well, they didn't believe that kid's story that I tried to kill him, especially not after he admitted that I was cleaning up urine on the floor and, therefore, posed no threat. They suspended him for two weeks for fighting on school grounds pending a disciplinary hearing. He never attended Lynvern after that. I heard that he went to a private school. But there's more to the story."

Dr. Macy raised her forehead. "There is?"

"Of course," replied Jesse, smiling. "For several days after the incident, Johnny adamantly denied that he beat me up, perhaps afraid of further repercussions. But when he saw the respect and adulation he received from his friends and peers, he accepted the lie — slowly embellishing the story until he actually fought me and all three of my friends as well. The suspension, rather than a black mark on his record, became his ticket to self-respect — a badge of distinction. It made him a somebody. His father and mother both looked at their son in a new light after he finally stood up for himself. They granted his request to attend Aviest. His suspension was overlooked by the admissions committee with the help of one of his mother's corporate clients.

"As far as I know, he's doing quite well. He is academically successful, a member of the Math League, and co-captain of the Chess Club, has grown a few more inches, and has become relatively popular. All this because he broke my nose."

Jesse chuckled to himself. "Isn't it ironic that our society often rewards and nurtures violence, even though ostensibly it throws people in prison, because there are at least two types of violence. Common violence and state-sanctioned violence. And the difference is easy to demonstrate. Beat up someone on the streets, and you're arrested for assault and battery. However, add a canvas tarp, three ropes, and a referee, and it becomes a sport people will pay millions to watch."

"But Jesse," interjected Dr. Lacy, "in the former example, victims are unwilling participants. Athletes volunteer."

"Yes, that's commonly said," said Jesse. "But is it true? I cannot speak for the mentality of the athletes who voluntarily wish to have their brains scrambled. Perhaps they want to scramble someone else's brain. But that's violence. Perhaps these boxers need this sport as an avenue out of their wretched environment — but that's indicative of the violence perpetrated upon them by social conditions. Perhaps they learn to box to survive the streets. Anyway you look at it, they have no choice but to be violent.

"I'm sorry, Jesse," said Dr. Macy, shaking her head in a way that seems as if she were sorry to correct him, "but there are other, more civilized way to escape social malaise."

"If that is true," said Jesse, his voice becoming firmer, his breathing and pulse quickening, "and people need not have to butcher humanity and other humans in the process to socially advance, then what is actually happening is that people *want* to be violent, they *wish* to be violent, they *like* violence. People fall over themselves and stand in line waiting for the wonderful opportunity to voluntarily hurt someone ... just to play a game."

Jesse stared right at Dr. Macy, and her closed silent mouth. Dr. Macy's mind spun, however, through possible rejoinders to his statements but nothing seemed adequate, though she didn't try very hard. Deep down, she intuitively felt he was right. Jesse went on.

"Is this how we want, in a civilized society, to classify our enlightened twenty-first century American population to ourselves and our progeny? That hundreds of thousands of Americans died all across the globe just so we can beat each other to a pulp at home? You must recall the Vietnam protests, and especially the Chicago DNC riots, where people engaging in non-violent protest were battered with batons and billy clubs by police. Scenes you'd expect from a third-world dictatorship occurring in our own home, and splashed across America on the nightly news. And nowadays, supposedly non-violent methods of crowd control are available. Foam, in which people have suffocated, and mace and pepper spray, with which people have died from excessive inhalation, are just two of the methods used today. Again, the ironies abound. Here we have a substance, mace, designed and used to subdue violent criminals and protect people from rapists and muggers, used by police carrying other deadly weapons on people doing absolutely nothing to fight back. Unfortunately, I do not find the use of torture against individuals engaged in acts of free speech and social conscience conducive to promoting freedom. Perhaps others do.

"But in any case, people can't really be blamed for loving violence so much. After all, people wouldn't be so violent unless they were forced to be or there was something to be gained by being violent."

"Yes, prison sentences," said Dr. Macy with added emphasis, awoken from her ruminations and slowly tuning Jesse out of her mind. His political activism, though quaint and clearly impassioned, wasted her time, and she started dreaming again of Mormon Lake.

"As I mentioned before," said Jesse, seemingly thrilled by the interruption, "there are two types of violence. Those who go to jail are the ones who were caught doing social unacceptable acts. On the other hand, socially-sanctioned violence rewards successful individuals with prestige, high self-esteem, recognition, money, and power. Think about it. Violence rewards television advertisers with an audience for their products, which hopefully will make them and their shareholders wealthy. Political leaders reward the police for quickly and efficiently clearing out protesters which hamper businesses and productivity, which in turn hampers the collection of campaign funds. Clearly, violence rewards the military-industrial complex. Did you know that military manufacturers willingly sell advanced weaponry to other countries — often not our allies — just so they

can come back to the Pentagon with the argument, 'Since your enemies have these advanced weapons, you need to pay us billion of dollars more so we can produce a more advanced weapon to counter this new threat.' Neat how it works, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's all very neat Jesse," said Dr. Macy, impatiently. She had had enough. "But none of this is relevant to the issue at hand, now is it?"

Jesse's face sagged with disappointment and disbelief. "Not relevant? Understanding violence not relevant?"

"Not to the issue at hand, Jesse, which is you." Dr. Macy sounded more polite this time. The control of the discussion slowly returned to her and she could now better pace her comments.

"Did none of that mean anything to you?"

"If you don't mind," said Dr. Macy, ignoring the comment, "I'd like to continue..."

"I do mind." Jesse's eyes shimmered with moisture. "People have been dismissing my comments far too long. Ignoring what I say, instead of intelligently discussing the merits of the arguments. But because I am so impassioned by this subject, it seems like I ought to be avoided even more. People — and I have found this out the hard way — have no interest in changing their views. They have been taught simply to tolerate others views and perspectives, but never to actively engage with them. Pundits teach us tolerance, but rarely comprehension."

"Jesse, we can talk all you want about violence and war and that kind of stuff, but in this room during this therapy session, it solves nothing." Dr. Macy, though outwardly calm, found his impertinence annoying, if not laced with a bit of sour grapes. "It just wastes your time, and my time, and keeps you in this place at least a week longer."

"But I need to convince you." Jesse sounded contrite, and he was.

"Yes, of your mental sanity. But not of your political views."

"But they are one in the same."

Dr. Macy cleared her throat after feeling a twinge in her chest. She avoided eye contact with Jesse by fiddling with her papers.

"And what about you, Jesse?" asked Dr. Macy, talking into her lap. "What happened to you after the incident?"

Jesse looked at her for a while waiting for her eyes to re-appear. When they did, there was no connection left in them. She had completely shut him off, and his views were being slowly forgotten, even this soon. "And to think she might have helped," he thought.

She still can, Jesse, replied a mental voice only Jesse heard. Don't give up. She needs time to learn and understand, just like you did.

"I'm tired," thought Jesse.

I know you are. But did you actually believe that she would accept us so quickly?

"I had hoped."

Keep hoping. It's for everyone's sake, as well as her's. The voice evaporated from his mind.

"I didn't remember anything about the bathroom incident," Jesse said, finally acceding to his doctor's request to return to the subject at hand. "The school administrators understood this considering what I had been through. Plus, my nose needed medical attention, and I was sent to the hospital as soon as the ambulance arrived. The doctors tried to rebuild my nose the best they could. They cleaned me up, packed my nose, and gave me a tetanus shot and other antibiotics. Mom picked me up that evening at the hospital. Dad was nowhere to be found."

"Why do you think he disappeared?" said Dr. Macy. in the normal psychiatric voice. Jesse heard it immediately. It was one of those "I know the answer, but tell me anyway" kind of voices. Jesse, in other circumstances would have ridiculed that style of questioning, but he was too tired right now to be cynical. He obsequiously fell in line and answered the question.

"My father was ashamed of me getting beaten up by a 98-pound weakling," Jesse said without emotion. "He got drunk again."

Dr. Macy nodded. She then flipped up some pages on her note pad.

"You said," she started, still looking down at her notes, "that you knew why the incident happened."

"Yes," said Jesse. He had a hunch where she was going with this and tensed up.

"And you decided the amnesia wasn't due to the those two blows to the head."

"Of course not." Jesse leaned forward on the couch.

"And you maintain this despite what the other doctors have determined."

Jesse fumed. "Those doctors never explained why I was down on my knees wiping up piss with my hands." Jesse strained to speak without exploding. "They said I was guilt-ridden from the swirly, even though I had never been that guilt-ridden before. Also, they couldn't explain why I looked drunk, or doped up, even though the blood test at the hospital was negative. They couldn't explain my inability to speak." Jesse took a breath, and smirked. "The best they could come up with was that I had planned this whole thing; that I ignored all the potential consequences I would have had to face if I were caught, just so could bow down in front of this kid, and sloppily wipe his urine off the floor. And all for some inexplicable reason that I forgot, along with everything that I had planned, once I

was kicked in the head." He smiled broadly. "What a crock of shit." He sat back in the couch. "What a convenient crock of shit."

Dr. Macy's eyebrows hopped up. "Convenient?"

"Of course." Jesse paused to stretch out placing his hands behind his head, while Dr. Macy not so patiently waited. Jesse had regained the initiative. After the pause was sufficiently dramatic, Jesse continued in a clear and well-paced voice. "You see, by coming up with some sort of justification, no matter how half-baked or inane it is, it permitted these doctors to ignore the disconcerting possibility that my solution may be correct.

"You see, most people are like that. They all need reasons to believe things. But more importantly, they all need to believe things that will not disrupt their own belief structure or their 'view of the world,' so to speak. Consequently, if good reasons disturb a person's view of the world and bad reasons don't, then bad reasons will be accepted. A person's life is more comfortable if one's view of the world and the world itself match perfectly, despite how idiotic that world view or its justifications may be."

Jesse waited again in silence for a moment letting the doctor digest what he said. "So," Jesse went on, "would you like to hear what really happened?"

"And how did you learn what really happened?" asked Dr. Macy, seemingly unimpressed with his diatribe.

"I got home from the hospital exhausted, went to bed, and quickly dropped off to sleep, still groggy from the anesthetic. Once asleep, I had the second dream."

"The second dream," mumbled a skeptical Dr. Macy. "And how do you know your second dream is right?"

"Because, as I already said, it fits comfortably into my world view."

"How do you know your world view is correct," Dr. Macy pressed, "or your justifications are not themselves idiotic?"

Jesse stretched his arms out pretending to encompassing the room in his hands. "Look around you," he said with a jovial laugh. "Look where I am."

Jesse did not expect to see the quizzical look on Dr. Macy's face. "Hmph. You don't get it?" Dr. Macy shook her head quickly.

Deflating his chest, Jesse dropped his hands and leaned forward towards the doctor. Almost nose to nose, he waved his finger, though not stiffly, in a compact version of how he just waved his arms, and whispered, "Don't you see? All the doctors who have treated me, and all the people I have met, and the whole world in general, have determined that the answer to that question is now for you to decide."

Seven

Jesse woke up covered in shade and multi-colored leaves. His head rested against a small and slightly mushy moss covered log. The sun, just like before, flickered through the leafy canopy above and sparkled in his eyes, though it didn't seem as high overhead this time. Jesse guessed it must be Autumn here ... wherever *here* is. The leaves were changing colors and the air chilled his face and hands.

"Here we go again," he mumbled to himself. He sat up and noticed that in addition to the cotton body suit and the black boots he wore before, he was now wearing a gray cotton tunic tied at the waist with rope attached to the tunic in the back. It had a soft high collar around the neck, almost like a turtleneck, snug around his wrist, and when he stood up saw that the tunic extended down below his hips. A hood hung off the neck collar and down his back, and a large pocket was placed in the middle of the tunic, just above the belt. It was very comfortable and very warm, and looked much like the hooded sweatshirt he owned — the one with the Dallas Cowboys logo.

Being here no longer shocked him. He had heard of other people having recurrent dreams, and he must be one of them. Actually, he didn't mind anymore. The place grew on him, and he relished the tranquillity of the woods. It reminded him of the camping trips he and his family took over the years. Of course, the Strich's drove from camp to camp towing an thirty-foot fifth wheel RV behind, and the parks at which they stayed had pools, eating halls, cabins, and often over a hundred other families. It was the closest he ever came to the backwoods, but it was nothing like where he stood now, especially without the faint smell of propane, burning charcoal, and suntan lotion wafting in the air.

He looked around at his environs, trying to get his bearings. This looked like the spot where he fell, but he couldn't be sure. The changing seasons distorted what little he remembered. However, when he looked over his shoulder, he had no more doubts. Behind him, he could make out the clearing, that glowing field of green light he ran from in the previous dream. Although he couldn't see or hear anybody playing there now, he decided to go in the opposite direction and see where that would lead. As soon as he

started walking though, he felt a stiffness in the ankle of his left foot. He remembered he had sprained that foot last time, but this time the soreness was minor, and he figured he could work it out beginning with some slow strides.

He set off into the forest, being careful not to overlook the rocks. But before he went more than five steps, he heard what sounded like a flute. It was hard to tell from where the music was coming; it seemed to float in the forest air. The timbre was more ephemeral and wispy than the flute to which he was accustomed — from his middle school's band concert assemblies he suffered through — and the pentatonic melody more oriental. The soothing quality of the tune drew him towards its origin. *Perhaps the Pied Piper attracted his victims the same way with the same melody*, thought Jesse.

He couldn't pinpoint the location, but his body turned to the left seeming to know automatically which way to go. He followed his body around a large boulder where it stopped and looked and listened. Sitting on the other side was the musician, a middle-aged man with smooth brown skin, though shiny like dark polished bronze. On his face, he grew a full and thick salt-and-pepper beard that more than made up for his lack of hair on his scalp. His ears were large but flat to his head, his nose squat yet full. His fingers were long and lanky, slightly worn and hardened with age and use, though still delicate enough to operate the wooden flute he played. He wore the standard garb of this area, a gray cotton bodysuit. Draped over his clothes was the same type of tunic Jesse was wearing, also of light gray cotton. The light colored attire so set off the dark hands and head, he almost looked like a mannequin with those parts attached separately.

The man played on, unaware of Jesse's presence. He, too, was lost in the music. Incredibly, it didn't distract from the quietude. It bonded synergistically with nature making the tranquility even more serene. Standing transfixed, Jesse relaxed to a level he had never felt before. He didn't know how it happened, or that it was even happening to him, but nothing mattered. All his troubles were forgotten. The bitterness he held inside against that kid who kicked him in the nose, his dad's drunken disappearance into a smoke clogged booth wrapped in darkness stashed away in some poorly lit corner of some bar somewhere, his mother's loveless marriage — they all vanished. This man and his music and these woods and the colors and the air all cradled him with blissful ignorance. For a brief moment in his life, he forgot the pain of reality.

Then, the man released his lips from the instrument, but the music lingered on — in the forest, in the sunlight, in Jesse's body — and faded away up into the branches and to the heavens. Jesse's head arched upward following the melody as it floated through the

leaves. His head returned to the man, now looking directly at him, his lips moist and curled ever so slightly into a small but knowing smile that made Jesse trust him instantly.

"So, young man, how can I help you?"

Jesse thought that hearing the man's voice would jar him back from his reveries, but the voice emitted no harsh nasal or throaty noises, no hoarseness or scratchiness. The untainted voice was rich and mellow, pure and clean, like everything else around. When the man spoke, the surroundings reverberated sympathetically and gently hummed in harmony.

Jesse searched for some way to respond, but he had never before met a man so at peace with the world — so seemingly at one with nature. Jesse lacked the words necessary to describe this man's charismatic power. Jesse felt silly about his speechlessness. This guy was just another man. After all, they had just met, and Jesse didn't know anything about him. Child molesters and kidnapers are charming and alluring as well. Other charismatic leaders of the past have sent nations to their doom. Still, in his gut, Jesse had a different feeling about him and said nothing, and felt ridiculous doing so.

The man, noticing Jesse's silence, began moving his hands. The gestures went by quickly and Jesse remember only the last, when the man placed a thumbs-up sign in his left palm and extended them together towards Jesse. Jesse didn't know what it meant, but he had seen similar motions in gym class at school where there were several deaf students who talked to each other in sign language. This looked just like that. Fortunately, the distraction was enough to end Jesse's speechless awe.

"No, no. I don't understand sign language."

"I'm sorry, but since you didn't answer, I thought you might have been deaf and didn't understand my question," said the gentleman. Surprisingly, the voice was uncritical, unlike other comments he has heard over the years, such as: "What are you? Deaf?" Or: "Why the hell didn't you answer me the first time then?" Or even: "Then speak up. Don't just stand their with one finger up your nose and one up your butt." Jesse immediately liked him more for not doing that.

"So, how can I help you, Mister ... " began the man. "I'm sorry. We haven't met before, have we?" The man, while remaining on the rock, extended his hand for a handshake. "My name is Feszj."

Finally! Someone who knows about handshakes, Jesse said to himself. Jesse reached for Feszj's hand. "My name is Jesse."

They shook hands. Feszj's fingers wrapped almost entirely around his hand. The grip was firm but accommodating. Jesse had the feeling that Feszj could have crushed his hand

if he wished. Feszj could even have squeezed harder in order to intimidate or test Jesse's grip. But Feszj did neither. Instead, Feszj adjusted imperceptively to match his grip with Jesse's.

"It is a pleasure to met you, Jesse."

There it was again, Jesse thought. That all-knowing kind of grin, as if he were expecting me. But how can that be. I just met him. Calm down. You're just being paranoid, Jesse.

"I was just listening to your playing," remarked Jesse, trying to change his thoughts.

"Did you like it?"

"Yes," said Jesse, in a far away voice. "It was wonderful." Jesse cringed when he said 'wonderful.' It sounded so corny, something a girl might say. Yet he said it anyway, because it was the right word. And at that moment, he realized he could say practically anything he desired and Feszj wouldn't mind. Jesse's mind relaxed. Feszj expressed no condescension and carried a non-judgmental attitude.

"Thank you, Jesse. I really only play for my own pleasure, but it is always nice to hear that other people enjoy it as well."

Jesse examined the flute. It was smooth and wooden with a light red color but no shine. However, the edges around the finger holes and where the flute would be held were discolored and shiny, probably from the sweat on Feszj's fingertips. Feszj had almost fitted it into a brown canvas satchel lying next to him on the rock when he noticed Jesse's curiosity.

"Would you like to see it?" Feszj asked, removing it from the bag and offering it to Jesse. Jesse took it, nodded thank you, and carefully handled the instrument, turning it around in his hands.

"Many years ago, when we were building our homes, some extra pieces of wood remained. One of the master craftsmen and I became good friends during the construction — Hartminger was her name, a big burly square-faced woman but with hands of ultimate delicacy. She carved this for me as a parting gift. At the time, I had no idea how to play a flute so I asked her why did she give me one. Well, she knew I loved singing, but that my voice may not be pristine forever. So she carved me an instrument that would outlast my singing, yet sound just as sweet. Furthermore, in this location, a flute was the only instrument whose sound would not distract from its beauty. So she said, on this very rock. We used to come here to sit and meditate and dream. This rock has been here for many years.

"In any case," Feszj continued, as he reached for his flute, "many other instruments have arrived to the settlement, and they all make beautiful music. But in the end, when I am alone in the woods, I think she may have been right."

"I think so, too," said Jesse. He reluctantly let go of the instrument as it slid out of his hands. Feszj placed the flute gingerly into his bag.

"So Jesse," said Feszj, "what brings you here?"

Jesse paused for a moment to consider a reply. The question didn't make any sense considering his circumstances.

"I don't know. Well, actually I do know. I'm dreaming. You're just a part of my dream."

Feszj's head cocked to the side. "Am I now?" he said, his face lighting up with amusement.

"Yes," said Jesse, growing more sure of himself.

"In that case," said Feszj, "I suppose you're wondering why I'm here?"

"Well, now that you mentioned it ... "

Feszj chuckled. "You have me on that one. But I do have one question before I answer, if you would care to indulge this specter in front of you."

"Sure. Go ahead."

"How do you know you're dreaming now?"

"Of course, I'm dreaming. I got back from the hospital with a cast on my nose, fell asleep in bed, where I'm still sleeping right now." Jesse sounded almost indignant that this person would question the fact that he was dreaming.

"If you really were dreaming, how would you know so much about your life outside of this dream?" asked Feszj.

This caught Jesse off-guard. His face squinted as he tried to reconcile its troubling implications. Meanwhile, Feszj slid off the rock and took several paces away from Jesse.

"Look around you, Jesse," he said, his arms, palms up, spread open to the trees. "Feel the ground under your feet. Feel the wind in your face, and the coolness of the air. Look at the trees, look at the sun. You've heard music, squeezed my hand, touched my flute." Feszj reached down to pick what looked like a blue dandelion from the ground. "Here," he said, holding the petals under Jesse's nose, "smell this." Jesse inhaled slightly, but the intoxicating aroma forced him to suck all the scent out of the plant, filling his lungs and causing his brain to tingle. "What is there not to believe?"

Jesse pushed away the flower and shook his head to clear his senses. "What are you trying to do? Drug me?"

"Hardly," said a contrite Feszj, dropping the flower to the ground, "It was just a demonstration."

"That's nothing special." Jesse defended his illusion. "None of this is anything special. All of this can happen while dreaming."

"True," answered Feszj. "But if all this is a dream, how do you know where you come from is not a dream?"

Jesse was about to speak, but Feszj interrupted.

"Before you answer, understand and consider the alternative. Consider carefully all that is a dream. Do you remember the fuzziness of the air in dreams? Do you recall the discontinuous nature of time and space in your dreams? The bizarre juxtapositions of events? Even the element of changing perspectives? Do you remember dreams when you floated outside of your own body watching yourself? But most of all, didn't you notice a ghostly ephemeralness about the entire experience?

"None of that exists here. Here, everything is crystal clear, including your own thoughts. There is nothing ghostly about this place. And unlike your dreams, you get hungry here, and get thirsty here. You get hurt here, too. Fall into a rock, you bruise. Scrape your arm, you bleed. Try to fly off a cliff, you fall and die. The laws of nature and of time are just as consistent here as from where you came." Feszj paused to take a deep breath. "Knowing all this, how do you know this is no more a dream than the world you left?"

Jesse began to speak again. Feszj waited. But this time, nothing came out. He paused to consider, but there was too much at stake now. This place did seem more tangible, more real than a dream. He had to admit to himself that Feszj was right about that. He remembered some snippets of his own dreams which were exactly how Feszj described it, including the dream where he hit a home run at Yankee Stadium, and then watched from the stands as he trotted around the bases. His dreams often behaved like television productions, with varying camera angles and special effects.

But how could this place be just as real as home. To be anything else but a dream was insanity. He fought the possibility. It was nonsense. To answer the question of how one knows, Jesse spit out a jejune, "You just know." He knew it was lame, but he couldn't think of anything else to say. "It's just common sense, for Christ's sake."

"Perhaps," said Feszj, responding in a conciliatory tone after having witnessed Jesse's internal struggle for sanity, "you might wish to claim that there is an internal logic to dreams that guarantees the rationality of its actions. After all, when we are dreaming, most of what we experience makes sense to us then and there in the dream. Doesn't it?"

Jesse lunged at the explanation. "Yeah, that's it!"

Feszj laughed. "I'm glad we solved that problem."

Jesse smiled in triumph. He could now explain what was unexplainable. Yet by letting go of the argument so easily and quickly, Feszj gave Jesse the impression that he knew more than he was admitting. The concession, therefore, seemed empty and the explanation unconvincing.

* * *

"If this is your dream, and I am a resident of it," said Feszj, grabbing his satchel off the rock, "perhaps you would permit me the courtesy of escorting you around ... and show you everything that exists in our dream world."

Feszj pointed to an almost hidden path through the trees, covered as it was with leaves. He led the way, but tried to stay next to Jesse, which was difficult — the path was narrow. It wound a tortuous route through the forest. Jesse walked carefully, not wanting to trip. Feszj, on the other hand, hardly looked anywhere but straight ahead or up at the trees. Jesse figured that he knew the trail so well, he didn't have to watch his step.

After a few minutes of silence, Jesse spoke up.

"Well, I haven't seen anything exciting yet. Just a bunch of trees."

"Patience, Jesse." Feszj turned his head towards Jesse but kept walking. "Don't you have a saying in your world? All good things come to those who wait?"

"Yes."

"Here, we have a slightly different saying. All good things come to those who move towards the Good. If we waited, we would go nowhere, yet forever hoping that someday the Good will come to us. A lot of effort wasted, a lot of time lost, and a lot of life will pass you by."

Jesse squirmed while he walked. "I can feel a lot of calories wasted now," quipped Jesse under his breath. The last thing he cared for now was a philosophy lecture. He slowly tuned out as Feszj continued speaking and hiking.

"Remember Jesse, finding the Good isn't necessarily difficult, though it may be long. We need only to follow the path trod by other people who have travelled towards the Good. The more who have travelled the path, of course, the easier it is to follow. Following the right path, however, does require caution and careful attention."

Blah, blah, blah.

"And unfortunately, there are many other well worn trails — especially where you come from — that are more heavily and more clearly marked which travel away from the Good. These paths may make life more pleasurable, but are you any happier? These trails may sate your appetites, but do they fill you with any substance? An escort like myself can help, but often, you will have only your wits to guide you."

Boy, this guy sure likes to hear himself talk, thought Jesse. *I thought this guy was going to be different, but instead he's just another wind bag.* Jesse's tolerance for Feszj waned. He felt tired and irritable, and he also realized he was hungry. *Do people get hungry in dreams?* He grew irascible.

"This is bogus."

"Just a little further, Jesse."

"I'm not moving any further until you tell me where we're going!" he blurted.

Feszj stopped abruptly and spun around. He rose up to his full height, almost the size of his father. Scared, Jesse stopped and prepared for the scolding, but it never came. Feszj's face never hardened. It stayed calm.

Feszj's non-reaction shocked Jesse. Bratty kids always got yelled at, or slapped, or given something to shut them up. Feszj did none of that. He simply stood there, his face slowly saddening, as if a good friend had just insulted him. This look made Jesse extremely guilty in spite of his belligerence.

"I'm sorry," said Jesse. He didn't mean it, but it usually helped release his pent up guilt and averted being hit.

Feszj shook his head and stepped forward and raised his hand. Jesse head slunk down into his torso as he braced himself for the strike. Feszj just placed an immense hand tenderly on Jesse's shoulder. It surprised Jesse, and he stiffened up even more.

"No, no. Relax Jesse. It is not your fault. You have nothing to be sorry about. It is I who should apologize. It was unforgivable of me to have forgotten that you are not accustomed to our world. I neglected your concerns and ignored your fears. I hope I have not offended you."

Jesse was puzzled, but his muscles did slowly loosen. He thought it was unusual for a grown man to be so apologetic and so sincere about it. Jesse's confusion increased. The best response Jesse could think of was a glib shrug. He then lowered his head ashamed at its lameness. A calloused yet gentle finger raised his chin up.

"Why drop your head? You have nothing to be ashamed of, Jesse."

"I know, but ..." Jesse searched for the right words. Feszj was patient. Jesse started over again.

"No, it's not that. It's just that ... well, I guess I'm not used to adults apologizing to me for anything." Which was true. Most of the adults he knew never apologized much, and certainly not to children.

"Not even your parents, Jesse?"

"No."

Jesse cursed himself. He should have lied. It was so embarrassing. What made him blurt out to this man — a relative stranger — that he had never heard his dad apologize? Of course, it was not like a mistake was ever Dad's fault, Jesse considered. If he arrived late anywhere, the traffic was invariably the problem. If he ever forgot something at the store, he had other more important things on his mind. It wasn't his responsibility anyway. "Why didn't you remind me?" was a standard response.

Jesse recalled a time when he was no more than nine or ten. He phoned his dad at the dealership asking him to pick up some poster board for a school project — God knows what it was; Jesse had long forgotten it — on his way home from work. Peter came home, but without the materials. He never said he forgot. Rather, he said, "If you want things done — do it yourself. Take responsibility for your own actions, and your responsibilities will take care of themselves. I'm not at fault simply because I didn't help you. There's no law saying I'm required to feed the hungry, or clothe the needy, or shelter the homeless. Consequently, it is your fault for trying to get out what you should have done in the first place. Let this be a lesson to you." So his mom made an emergency trip to K-Mart.

His mom was different, though. She seemed to apologize for everyone's mistakes; yet in so doing effectively trivialized any heart-felt significance contained in her apologies. It became just a trite and meaningless little expression, much like "How are you doing?" No one really cares. People think themselves polite and civilized by saying that, but when someone takes the question seriously and describes how they really are, all patience disappears. Their minds immediately turn off from listening and on to figuring out how to excuse themselves from the conversation as quickly as possible. As Jesse further considered, Mom and Dad were really no different at all. Even though his Dad never apologized, Mom apologized but never meant it.

Of course, when Jesse's mother returned, another fight broke out between his parents. Jesse couldn't even hibernate in his room to finish the project while they yelled at each other. Peter ripped the poster board out of Jesse's hands and tore it apart, all the while screaming at Mom for trying to undermine a father's right to educate and discipline his son. Moreover, when the poster board was pulled from Jesse's grasp, it sliced through the flap

of skin between his thumb and index finger. Jesse sprinted to get a band aid from the bathroom with his hand in his mouth, sucking salty blood and stifling the howls of pain.

"I'm sorry, Jesse," said Feszj, coaxing Jesse from his memories. "But I'm glad you confided in me, because I can sympathize with you and your situation."

"I doubt that."

"But I can. I was new here once — a dreamer, just like yourself." Jesse's his eyes popped open in surprise as his head jerked around to stare at Feszj. "There were many things I too found disconcerting when I first came to this place, with its different expectations and different responsibilities. I resisted many things initially; but unlike you, I kept many thoughts secret from others — in the end, hiding even from myself." He released the hold on Jesse's shoulders, only to reach around and rest his arm behind Jesse's neck.

"But you are among friends now," Feszj said to the forest in a more jovial voice, "where trust is built upon the sharing of experiences, thoughts, and feelings, whereas secrets breed doubts and suspicions." Leaning his head to the side and continuing in a softer tone, he told Jesse, "And just as important, being with friends is always being able to say 'I'm sorry.'"

Feszj smiled and his ebony face shined. Jesse considered his new friend. "I'm hungry, too," said Jesse, emboldened by Feszj's kindness to express himself.

"I understand. You can eat as much as you can ... uh, stomach? ... as soon as we get there."

Jesse heard the pun, but had other concerns on his mind.

"Get where? Where are we going?"

At that point, Feszj raised an outstretched arm leading Jesse's gaze to a tiny gap between two bushes blocking the end of the path. Feszj nudged Jesse slightly in the back with his other arm, his head silently prodding as it jerked towards the bushes. Jesse tentatively started forward. He glanced from side to side appraising the huge boulders rising up around him and closing in on him as he proceeded. Above the bushes, he could see the blue of the sky; apparently, the tree line ended there. As he reached the bushes and brought up his hands to part the branches, he glanced back at Feszj, standing with his hands in his front pocket, his bag resting on the ground next to him. His face looked like that of a parent watching a child's first steps, a unique combination of anxiety, eagerness, and hope. His lips open, his breathing shallow.

"What's beyond the bushes?" Jesse asked.

Feszj paused for a moment, pressing his lips together. He inhaled deeply through his nose, exhaled slowly, then looked Jesse straight in the eye.

"The Good."

Jesse returned to the bushes, more perplexed than frightened now. He pried apart the branches easily and stepped through the opening. What he saw stopped him cold. Beginning a couple hundred yards away and extending almost as far as his eyes would allow, all he saw was an immense valley, covered with a patchwork collection of dark and light brown, green, and gray rectangles separated by thin rows of trees and bushes, leaves freshly painted by the season. The horizon directly in front of him extended almost infinitely, highlighted by low hanging fluffs of clouds, and unimpeded by the mountain range with its cracked white peaks which gradually rose up above the valley the further left he looked. Scattered sparsely across the checkerboard landscape he watched what looked like bright silver and gold tractors, sparkling in the sunlight, crawling slowly across the squares with only the slightest of rumbles. They were so far away, the birds's chirpings practically drowned out the tractor noise. Jesse concluded that what lay before him was a gigantic farm.

"Nearly 12,000 acres of farmland," said Feszj, surprising Jesse from behind, "spread out over almost 50 square kilometers."

"It amazing."

As a breeze from the valley blew against him, Jesse could now catch a whiff of manure — a sweet smell to a farmer, though sickening to Jesse. Averting his eyes from the incredible scene of an entire valley covered in farmland, he noticed below him hewn rock steps descending several yards down the sloping incline and ending at a small road, nor more than about fifteen to twenty feet wide, made entirely of stone, cut flat on top (though not smooth; it looked a little rough) and fitted perfectly together. No weed sprouted between any gap because there were no gaps. The road followed the tree-line to either side of Jesse for hundreds of yards until it disappeared over a rise or around a bend.

"Wow. That's a neat road," said Jesse.

"Thank you. We take pride in our endeavors."

"Where does it go?"

"One of two ways." Feszj descended the stone steps while he explained. "If we follow the road that way (Feszj pointed to the left), after about a fifteen minute walk, we will arrive at Vilmar, our settlement — well, at least my settlement. You'll be able to see it once the road peaks over the hill. If you go the other way (Feszj pointed to the right) for about fifty kilometers, you will arrive at another community, Dunlo."

Feszj waited on the road for his your companion to follow, but Jesse still stood in front of the bushes exploring the vistas with his eyes. He spied several almost house-sized grass-covered mounds scattered about the valley.

"I thought you were hungry, Jesse?" Feszj hinted after a while.

"Oh, right." Jesse, forgetting about the mounds, hurried down the steps and the two started walking. The road was solid. No loose stone tipped under his feet. Not that he was paying attention to the road. Jesse couldn't help twisting his head to the side being drawn back to the miles of cultivation.

"How many acres? Twelve thousand?" Jesse commented. "That's a lot of food."

"Our community supplies the primary food needs for over 90 other communities extending over an area larger than your state of Utah."

Jesse whistled in awe. Feszj went on.

"We supply the area settlements with wheat, carrots, onions, squashes, corn, potatoes, soybeans and other vegetables."

"Spinach?"

"Yes, Jesse. Even spinach." Jesse groaned.

"Oh, don't take it so hard," said Feszj. "Our food preparers do a phenomenal job of making all our meals wonderfully appetizing." Jesse was unimpressed. Feszj continued, almost rehearsed.

"Other communities probably have their own small plots of land on which they grow vegetables, primarily spices, but not all communities can spend their time with major farming operations. That is our responsibility."

"Responsibility?" Jesse learned very early on that to be polite, ask an occasional question to look interested, even though one may not be. His hunger consumed more of his attention. All he wanted to see was the town, but the road didn't reach the rise for a couple hundred yards. Jesse picked up his pace. Feszj automatically matched his stride and went on with his descriptions almost as if he didn't need the prompt.

"Yes. Each community has a specialty at which they become adept and highly skilled. Ours is agriculture. Livzon, for example, about a hundred kilometers to the south, manufactures building equipment and materials. Or Dunlo, the neighboring town behind us (Feszj gestured with a thumb over his shoulder), known for their wool and textile production. The fabric you and I are wearing came from there."

Jesse halfheartedly dropped his head to re-examined his tunic more closely. It was smooth and soft, lightweight yet thick and warm, with tightly woven diagonal stitching.

The belt, however, didn't feel like traditional rope. This peaked Jesse's curiosity which Feszj noticed.

"The rope is made out of hemp, perhaps the strongest natural fiber available on your world."

Hemp? That jogged a memory in Jesse, but he couldn't quite figure out where he had heard it before. However, a sudden breeze rising up from the valley further distracted Jesse's thinking by flipping his hood on to his head. Jesse knocked it back down, and then waved off an errant wasp that rode in on the wind and was buzzing too near.

"There are bugs here?" asked an indignant Jesse.

"Of course."

"Damn. I hate dreams with bugs in them."

Feszj chuckled. "This ecosystem needs insects: To consume waste materials, to pollinate flowers, to aerate the soil, and for countless other benefits. We make extensive use of insects in our farm management. You see, we don't use pesticides on our crops."

"Well, that's good."

"Yes, it is, and I'm glad you think so. Besides, pesticides aren't really needed anyway. Your researchers have actually estimated that if the use of pesticides were completely discontinued, the additional crop damage would amount to little more than five percent. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that most of our plants have been biologically altered to produce toxins and other natural pest repellents, insects quickly develop resistances. Therefore, we usually leave a few acres of land planted with unaltered plants. The bulk of the insects congregate in these areas, and have little need then to adapt to and overcome the defenses of the protected plants. Add to this our use of cats and dogs to keep in check the rodent population, wasps and praying mantis and other beneficial insects, as well as the native bird population and the bats ... "

"Bats?" Jesse's voice filled with concern.

"I guess I shouldn't tell you about the bats then, should I?" Feszj asked.

Jesse knew a little about bats. When he went to baseball camp last summer, he and fourteen other boys lived in a cabin that was vacant eight months out of the year, but home to a family of bats. He could here them scratching on the roof beams and rafters. His cabin counselor, Zach Armstrong — who pinch hit and occasionally played third base and outfield for the University of Michigan whenever the first and second string players were injured, had cautioned the campers not to shine flashlights at the bats, throw anything at them, or worry about them. Naturally, the first things Jesse and his bunk mates did were to shine flashlight up at the ceiling and work on their throwing arms with wads of crumpled

notebook paper. The bats would fly around frantically, while everyone dived under their sleeping bags. Jesse swears that one of the bats walked on his bag one night.

A little after eleven one night, Jesse could hear one of the girls cabins from across the practice fields erupt in screams. His whole cabin jumped up ready to charge over there to "protect" those girls by hopping into bed with them. Unfortunately, Zach was at the door first ordering everyone back to bed. It was learned the next day that they were doing the same thing to the bats as the boys were — shining lights and throwing paper. This time, however, a bat got caught in the hair of one of the girls. She swore up and down that the animal bit her, but none of the counselors could find any marks except a claw scratch or two. Most of the camp thought the incident amusing, but her well-connected parents expressed a different opinion, and by the end of the week, exterminators removed the bats from every cabin. This caused a minor uproar with a group of would-be animal rights kid activists. Soon, camp leaflets appeared addressing the dangers of bats and how they carry diseases and parasites, and that removing the bats was in everyone's best interest. Camp administrators, however, never addressed the question of why the bats were never removed before camp began. Yet, once the camp play-off games started, everyone lost interest in the issue.

"You'll like the bats," said Feszj, observing his anxiety. "They eat a tremendous amount of insects and small rodents. If you look carefully, you can see bat nests throughout the fields hung on the trees. They're sleeping now, but later tonight, at around dusk, you'll begin to hear their distinct squeaks.

Jesse peered nervously into the trees to catch a glimpse of a nest, but his eyes were unable to see through the shadows to the tree trunks.

"In any case," Feszj went on, "put all these pest controls together throughout our fields, and we can harvest almost ninety percent. We even use insects in the grain silos, which eat the insects which eat the grain."

"That's gross." Jesse grimaced.

"Don't worry. All insects are ostensibly removed during processing. Not that it would make much difference. You can't get away from eating them. Even in your society, everything from orange juice to canned tuna fish to bread all have insect remnants. Who knows how many live insects you've eaten at picnics, and yet you are still around to stand before me."

Jesse suddenly lost his appetite for grilled cheeseburgers, topped with pickles, ketchup and potato chips — his favorite combo.

"But what you have to understand," continued Feszj, "is that nothing of what we are doing in the area of farm management is beyond the capabilities of your farmers. There is nothing new here. Just basic biology. And some of your farmers are catching on, but certainly not enough, and certainly not to everyone's benefit."

"What's the problem, then?" asked Jesse, now more interested, since Feszj is talking about food. "Why aren't all our farmers doing this?"

"The reasons are many, but they can usually be divided into two broader topics — social psychology and economics — which are almost one in the same anyway."

Jesse groaned and looked away from Feszj. "You know, I don't think I need to hear about all this. Let's just wait until we get to town, and then ..."

"No, Jesse." Feszj stopped walking and turned to face Jesse. He touched Jesse's elbow to prompt him to stop and pivot as well. "You must listen. You must listen to it all. You must learn as much as you can."

Jesse realized he is reaching the breaking point with Feszj like he reached with Catiana. *I wonder what would happen if I taunted him,* Jesse thought.

"Why? What if I don't want to listen? You know, this is my dream. I don't really care about what you need to tell me. I don't have to care. What are you going to do about that? Huh?"

To this outburst, Feszj simply stood there, his eyes shimmering as the life drained from his face and disappointment filled the void. His cheeks sagged and lost their shine. His shoulders drooped a little and his back hunched. His lungs emptied of air.

"Nothing," said Feszj, shaking his head.

"Nothing? What do you mean *nothing*?"

Jesse was totally unprepared for this response. He expected demands to sit down and shut up. Orders to pay attention or get detention. He expected responses more in line with his teachers at Lynvern High who were masters of coercion. The threats they cavalierly used to get the students to do their work engendered a sense of fear of their teacher rather than respect.

But since Feszj did none of that, Jesse hesitated. He was used to defying authority, used to being as adamant and as pigheaded as authorities are wont to be when their position is challenged. Yet there was nothing to defy here. Feszj avoided confrontation. He remained calm though despondent. It was like punching a ghost.

"I cannot force you to listen," said Feszj, in a somber tone. "I cannot force you to learn. You must want to listen and learn on your own accord. Only then will what I teach and what you learn be significant to you and be remembered. I cannot motivate you to do

anything. I will not prod you into anything. You must motivate yourself. The best I can do is to provide an environment which may prompt you to individual motivation. However, if you don't want to listen, I have failed even to do that."

Feszj licked his dry lips. "We had hoped you would be of help to us with our project, but apparently there is nothing more I can do."

There it is again, talk about a project. But again, Jesse was on a different train of thought and did not want to lose it by being sidetracked.

"You mean I could just walk away, and you won't do anything to stop me?"

"Yes, you can do that here. You can even leave this, as you say, dream, if you wish."

"I can?"

"At any time you desire."

"Hmm."

Jesse brought his hand up to his chin while resting his elbow in the palm of his other hand, posing in a silly caricature of someone actually thinking deeply and weighing options. Jesse, however, thought little of his options. He was figuring out how long he ought to take before announcing his decision to leave.

"But there is something you ought to know, before you make your decision," said Feszj, interrupting Jesse's plan.

"Yeah? And what's that?" barked Jesse, irritated and at the same time toying with him.

"Once you choose to leave," replied Feszj, "you will not be coming back. This dream will never reappear in your sleep."

"Never?"

"Never."

Jesse didn't care. He returned to his childish pose, in part to add some drama to an otherwise simple decision, and to taunt Feszj. Feszj, however, remained unmoved and seemingly unconcerned. Jesse began speaking, his plans to tease failing.

"Well, I've made my decision."

"Excellent," said Feszj. This dumbfounded Jesse. Feszj didn't look upset in the least.

"Wait a minute. I haven't told you yet. How do you know it's gonna be excellent?"

"Well," Feszj began, "knowing you're an intelligent person, I can only guess you have decided that the prudent thing to do in your situation, considering the finality of any decision to leave, would be to at least see the community, interact with its members, and hear some of their thoughts before making your choice. In other words, live with us for a while. You've already admitted that this land is peaceful. I'm sure you're thinking of this area as a vacation spot; a respite from the tribulations of your earthly reality. Why leave it

so abruptly then? Relax and enjoy. After all, you can leave at anytime; if you leave too soon, however, you might miss something."

Feszj smiled and his whole body filled with the exuberance he lost before. His skin returned to its luster and his posture corrected itself. "I think you made a wise choice, Jesse. You're a good friend. You have vindicated our faith in you."

"Our faith?"

"Why, the community is just as eager to see you as you are to see them. I'm also positive they have prepared a wonderful meal for you. You're our guest."

How does one respond to that, Jesse thought. In fact, to respond in any other way would make Jesse look like a stubborn fool. On the other hand, Feszj made a good point. No sense leaving too soon. Perhaps even his hunger was making the choice for him. But no matter, Jesse always had lousy days whenever he woke up in the middle of a dream.

"Wait a minute? How can I be your guest if I just arrived? You didn't know I was coming, did you?"

"All newcomers to our community, and all other communities for that matter, are treated as guests."

Being an honored guest of an entire community further intrigued him and flattered his ego. Moreover, this new-found ability to do as he pleased invigorated him. He could now choose his own course. Listen if he was so inclined, learn if he wanted, leave if the urge moved him, and Feszj could do nothing. The entire town could do nothing. The power of choice intoxicated him.

Yes, he would stay and let Feszj entertain him. He would tolerate the man, use him to get some food in his stomach, perhaps the key to the city, only to demonstrate his impunity later on by ignoring it all and departing forever.

* * *

The rise in the hill lie only a few hundred feet away as they resumed walking. At the crest, the road split off a clump of trees from the rest of the forest, a forest consisting of a mix of evergreens and birches.

"As I was saying," began Feszj, then glanced at Jesse, "if I may proceed?" Jesse, possessed of a new found arrogance, slowly bobbed his head. "You may," he said.

"Thank you, Jesse." Feszj sported an amused smile. "You had asked why your farmers are not more quickly reducing the use of pesticides — and herbicides, for that matter. That is an excellent question. And I replied that there were two aspects, a

psychological and a economic justification." Feszj paused. "Now I understand that this material may not be of more than cursory interest to you, and the discussion itself may sound complicated, but please, bear with me. I'll try to make the subject as stimulating as possible." Feszj took a deep breath and collected his thoughts. He then began slowly and methodically.

"People in your country do not like insects. Roaches, spiders, centipedes and many others, along with their larvae and their stings and poisons invoke disgust, if not downright fear, and support a multi-billion dollar insecticide industry. So the very last place individuals wish to see these creatures is on their dinner plates. Insecticides greatly eliminate that potential, but as I said, they can't eliminate it.

"In exchange for this peace of mind, however, your population gives up a lot; a deadly price is paid — to be willing to eat food contaminated with extremely high levels of these poisons which builds up in the body and eventually leads to cancer. Unfortunately, many Americans garnered a false sense of security when DDT, then Alar, was banned — at least in your country; they are still used elsewhere. But it was replaced with other chemicals just as bad. And as insects develop resistances to these chemicals, stronger pesticides are manufactured. Your citizens eat fruits and vegetables with the hope of avoiding getting cancer, yet they will get cancer nonetheless, being slowly poisoned to death. Just think of the world of good it would do if the population ate untainted vegetables. But people fear, whether rationally or not, they will see wings and legs and worm-like grubs; one cannot see lindane or atrazine or other contaminants that remain on the surface of plants or are washed into the soil and leech into the water supply."

Feszj glanced once again at Jesse, eyebrows raised. "Am I doing okay?"

"You're doing fine, but I already knew that chemicals poison us."

"Yes, I had no doubt you did. But that's not really the issue. If you and other people know this situation exists, why is so little being done to change it?"

"Well," Jesse fumbled his words, "it's not that easy."

"That's true. It's not easy to be the harbinger of bad news in a world that seeks pleasure and comfort, and isolation from misery — witnessing death and destruction safely through a picture tube, sipping coffee, and waiting for a particular sit-com." Feszj's tone became harsher and more strident. "It's not easy to be an original thinker in a society where acceptability informs wisdom, and the publicly demonstrated *search* for new ideas precludes actually finding any."

Jesse saw in Feszj unfocused eyes staring off at the mountains, and his face scowling as if from bitterness or frustration. Feszj had the kind of face one gets when something

easy to do becomes inexplicably difficult, like being unable to screw a nut on to a bolt, or hammering nails that keep bending askew. Then, just as quickly as his mood darkened, Feszj reverted to his calmer self and returned his gaze to Jesse.

"But in any case, so much for the psychology of insecticide use. However, when it comes to the economic foundations of pesticide use, the reasons are much more subtle and much more insidious. But first, a little history."

"No, no. Forget the history."

"Oh, but you'll like history, Jesse. It means so many different things to so many people. And you'll be fascinated by where this ends. Trust me."

Jesse peered at the top of the hill. It was still a good hundred yards away, and all the more beckoning.

"Okay, go ahead."

"Your country," Feszj began, "despite the glorified stories of heros like Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Lewis and Clark, was built upon the backs of the farmers. Not the supposedly rugged individualist who was an essentially rootless person who hopped from place to place, coming and going as they please, enamored more by the pursuit of money than relationships, who placed their own personal agenda for power and fame over mutual interests like loyalty or love. The early settlers your society idolizes were made up of people who escaped problems, avoided conflict, were unwilling and unable to deal with people, and when faced with a difficult situation, packed up and fled — a response that has become your society's trademark.

"But the person who stayed in one place, put down roots, plowed the earth, and established a community — that is the true hero. Think about how many towns sprang up around gold and silver strikes, only to be reclaimed by the dust and ghosts of the desert once the precious ore withdrew into the earth. Yet towns that grew around farmland prospered at a more sustainable pace and still exist today. The thrill seekers and the speculators come and go like tumbleweeds, but the farmer will always remain.

"Yet, over the years, American society, through its individualistically tinged eyes, soon viewed the farmer more and more as a lone wolf, part of a dying breed, as immense corporate farms drove produce prices down, signalling the death of the family farm. Society balked. Your government couldn't let family farms disappear in the wake of corporate farms. Consequently, farmers were eventually paid not to plant vegetables so the produce market wouldn't be glutted and prices would remain high, keeping the family farmer in business — and, oddly enough, working against consumer demands. Not that

there's any longer a need for a lot of family farms — it just permits the illusion of a free market. Agribusiness would appear monopolistic without them."

Jesse's mind wandered over to the lush scenery around. The immense vistas as far as the eye could see made possible by the crisp and clean Autumn air — air surprisingly free of dust. The horizon was no fuzzier than the nearest blade of grass. He smelled the trees, the flowers, the tall grass growing next to the road — something he had no recollection of doing at his home, except when Dad bought Mom flowers once a year for Mother's Day. Even then, he had to practically shove his nose into the buds to smell anything. He also seemed stronger breathing in this air. He speculated it might have contained a higher content of oxygen.

"Don't you see?" Feszj interrupted Jesse's musings. "Because of the fear of losing family farms, your government maintained higher prices and avoided anti-trust actions all to the benefit of the corporations, where profit margins are much higher than on smaller farms."

"Neat," said Jesse flatly, hardly giving Feszj a glance. He wondered how tall those mountains in the distance were.

"In any case," persisted Feszj, challenged by Jesse's indifference to try a different approach and become more animated with his gestures and vocal inflections, "pesticides were necessary to keep costs down by increasing production on the family farms making farming at least minimally profitable. Pesticide-free foods, on the other hand, cost more. There's less of it, and consumers will pay extra for it. Charge what the market will bear. Basic capitalism. Makes sense, doesn't it?"

Jesse nodded in a polite, albeit half-hearted, way. "Whatever you say." He returned to his mental calculations of the mountain heights. He then noticed something shimmering near the middle of the mountains, at the top of the foothills he surmised. But it couldn't have been snow; the snowline ended higher up. Feszj realized what he was looking at, and decided not to fight the curiosity.

"What do you see, Jesse?"

"Oh, nothing." It was probably just reflections from streams in the area, he concluded. "You were saying?" Jesse tried to be courteous.

"I was going to ask what does all this mean?" Feszj emphasized this question in hopes of occupying more of Jesse's attention. Jesse shrugged his shoulders, not bothering to think. "It means that poorer individuals will almost exclusively eat pesticide-laced fruits and vegetables. In the end, your economy willingly exposes the poor to hazardous foods, all in the name of profit, productivity, and capitalism."

Jesse awoke from his stupor, and looked away from the mountains, unable — and now, unwilling — to figure out what the shimmering objects might be. The conversation suddenly became more interesting. "The poor could always buy those good foods if they wanted to," said a cynical Jesse.

"True, but because a minimal amount of money is required to purchase necessities, the poor invariably have less income available to buy healthier, more expensive foods. These families need to purchase the most food for the dollar. Pesticide-free foods are a luxury. And like all luxuries, only the well-to-do can partake."

Jesse mulled this over as Feszj continued. "Of course, this situation doesn't restrict itself to just vegetables. Many poor families can't even afford produce anyway, resorting to nutritionally bankrupt alternatives to sate their appetites. Whole wheat bread, for instance — three times more expensive than white bread but which helps reduce cancers of the digestive tract — is a luxury. And it's not just better food which is deprived the poor. Proper preventive medical and dental care is out of reach for most of the underclasses. Automobile maintenance is superficial, risking drivers and occupants of every vehicle on the road. In all categories, less expensive products are more ineptly crafted and often more dangerous. This is what your economy does to those who have the misfortune to be poor.

"But by far the worst outcome is the social costs of this reprehensible situation. For example, poorer nutrition leads to learning disabilities, birth defects, hyperactivity, violence, depression, and a whole list of other mental and physical anomalies, including suicide. By ruining people's health with inexpensive foods — junk food, fast food, poisoned food — it may not be too bold to stress that, to a certain extent, the market system institutionalizes a form of class extermination."

Jesse smirked. "Is that really what's going on?"

"Why shouldn't it be? History is merely a convenient compilation and arbitrary interpretation of facts. Consequently, anyone's history, if it explains events, is compelling, especially to similar understandings. However, considering your country's economic foundations and recurring infection with social Darwinism, I think this explanation is rather plausible."

"That seems a little hard to believe ... " Jesse tried to intercede. Feszj ignores him for the moment and continued on.

"One solution the indigent have to survive is reproducing at a faster rate than the wealthier classes — something that has been amply proven throughout your world and throughout your centuries." Jesse shook his head. The discussion was getting beyond his

comprehension. "However," said Feszj, "a more rational approach to the problem is collectivization."

"Collective—what?"

"Banding together and pooling limited resources to raise their own foods, repair their own cars, and receive medical treatment. But none of this ought to be anything new." Feszj punctuated the change in direction by raising his voice. "Your political pundits, your industrialists, your philosophers, they all know the problems exist, but are also unable to solve the problems. On the other hand, thousands of collectives exist coping somewhat successfully with the problem, and are all but ignored by the general population."

"Why's that?"

"Because the people in a position to affect change ascribe to a world view that prohibits them from changing anything. Oh, here we are."

Feszj's abrupt change in conversation caught Jesse off-guard. While engrossed in conversation, the two covered the last stretch of road rather quickly and unexpectedly. They stopped at the top of the hill where the road crests and started descending downward. Feszj's eyes overlooked the valley below, and before Jesse could pick up the conversation where it ended, followed his eyes to an amazing scene. Jesse's eyelids withdrew into his eye sockets. His breathing momentarily ceased even though his mouth opened.

"There it is, Jesse. Vilmar."

Below him, covering acres of land, rose a community he never could have imagined, much less dreamed. Ten huge mounds, over twenty feet high each and covered with grass, formed a ring much larger than a football field in diameter. Between the mounds were gaps which allowed access into the central section of the community. In the center of the ring was an even larger semi-spherical building which must have risen 60-odd feet above the ground. But the most stunning site was the gigantic dome, anchored to white square plates at the top of each mound, which covered the entire community. The dome, composed of innumerable grayish-tinted hexagonal glass panes, sparkled in the sun and cast a shadow over the interior of the edifice.

"I don't believe it," said Jesse unconsciously. Feszj, overhearing Jesse's awe, nodded his head in silent agreement.

"Do you still think you're dreaming now?"

Jesse failed to register Feszj's question, enthralled by what he viewed below him. He scanned the area in parts, impossible to take the entire scene in at once. Jesse soon noticed dozens of other people scurrying around and under the dome, most dressed, as far as Jesse could tell from the top of the hill, in similar style cotton body suits and pull-overs as he and

Feszj wore, each of varying colors. Off to the left side of the dome and a little in front, he saw a group of kids of various ages playing a strange game with what looked like a six-foot rubber ball. They held the ball in place while one or two would climb to the top, stand, and try to remain upright as the ball was moved. A hopeless endeavor in most cases, ending with the child on top losing balance, flopping down on the ball, bouncing off into the waiting though ineffective arms of other playmates, only to pile up on the ground amidst raucous laughter. The larger kids seemed uninterested in riding the ball, instead seeing fit to organize the efforts of the smaller children. Hopping around them were some playful puppies yelping and nipping at their heels all the while. Elsewhere, other adults and children and more mature dogs strode back and forth between the dome and the farmlands beyond, pushing wheelbarrows and carrying baskets, some empty, some full. What they were filled with, Jesse couldn't tell from this distance.

"What's in the wheelbarrows?" he asked of Feszj.

"Most likely vegetables for the celebration tonight."

Celebration? Jesse mused to himself. That would explain the activity which occupied the attention of the largest group of people he saw. Decorating the overhangs of the dome above the gaps between the mounds, they strung up what looked like large orange balls with streamers hanging down from them.

"If you look carefully, you can see pumpkins and corn being hung over the entrances," said Feszj, as if reading Jesse's mind.

"Celebration?" asked Jesse. "What's the occasion?"

"It's the Fall harvest festival. The last of the Fall crops are being brought in today for distribution tonight and tomorrow. A dozen or so pilots will be arriving soon to transport the food to other communities. They, as well as you, will be our special guests tonight."

"Pilots?"

"Yes. The transport pilots. A rare breed of people which lives a nomadic existence, travelling from town to town, transporting everything from food to clothing to windmills and solar cells, based on whatever is needed at any particular time in any particular place."

"There are airplanes here?" Jesse wasn't listening to the explanation. Nonetheless, Feszj continued unabated.

"They have no traditional homes, instead living upon the hospitality of each settlement. In a sense, this makes the whole region their home. It takes a special temperament to live this way, and they love their duties. Of course, they are well treated upon their arrival."

"I don't see any landing sites, even for a helicopter."

Feszj hung his head in disappointment. Still, he reluctantly dealt Jesse's stubborn thinking.

"These transports are a little beyond your technology. They are similar to your hovercrafts, except these counteract the planet's gravitation allowing them to glide over the ground."

"Neat."

"Maybe so, but not as neat as the observation that you seem to be more concerned with technology than with the people who operate it. The true miracle lies not with the behemoth ships that travel our skies, but with the average person who helped design and build the craft and the people who fly them. We refuse to let technology mask the humanity which underlies it."

Feszj started descending the hill before Jesse had an opportunity to respond. Jesse felt he ought to apologize for his insensitivity, but why should he? He didn't do anything wrong.

"Wait a minute," said Jesse hustling after Feszj, who was moving quickly down the hill, "what's wrong with technology? We're a lot better off because of it."

"There is nothing wrong with technology," replied Feszj, slowing down to allow Jesse to catch up. "The problem are the myths which are propagated to justify technology. For example, when computers were first imagined and designed, they were supposed to make life easier for workers, and allow people more free time. However, ever since computers were mass produced, workers have had less time to themselves, having over a month less free time now each year than then. You see, your visionaries failed to account for the obvious: that market productivity will always be maximized. Thinking computers will provide extra free time ignored this fact, and assumed that productivity would remain constant. How naïve.

"Anyway, by the time the population realized its mistake, it was too late. Personal time was being consumed at a faster rate by increased corporate demands for productivity. The dream of a shorter work week disappeared. But as you said, it wasn't technology's fault. It was the fault of the humans underneath who misunderstood your society's economic mandates, and the fault of those above who understood them all too well. Remember, if you learn nothing else from your visits here, learn that almost every technological advance either sees or doesn't see the light of day outside of the laboratory based on its ability to enlarge the profits of a corporation. Any benefit to humanity is at best secondary to that end."

Jesse quit walking. "I don't believe that."

"Skeptical, Jesse?" Feszj turned to see Jesse, arms folded over his chest, nodding vigorously.

"You bet."

"That's good." Feszj raised a lean finger towards him. "Always be skeptical. It keeps everyone on notice, and you alert."

Jesse looked pleased to gain such unexpected respect from Feszj, and he pushed his advantage, trying to look unimpressed.

"That's all well and good, Feszj, but I haven't heard any proof yet."

Feszj beckoned Jesse to join him as he walked down the hill. As he neared him, Feszj placed his arms on Jesse's shoulders, drawing the young man next to him.

"Did you realize that cars could have been made which achieved four times greater gas mileage? With the addition of an inexpensive fan, the fuel/air mixture could have been efficiently atomized, maximizing fuel economy, reducing carbon monoxide emissions, and slowing fossil fuel depletions. But plans for this device, along with many others, were quickly purchased by energy companies and squelched to prevent cars from becoming too energy efficient. The quest for profit superseded global health.

"The quest for profit also explains why American companies sold steel to the Japanese during World War Two; and why American companies continue to operate in countries like China, or Indonesia, or Guatemala, despite the miserable treatment of their own citizens. Because these countries are favorable to American businesses, your government and media tend to look the other way, or try to rationalize minimal token changes as major accomplishments.

"All this happens within a seeming paradox. On one hand, sanctions are considered the best way to affect internal social change in countries like Cuba and Iraq. On the other hand, the same administration will adamantly assert that unhindered economic trade with a country like China is the best way to affect internal social change. It may seem paradoxical, but it's not. Foreign policy is dependent upon corporate needs for productivity. And as multinational companies come into their own, government edicts can be circumvented. Only international laws and legislation can solve that problem, but wealthy countries resist such moves. After all, international laws would remove whatever advantages multinationals possess. It has little to do with national sovereignty, which is actually a euphemism for corporate imperialism."

Feszj looked at Jesse and watched him shake his head. "Are you okay, Jesse?"

"Actually no," admitted Jesse, embarrassed. "I mean, it's very interesting, and it seems to make a lot of sense." Jesse rubbed his eyes and forehead. "But it also takes a lot of thinking."

"That's true. I'm sorry if I am overstimulating you. We can talk more after you have eaten."

During their conversation, the two travelled a considerable distance down the hill. They were first spotted by the puppies dancing around the children with the ball. Once the pups started running towards them, some children began calling after them. They too noticed Feszj and Jesse striding along the road. Shrieks of pleasure erupted from the children once they realized who was coming.

"Feszj!"

The group abandoned their game and their ball and rushed over, literally throwing themselves on Feszj accompanied with an abundance of hugs. Feszj made sure everyone received a hug in return. Then the children, without any prompts or any less enthusiasm, swarmed around Jesse for more hugs. Jesse stepped back, but was immediately surrounded. Jesse tensed and prepared to fight off the children. However, some of the kids seem to sense fear in Jesse and held themselves and the others back. Confused, the children talked nervously among themselves.

"Does everybody here hug?" Jesse said, raising his voice above the chattering.

"Yes," replied Feszj. "It's our universal expression of affection."

"Affection? You mean like ... love?" Jesse almost choked on the word.

"If you wish."

"But I don't know these kids." Jesse looked at them with suspicion. One of the smaller children, a pudgy-cheeked Hispanic-looking boy, shrunk away. "And they don't know me."

"They wish to express their affection for you," said Feszj, his eyes narrowing, "and you find that offensive?"

"Well ..." Humbled, Jesse sought ignorance to save face. "I don't understand."

"There are four reasons for it." Feszj spoke slowly and patiently. "First, they see the adults in the community hugging all the time, so this is all they know. This is how they have learned to greet people — much like how you learned to handshake. Second, the children see that I'm with you, and since I trust you, they will, too. Third, they knew strangers were coming to town and wished to be the first of the community to show their respect. But fourth, and perhaps most importantly, even if I weren't here, and no one was

expected to arrive when you just walked into town out of nowhere, they would still hug you."

"Why?"

"Because, in the end, the only thing that matters is the fact that you are a fellow human being."

Wading through the group of children encircling Jesse, Feszj moved to stand next to him. He placed his arm around his shoulder.

"Children," Feszj said to the group, "this is Jesse."

The children responded with polite hellos, 'Welcome to Vilmar,' and other introductions and greetings.

"These youngsters," continued Feszj, now speaking to Jesse, "do not prejudge anyone, nor will they ever. They don't know how. As far as they are concerned, all humans deserve affection."

"But they're like puppy dogs," whispered Jesse into Feszj's ear.

"And you wonder why a dog is man's best friend?"

Feszj then released his hold of Jesse and, while leaving the circle, spoke one more time to the lone teenager. "For once, Jesse, feel how wonderful it is to be loved simply for being."

Jesse took his eyes off Feszj and looked at the big, hopeful eyes of the boys and girls around him. They waited patiently but expectantly for anything that Jesse might do. Nervously, Jesse knelt down on one knee, swallowed, and extended his arms to the children and braced himself passively for what might happen..

All at once, the circle charged Jesse with cheers and hollering. He might have been knocked over by the rush if he weren't squeezed into the middle of the mass of juvenile humanity. He tried to keep emotionally aloof, but he could not help but absorb the genuine affection and warmth these kids extended towards him. The excitement was contagious and soon Jesse beamed as he willingly and actively embraced the eager troupe of kids. The exuberance and naïveté of the children quickly broke down any remaining reluctance Jesse may have had from his earlier disinclination to hug.

Feszj, stood apart and watched Jesse fall off the road onto the grass, rolling and rollicking with the children as the pups licked at his laughing face. Feszj grinned slightly and wiped a tear from his cheek.

* * *

"I bet you spend most of your days hugging," said a smiling Jesse, brushing dried grass out of his hair with one hand and playfully pulling a child to his hip with the other. Other children brushed the grass from his clothes.

"Other visitors have mentioned that," remarked Feszj. He noticed the children pushing Jesse in the direction of the ball. "As much as I'm sure you would like to play with these kids, we have other sights and people to see." Then turning to the entourage following Jesse, he said, "I'm sure the boys and girls will understand."

The group disengaged with Jesse, some getting in one last hug, before rushing off back to the ball and yelling farewells over their shoulders.

"Good-bye."

"See you later."

Jesse waved good-bye to the kids, disappointed that they had to leave so soon.

"Don't worry, Jesse," said Feszj, reading Jesse's yearning gazes. "There will be ample opportunity to play later. Right now, there is a whole new world to show you."

"What's the game are they playing over there?" Jesse pointed to the ball. Feszj took his young charge's disinterest in stride.

"Some of the children call that game 'Walk the Ball.' I don't know half of the games these kids create, but that particular game every child learns. It's part of their heritage and upbringing."

"Why? What's so important about it?"

"When did you learn baseball, Jesse?" Apparently changing the subject, Feszj slowed down his gait as he spoke.

"I can't really remember. It was so long ago. I used to watch it on TV with my dad. I remember snatches of memories of when I would be bounced on his knees when the Yankee's got a hit and ran around the bases. He would grab my hand and pretend I would pitch the ball whenever the other team batted. He would yank my arms for every out called and spread my arms for every safe."

"You probably cherished every moment." Feszj continued the story for Jesse. "You probably ran to your father daily asking who was playing that night, or that weekend. You father probably bought you your own baseball and mini-sized glove to wear while watching the game. You probably ate peanuts and hot dogs in front of the television."

"The only time we were ever allowed to eat in the living room was during games."

"And you learned all the names of the players, the old ones like Ruth, Gerigh, DiMaggio, and the new ones as well. Your father described the great scenes from the past, and the folklore which spawned around the game."

Jesse bobbed his head in wonder. "That's right." *How does he know all this?*

"As soon as you could hold your head up and watch a television, this is where and when you learned baseball. You loved your father, and in turn you loved the game that brought you two together. So, if someone were to ask you what is so important about baseball, you could say that it's not just the game, but the love and affection associated with it. Baseball meant something more to you, as it probably did to thousands of other kids and their fathers over the century. And you probably enjoy playing the game now more because of the good feelings of the past tucked away in your psyche rather than any enjoyment the game might give you.

"So, as you can see, games and sports have significant links to deep emotional and psychological associations that extend beyond the ostensible. Your competitive sports possess these cues; our games have them as well. And each association provides additional foundations that reinforce or obscure the new behaviors learned from the activity itself."

"Whatever you say, Feszj." Jesse only half listened to him. Instead, he intermittently craned his neck over his shoulder to watch the ball game. The noisy laughter and occasional cheering constantly distracted Jesse.

"Fascinating, isn't it?" said Feszj, patting Jesse on the shoulder. Jesse nodded absentmindedly. "There will be time later for fun and games," continued Feszj. "In the meantime, let's head into the dome."

The gamesters faded from hearing as the two continued along the road until a sidewalk branched off and headed towards the community. The size of the dome amazed Jesse. It seemed to grow larger and larger as he approached. The massive interior building especially awed Jesse, and through the opening between the mounds and under the glass dome, he started making out windows in its ceiling walls. He also noticed what looked like crystal pillars sticking out of the massive mounds encircling the community.

"What are those, Feszj?" Jesse pointed to the objects.

"Those are light collectors. Sunlight hits the lenses which is reflected to a mirror which in turn reflects the light downward into the home, where another set of reflectors shoots the sunlight into the rooms. The ambient lighting is glorious."

"Wait a minute. Those mounds ... "

"... are community living quarters, yes." Feszj nodded in sympathy.

"You live underground?"

"Well, not completely underground. Just partially. On the inside, facing the community center, is a more traditional wall with windows. However, the overall design

is extremely energy efficient. The soil covering provides coolness in the summer and warmth in the winter."

"Where is everybody?" asked Jesse. He had not seen many people as he approached the dome, aside from the children.

"Most of the community inhabitants are busy with completing the harvest and preparing for the celebration on the other side of the dome, the side facing the farmland."

Jesse then remembered something he had been meaning to bring up for some time.

"Everyone wears pretty much the same things around here."

"Our clothing is functional," replied Feszj, "with only minimal decorations, limited to an occasional patch or color scheme. Remember, it's not what on the outside of the individual that counts."

"But," and Jesse felt himself quite clever thinking of this rejoinder, "what's on the outside reflects what's on the inside."

"Is that what your clothing advertisers have told you?"

"It's true. Clothing is a representation of a person's individuality." Jesse had heard this position stated elsewhere, and it had always sounded good.

"Maybe so, but representations essentially mean nothing. How you wish to be perceived above and beyond what you already are is a sign of vanity and secrecy. You put on an outfit to mask what you really are. You wear certain attire to imply that you are something you aren't. You are just acting, and the costumes enhance the deception.

"The minimal amount of clothing we possess gives us no opportunity to hide. Unlike your public relations specialists in your world who primp and prune their clients to be perceived as individuals who are better educated than others, more virile and sexy, and are in command of a lifestyle the rest ought to envy and emulate.

"But it is all part of the show. People in your society are 'informed' by advertisers that they ought to be dissatisfied with themselves and their existences. In part, they are correct. Your society is laden with meaningless lives, empty of experiences. But the problem cannot be solved through flashy wardrobes, or large homes, or fast cars. It just reinforces the insecurities, because advertisers constantly work to insure that consumers will always become dissatisfied with their purchases as soon as possible, thus prompting additional purchases.

"The answer lies in developing our self-worth through experiences that cannot be made obsolete. Friendships, relationships, and the like make us feel important simply for what we are, what we do, and what we know. We are who we are, and our personalities are

reflected in what we say and what we do, not what we wear or what we buy, except that it indicates a lack of personality."

Jesse and Feszj walked underneath the entrance to the interior of the settlement, which had already been decorated with pumpkins and dried corn. Once inside, the interior assailed Jesse with all kind of wonders. As his eyes adjusted to the shade provided by the tinted glass, Jesse saw the stone path connect with a larger stone walkway which, as far as he could tell, went in a circle all the way around the interior. He could see and hear birds flying around under the dome. He heard echoes of dozens of people employed energetically throughout the interior. Jesse now saw the interior walls of the homes, composed of long vertical wood slats of a rich amber color. A carving of a complex arrangement of interconnecting triangles graced the wooden doors in front of the homes.

But again, the most impressive sight was the ovoid-shaped building in the middle of the community. Fifty yards in diameter at the base, it towered above everything else, nearly touching the top center of the dome. Made up of triangular shaped pieces of ...

"Is that made of plastic?" Jesse asked.

"Yes. The geodesic dome is composed of large panels constructed of foam insulation sandwiched between two sheets of plastic."

"That's odd."

"Hardly. The geodesic dome is perhaps of the strongest structure ever designed."

"No, no. That's not what I meant," interjected Jesse. "Although that doesn't explain the dome."

"No, that's correct. The dome is different because a hexagonal structure has a greater surface area than a geodesic structure. And," Feszj raised a quick finger in anticipating Jesse's question, leaving him only to close his mouth, "that is important because the entire dome is made up of solar cells. The more surface area, the greater the collection of electricity."

"Wow. That's neat. But what if it's not sunny?"

"The electricity is stored, so we can draw upon reserves when the collectors are not at peak. Plus, and you saw these objects before glinting in the sunshine on the mountainside, we have giant windmills constantly supplying energy for the community. And if all else fails, or we need a tremendous amount of energy, we turn to water."

"Water?"

"Yes. You see, unlike petroleum based energy sources which are relatively inefficient and extremely toxic, using water as a source of hydrogen energy is highly efficient, produces no pollution, and is exceedingly abundant. In fact, one of your scientist, Dr.

Randall Mills, has figured out how to do this. But very few, if anybody, seem to be interested. In the meantime, levels of pollution continue to rise."

"That reminds me of my second point."

"Apparently science is of little interest unless it is science fiction," said Feszj under his breath."

"What was that?"

"Nothing. What was your second point, Jesse?"

"Well, if this community is so concerned about the environment, it's odd that you would use plastics."

"Not odd at all. Only resourceful." Jesse peered at Feszj.

"But why would you call it resourceful?" asked Jesse. "Plastics take centuries to decompose."

"Exactly, but look how it is being used. You see, your society uses plastics for an inordinately high number of trivial purposes like milk cartons, six-pack rings, sandwich bags, and countless other wasteful applications that are used once then tossed away to a landfill. We use plastics for specific reasons: to help construct items we wish to last centuries. It's only recently that your scientists have begun designing bridges made from plastic." Feszj points to the mounds around them. "Our living quarters, for example, are actually gigantic plastic shells, impervious to the soil placed around them. Plastics are insect resistant, extremely durable ..."

"But what about the wood walls and doors?"

"It is one of the things we do to give the community an attractive ambiance, but it is simply a decorative fascia. Fabricated from hardwoods native to the area, and protected from the elements by the dome, it too will last for decades, perhaps a century — long enough for the replacement saplings to grow. But almost everything you see, and many things you don't see, are constructed with plastics. And plastics, of course, are also recyclable."

"You seem to be very big on recycling around here," said Jesse.

"We produce and use nothing that is not either reusable, recyclable, or biodegradable. Even the food we send out returns for use in our composting."

"We recycle at home as well."

"I'm sorry Jesse," said Feszj, "but recycling soda cans is barely a start. There are paper, metals, plastics, glass, and many more. Unfortunately, for an all-too-large number of people in your society, it is enough to throw away an aluminum can into a recycling box to assuage social conscience. Plus the fact that there are so many different plastics and

paper and glass that need to be separated, recycling is a daunting task. It is a shame that companies refuse to reduce the variety of materials to ease the recycling burden."

"Come to think of it," replied Jesse, "I've noticed that variety: brown glass, green glass, clear glass. Tin cans, aluminum cans, other metals. Newspapers, glossies, junk mail, cardboard. What a mess. Yeah, it is no wonder."

"Granted," Feszj went on, "there are some towns around where you live that are enlightened enough to make a concerted effort to recycle — in some cases, mandating it — but they are small and insufficient to make a major contribution to the amount of trash accumulating. Most people, and perhaps understandably, do not wish to be bothered with the problem. Throw it in a trash bag, throw it in a garbage truck, and watch it drive away into mental oblivion. After all, there are better things to do."

Feszj emphasized 'better' with a peculiar and cynical snarl. Jesse noticed it but only vaguely understood its import.

"Our society," continued Feszj, "makes a concerted effort every day to assure the absolute minimal amount of waste, unlike your society. It isn't the technology that makes the difference. Remember what I said before — we accomplish very little here that your technology cannot duplicate. Your world has ample technology to deal with many, if not all, of your waste products."

"So, what's the problem?"

"For a society which exclaims the virtues of personal responsibility, an inordinately large percentage of your population works very hard to avoid it. There is a palpable lack of commitment to anyone but oneself. In the case of conservation, it needs to be a matter of wanting to accept responsibility for people that will never be seen or ever be known, for they have yet to be born. It is a commitment that mandates a conscious sense of humility which your society shuns."

"I don't understand," said Jesse.

"Your society," said Feszj, slowing his speech so he can consider the best wording, "would rather promote individuals who abuse everyone's future by exploiting the present to the accolades of their stockholders, than a person who believes community represents more than just drinking companions smoking cigars in some private club. Individuals in your society must overcome the temporal boundaries which restrict their thinking and prevent them from becoming friends with their past and future. Someone who doesn't let an accident of temporal location — being in the right place at the right time — determine who succeeds and who fails, who wins and who loses, who survives and who dies. But like I said before, those in a position of power and influence, the very people who have

profited most from the chance occurrences of fate, are the least interested in changing anything. They have no desire to relinquish that which they have obtained so fortuitously."

"But there must be a balance."

Jesse's comment intrigued Feszj. "A balance?"

"Of course. It is a constant choice, a balancing act, between progress and conservation."

"But the balance is fictitious, Jesse. Think about it. To what are you progressing?"

"Um ..." Jesse never quite thought about it. Progress always seemed to be self-explanatory, something that was never questioned. "To a better life?"

"Can you be so sure, considering your age is the first age in human history that actually has to invent technology to counteract previous toxic technology. But you don't see that because each technology adds to your GNP. The more damage you do to the environment, the more you have to work to clean it up, the stronger your economy looks, and everyone's happy." Feszj forced a dry and cynical laugh. "How nice."

Feszj continued. "Sure, you have luxuries, more luxuries than you know what to do with, but has this ended poverty, starvation, or disease in your society or your world? Has all this commerce made you or your friends more moral or less selfish? Hardly. And if you have become more socially conscious, it has been in spite of your society's wasteful habits." Feszj was virtually yelling now. "Conservation is the only future you have. It has always been the only future, since you only have so much to use ... and so much to lose."

Feszj's eyes flashed once again, becoming unfocused in the passion of his speech. The fire and brimstone commentary to follow both tantalized and frightened Jesse. Feszj looked not so much at him but through him hoping his words would echo within Jesse's soul.

"Crimes against humanity apply to genocidal murderers, torturers, and war mongers. But never polluters — people and corporation engaged in the murder and tortured deaths and possible extinction of animals and humans present and future. They get away with it. Why? Well, like all genocidal activities, their activities are supported by the state. After all, only the victors determine who actually committed crimes against humanity, and the victors in your world are multinationals. But maybe more importantly, the criminals who perpetrate these crimes act with impunity because they will rarely if ever have to face their accusers.

"From every corporate executive who gleefully fights for contracts to make weapons of mass destruction, to the beleaguered working mom who uses disposable diapers, to the

lowest unemployed Teamster who throws a cigarette butt out a car window, you are all responsible for your own genocide."

Jesse understood all too clearly, and he felt ashamed at the wastefulness of his actions. He sank his head to his chest.

"But again, Jesse, it is not your fault," said Feszj, calming down and refocusing his attention on Jesse. "It was never expressed to you in quite so apocalyptic of terms." Jesse shrugged his shoulders. Feszj went on. "But feeling remorse at your actions is a step in the right direction, a step in becoming linked to the community of all eras. And the fact that your societal spokespersons encourage you to think otherwise demonstrates how far they have to go before they, too, feel some mortification. You, my friend, are one step ahead."

Jesse lifted his head towards Feszj and nodded. That was some consolation, but not enough. He still felt miserable, not only for himself but for the human race in general — a species gleefully and optimistically rushing headlong into self-destruction.

* * *

"Would you like to see what's inside the 'bubble,' as we call it?" Feszj extended his hand towards the huge building in the middle of the complex. Jesse, thankful for the opportunity to forget his morbid thoughts, eagerly agreed. They started walking along the sidewalk to one of the side entrances to the building.

Jesse noticed primarily two plants growing in the ground all around the sidewalks and throughout the interior of the dome — grass that had been trimmed short and another, unattractive, plant possessing hard leaves of dark brownish green.

"What are those plants?" asked Jesse.

"Those are iron plants. They will grow practically anywhere, need almost no attention, very little water, and are incredibly insect resistant. In essence, they are indestructible."

"But doesn't the dome keep out the rain?"

"It does, but we have irrigation lines that collect what little rainwater these plants use and channel it into the interior." Jesse looked around. "Don't bother looking. They're hidden."

"But what about the grass? I assume it doesn't need a lot of water either?"

"Correct. It is called midget grass and was genetically designed to grow to a maximum height of between 5 to 10 centimeters. It's water requirements are a little greater than the iron plant, but again, ample water is available through irrigation."

The two reached the door to the central building. Jesse looked up at the building and could no longer see the top — the building curving away from sight. He now got a better impression of its size when he compared himself to the large triangular panels which are themselves almost as tall as Jesse. He stepped off the sidewalk onto the grass and approached one of the wall panels. He ran his hand along the surface and was amazed at how easily it slid across. It was the smoothest surface he had ever felt. Smoother than wet ice. Much smoother than a freshly waxed car.

"The wall is coated to enhance its frictionless quality," remarked Feszj. "Mounted vertical, nothing will adhere to the surface. When laid flat, only the finest layer of dust will stay put, for even a slight breeze will dislodge anything else and blow it away. The slick surface improves its durability by eliminating dirt buildup."

Jesse returned to the sidewalk and they proceeded to where Feszj awaited, a doorway with an arched top which jutted out from the bubble. Beyond Feszj, a door again decorated with the same interlocking triangle pattern he saw before, although this time the triangles were highlighted with different colors.

"There are a lot of triangles here," said Jesse.

"The triangle is the most stable structure known. Your pyramids have lasted thousands of years, and they will last thousands of more. What better symbol for our community?"

"A circle?" Jesse suggested.

"I'm sorry, but with everything resting on only one point, the circle is the most unstable structure."

"But Feszj," insisted Jesse, not wanting to be put off, "what about the notion of the round table and everybody being equal to each other and all that?" Jesse's voice softened with uncertainty as he spoke. "I mean, with a round table, no one is superior to another and no one can place themselves into a position of superiority."

What garbage! Jesse cursed himself. *How could I say something so stupid?* He felt had something important to contribute, but his thoughts raced ahead of his mouth and lost the focus of his argument.

"I know what you're saying, Jesse. And even though we all know what happened to the Round Table, I'm sure arguments have been and could be made to tout the benefits of circles. However, the problem with circles, from our perspective, is the overt reliance on only one point to stabilize it. Remove that point, and the ball starts moving, and stability is lost. The analogy to the charismatic leader is both clear and striking. All too often in history have popular movements collapsed when a leader — that single point of ideological reference — loses influence or leaves and the movement's original focus fragments into

conflicting and competing dogmas. And it is so easy to move, remove, or replace that one point. In our society, no ideologues exist to establish conflicting doctrine."

"But what about the ball game, huh?" inserted Jesse, thinking he had found an inconsistency in Feszj's argument.

"Yes, there is a ball involved, but notice the shape of the construction when you include all the children." Feszj brought his hand up to demonstrate visually his words. "A child on top represents the point, which extends downward to the sides of ball ... " Feszj's hands descended and separated. " ... ending up with the children at the bottom all around, maintaining its stability." Feszj completed his picture. "Include the tutors, the older children which structure the activity, who form the points and what do you have? A tetrahedron. A three dimensional triangle. A triangle necessary in stabilizing the ball."

Jesse stood and shook his leg nervously.

"Another problem with the circle, if you'll allow me to extend an analogy," continued Feszj, "is that no one idea ever receives special acceptance. All ideas are essentially equal, and just as a circle may roll and supporting points constantly changing, so too are ideas interchangeable. Any one of them can support the society, meaning none of them offers stability. The circle-slash-society can be pushed or shoved in any direction. It is a situation your society has created for itself; for in its unwillingness to actually coerce ideological change in instances when one idea may be better than another, your pundits claim only the most basic of human needs of life as universal, like opposing murder and starvation. But even then, exceptions are made. Killing is acceptable in war, and in the preservation of peace. Starvation still exists — three million children a year die of starvation in your world, and tens of millions more die of malnutrition related illnesses. To end war and starvation, larger, more righteous nations need to dominate, annex, or eliminate smaller, more morally incorrect countries.

"But this isn't done for several possible reasons. One, the notion of national sovereignty permits nations to abuse their own population as long as they support market capitalism, thus the recent surge in newly created nations and encouragement from the West. By establishing new countries, older established countries gain additional political clout and influence; and by maintaining a new world order by adding more and more new and often impoverished countries, multinational corporations are at an advantage — pitting nations desperate for economic development against each other. Two, it takes too much effort to actually act ethically than to talk of ethics. Or three, perhaps some political conscience prevents these overt remedies because nations are unsure whether their ideological positions are justifiably superior, ending in moral paralysis.

"So, to satisfy the pundits search for a solution without really finding one, your culture replaces the more meaningful term of 'understanding' with the more innocuous term 'tolerance' and just accepts the differences. You don't have to understand why; you don't even have to like them. Just stomach them, and live with them. In the end, what you have is the most minimal level of community, and yet it is the maximum level your society has reached, despite thousands of years of opportunity to do better. But cultures and societies can't function for long if there are a multitude of guiding principles competing for the hearts and minds of its population. Inevitably, they all disintegrate."

Jesse tried to remain stoic, but both his frustration with Feszj and personal humiliation at comprehending little of the argument's significance grew. That wasn't a problem at home, where he knew how to deal with humiliation. He could punch, insult, or belittle his antagonists, winning back his self-esteem, and their responses would always be predictable. But here, everyone acted differently. They were an apologetic people — openly, if not eagerly, accepting blame for their actions yet absolving him for his actions. He couldn't figure out what they were up to, and that angered him intensely.

"What about the dome," asked Jesse, tight-lipped and eyes tearing, trying to bring the subject back to something he understood, "and all those hexagons?"

"First, a dome is just a flattened pyramid, and a hexagon is just six triangle together."

"You must like confusing and contradicting me," said Jesse. Unable to control his emotions any longer, he lashed out in anger to avoid crying. "Do you like making me feel like an idiot?"

Feszj's smiling face changed into an apologetic one. He leaned his head down towards Jesse and spoke.

"No one here thinks you are an idiot. Yet there are many things with our world that are different from yours. I am just presenting these differences. You don't have to accept anything I say. However, if you are as open-minded as I think you are, then hopefully, you will be able to see some merit in our ways of life. Remember, you can leave at anytime, but the fact that you are staying demonstrates to us that you are curious about new ways of looking at the world and new vocabularies with which to describe the world.

"By accepting our invitation to come here, we are introducing into you new ways of looking at the world which you must assimilate with your older ways. And I agree, that is difficult. It is painful as well. But by expanding your vocabulary of world views, you open up alternatives and future possibilities that were not there before. Only an idiot resists by shielding their conceptions or reality with dogma. They shield themselves to avoid the pain.

"The fact that you feel pain clearly means that you are opening up, and that's good. Yes, it hurts. I know. I've been there. But I have also experienced the results of these growing pains — the euphoria of seeing beyond what I previously thought was limit of my horizon. It is an euphoria you too will experience once you start seeing beyond what is to what could be, and understand that the hope-filled imagination of a child is much more valuable to your future than the cynical pragmatism of an adult."

Feszj looked into Jesse's eyes, and saw through the liquid a feverish attempt to understand.

"I'm sorry, Jesse. I never meant to intimidate you."

"No, it's probably my fault." *I didn't have to apologize*, he thought. Yet for some reason, accepting fault made Jesse feel better. His shoulders straightened, his emotions subsided, and his head cleared.

"Still," said Feszj, "you are our guest."

"If I could just express what I'm thinking better, I wouldn't have this problem."

"It's not a problem. All you lack is knowledge and experience. I've been around a few more years than you have, and I have dealt with these issues before. Conversely, all this is new to you, and it can seem overwhelming. Just keep an open mind, and don't try to absorb it all at once."

At that moment, a woman pushed open the door to the building and almost collided with Feszj as she rushed outside. Then, seeing who she almost bumped into, her face lit up with a gleaming smile.

"Oh. Hello, Feszj." Feszj and the young woman hugged. She was a blond woman of average build. Her face was smooth with a turned up nose. Overly round buttocks topped off thick legs. Because she was wearing tights, Jesse couldn't tell if her legs were muscular or fatty. When they disengaged from their embrace, Jesse saw that she possessed flawless, practically rigid, posture. Jesse also noticed a small roll of fat on the back of her arms above her elbow when her arms dropped to her side.

"I'm sorry for almost rearranging you face," said the woman with a husky voice.

"Perhaps I ought not to have stood in front of the door for so long. Jesse and I were having a discussion. But I have yet to introduce you. Beedie, this is Jesse."

"It is a pleasure to meet you," said Beedie, hugging the acquiescent adolescent. "We've been expecting you."

"Beedie works in the water reclamation center in the basement of this building," remarked Feszj.

"You recycle water here?" said Jesse, after she released him.

"We recycle everything," said Beedie, "especially water. Only about two and a half percent of the water on this planet is suitable for drinking without going through desalination."

"Whereas on your planet" continued Feszj, "in the course of only about two hundred years, due to your miserable legacy of pollution, you have ruined almost eighty percent of your fresh water supply. Only about one-half of one percent of your world's water is now drinkable."

"Well, we're fixing that," said Jesse, trying to mount a defense. "We have sewage treatment centers."

"Yes, that's true," agreed Feszj. "Let's hope it isn't too little too late."

"Oh, Feszj," said Beedie, playfully punching him in the arm, and immediately causing Jesse to like her, "you could make the Mona Lisa frown, you're so depressing. Remember what you always taught us? The medium is the message. What he sees here will mean more to him than anything you could ever explain."

"You are absolutely right," admitted Feszj. "I too often forget that simple truism."

"You must forgive Feszj here," Beedie said, leaning over into Jesse's ear. "Sometimes he gets so carried away, his teaching sounds like preaching."

Feszj playfully quizzed Beedie. "Is there a difference?"

Beedie stood straight, eyed him for a moment, and then stepped over to face him up close.

"Always the teacher, eh?" she asked.

"If I stop teaching, I stop learning. And when I stop learning, my mind and my body will age and decay from disuse. And if and when that happens, I will dig myself a home underground with no windows or doors, lay down on a bed of clay, and sleep." Feszj stroked Beedie's hair. "I never grow old surrounded by students."

"I know." Her reply was breathy, as she caressed Feszj's cheek with the back of her fingers in return. "You will always be younger than all of us." Beedie wrapped her hands around his face, and gently lowered his head so she could kiss him.

"I will always be grateful I had you as my teacher," she said, standing and holding his hands. The two stared at each other, speaking silently with their eyes and sharing emotions with their touch.

Jesse, feeling completely out of the loop, turned away feeling an uncomfortable mix of embarrassment and revulsion. Not knowing what to do with himself, he started walking over to the wall to feel the plastic once again. But he didn't get very far, being called back by Beedie's ebullient voice.

"Jesse." He returned to the walkway. "I truly hope you enjoy your visits with us. If there is anything I can do for you, let me know."

"Well," Feszj spoke up. "Now that you mention it ..."

"Anything!"

"I was hoping you would escort Jesse around the bubble. I will need to leave shortly for a few minutes, and I really think Jesse would be more interested in seeing the building."

"I would love to," said Beedie, but then an embarrassed flush arose in her cheeks. "However, right now I'm off to check the impellers. We just got a computer signal on one that was malfunctioning. I should be back soon, though. Have you eaten?"

"Food! Of course," exclaimed Feszj, slapping his forehead with the heel of his hand. Jesse's mouth salivated. *Finally. God, I'm hungry.*

"Well then," said Beedie, "why don't you have something to eat, and I'll be back by the time you're through. Fair enough?" Feszj and Jesse both agreed, with Jesse nodding with a vigor only hunger inspires. "Great. Well, gotta go. I'll see you two soon. Oh, and by the way, Jesse." She stopped short and spun in his direction. "If Feszj gets up on his soapbox again, remind him of what he always taught us: Don't prescribe. Don't prejudge. Just present."

She winked at Jesse, slowly drew her fingers up Feszj's arm as she passed around him on the sidewalk, then strode quickly down the path heading towards the same opening to the dome which Feszj and Jesse entered.

"She has tremendous energy, and a vibrant personality," said Feszj, watching her leave. As an afterthought, he added, "And is just fun to be with." Jesse noticed Feszj's eyes lingering on Beedie's departing figure. Then he wondered if Feszj has or had any relationships, even though it appeared obvious he had had at least one.

"Have you known her long?" asked Jesse.

"Most of my life," replied Feszj, not moving his eyes off her. Feszj remained silent for a moment, almost in a trance, and then volunteered, "She was a student of mine at one time." He looked at Jesse. "I learned a lot from her." He returned his eyes to Beedie. Jesse looked at Beedie as well.

I'll bet you did.

Checking Feszj's left hand, Jesse saw no ring.

"You never married?" asked Jesse.

"No."

"Why not?"

Feszj turned away from Beedie as she left the dome and spoke to Jesse, his voice regaining its strong inflections, "No one marries here."

"No marriages?" Jesse's incredulity demanded a response, which Feszj partly supplied.

"It's a long story, Jesse. Let's talk about it on our way to the dining hall, shall we?" Feszj opened the door leading into what appeared to be an air lock and beckoned Jesse to enter.

Proceeding through the second door, Jesse and Feszj walk into a hallway which wrapped around the building. The floor was tiled with what looked like polished brick. The air smelled amazingly fresh for the inside of a building. His dad's dealership always had that awful stinging stale quality of carpet and furniture releasing years of pent up cigarette smoke. His school didn't smell that bad, but it had its own distinctive aromas — everything from body odors and perfumes to the dustiness of library books and the mustiness of the locker room's wet carpet. His home smelled like nothing at all, though his nose was perpetually stuffed up there.

Feszj gestured to the left, and they proceeded down the hall. On their left was the exterior wall, with its large glass windows. On the right through a seamless arched glass window which appeared to circle the entire interior section of the building, was what looked like a workshop.

"What's that?" asked Jesse.

"It is one of our research shops. You might call it a repair shop because it is used to keep all the farm equipment — from the tractors to the recycling apparatus — in good working order. But since our apparatus rarely need repair, it is primarily used for the research and development of new equipment."

The large shop, taking up almost half of the bottom floor of the bubble, was filled with what Jesse guessed were tools, though nothing like what he worked with in his middle school shop class. And instead of being covered with metal shavings or oil or dirt or grime, the equipment was clean, polished, made with combinations of plastic and metal. Each machine had a computer screen and a small keypad with letters which, though similar, were different from his English alphabet. As he peered around the room, he thought he made out a drill press, but without a bit in the chuck. Was that contraption next to the back wall a table saw, but without a blade? That didn't make any sense. In fact, very little in the room made sense to him.

Jesse's attention was eventually drawn to several men crowding around a table, above which was suspended a odd shaped device.

"How is that levitating like that?" asked Jesse, pointing to the group.

"Nothing is levitating. The object is a hologram."

"Nah."

"Ah, but it is."

"But it looks so real. All the holograms I know look more like ghosts."

"Give your technology a few hundred more years," said Feszj, shooing Jesse playfully down the corridor. "I thought you were hungry?"

"Yeah, I am. Where's the kitchen?"

"The door is further around the bend."

Jesse realized how well-lit hallway was, but no lights were visible. He followed the gradual brightening of the metal shop towards the center of the building where he could make out a set of mirrors reflecting light upwards and out across the ceiling.

"Is that one of those sunlight catchers?"

"Yes, it is. On top of the dome is a massive set of prisms which concentrate the sunlight down the central shaft of the bubble."

"What happens if there is no sunlight?"

"Inside each crystal is a powerful light bulb, the light of which is reflected down the shaft. The result is quite adequate."

"So, you use only one light bulb to light up the entire building?"

"That's right." Jesse shook his head in astonishment and disbelief.

The pair walked a little further down the corridor when they soon arrived at a pair of swinging doors, with windows extending from the top of the door to the middle, ending in line with the window wrapped around the hallway wall. Etched on the glass of the doors were the words,

DANIU HAL

"What does that say?"

"It says 'Dining Hall.'"

"What language is that? Danish?"

"It's English." Feszj carefully controlled his broadening grin.

"Yeah, right. You think I'm a fool?"

"It is English," insisted Feszj. "It's just that we use a different type of alphabet. A phonetic alphabet."

"What's wrong with the regular one?"

"Unlike the Italian language spellings, for example, which are very phonetic, your standard English language spellings is eighty percent inefficient. That means, at least eight out of ten times a word could be spelled correctly phonetically in more than one way. For example, G-H-O-T-I. What common English word does that spell?"

'Ghoti' was far from common to Jesse. "I dunno," he said, again feeling stupid.

"Fish."

"What?"

"Fish. GH sounds like F in the word *enough*. O sounds like I in the word *women*. And TI sounds like SH in the word *action*. So, there is one different way of spelling fish. And there are other ways — PHOSI, for example. The phonetic system that we use, with its forty phoneme symbols, is known in your world as Unifon.

"One of the benefits of the system is that our children, who know a great many words by the time they learn to write, can now spell correctly all the words they know, and read and perhaps understand correctly words they have never seen. No more need for spellers or spelling tests. Some of your primary education teachers are trying to get away from the restrictive notion of correct spelling in order to foster writing habits in children. However, these kids will eventually have to deal with spelling exams. Spelling phonetically is not permitted in your society, despite its obvious advantages."

"If Unifon is such a great idea," said Jesse, unconvinced, "why haven't we changed over to it?"

"Oh, there are a multitude of reasons. One strong one is that much of your world, including the English speaking part, is lazy. The American lifestyle, for example, thrives on doing what little it can to attain everything it wants. Changing the alphabet to make language simpler would require effort that cannot be linked to any obvious economic or hedonistic goal. Which also explains why the United States has yet to convert to the Metric System, in spite of the fact that over ninety-nine percent of the countries of the world use the Metric system. It is a laziness justified by an arrogant and stubborn resistance to change. 'If the United States does it,' someone might say, 'it must be right.'"

"But wouldn't a phonetic alphabet be all messed up when it comes to different accents?"

"True, it is feared that a loss of regional dialects would result. Yet it could also be argued persuasively that such a result may not be a bad thing, considering that dialects are a way of knowing who's in a group and who isn't, thus maintaining a systematic segregation among individuals and cultures. Any possible global or even national unity is undermined

because a vast number of individuals in your society garner self-esteem from a self-description based on exclusivity.

"Furthermore, if everyone could spell correctly, which the implementation of Unifon would guarantee, it would eliminate one way of determining class distinctions — those highly educated and can spell from those less well educated and cannot spell. It is a position the upper echelons of society do not wish threatened. For as they know, and now you, those with an ability to utilize language well are some the most powerful people in a society. This argument goes a long way in explaining why political pundits actually do so little to improve education. Why threaten their position of authority as learned language users? Why, for that matter, increase the competition their own children, or their campaign contributors's children, will have to face by improving everyone's educational training? Sounds suspiciously like a conflict of interest, don't you think?

Jesse unconsciously nodded in agreement. He had forgotten his hunger for the moment. Feszj went on.

"In any case, there is a threat to the influential if the population becomes too literate, which the social upheavals of the 1960s made very clear. As a response, the media, controlled by the most powerful people in the country, began simplifying its contents. News, for example, started displaying information that was more visually appealing in exchange for becoming more and more superficial. Your population is slowly dumbing down, attention spans are shrinking, but commercial interests will do nothing substantive to change it. After all, individuals benefitting from a caste system in a supposedly casteless society must promote the stabilization of a class hierarchy while preventing a critical understanding of it and possible alternatives to it.. Knowing this assessment also explains many things. It explains why educational reform is geared to improving the education of American *workers* rather than American *citizens*. It explained why public money for the arts and sciences is drying up, being replaced with corporate grants subtly manipulating facts and promoting private agendas. Language, in all that it encompasses and in all its expressions, is used to define, assure, defend, and most importantly, hide just such a class system."

Though he didn't understand why at the time, Jesse found himself accepting more and more of the amazing tale weaved by Feszj. Whether it was because he found his statements compelling, or wanted to avoid feeling stupid, or he was just too tired to resist, he wasn't sure. Yet it did seem to explain a lot.

However, he was at the Dining Hall, and Jesse thought he caught a whiff of garlic which immediately shut down his brain and he no longer listened to Feszj. Jesse pushed

through the doors into the hall and he was instantly assailed with the tangy sweet smell of oregano and garlic. He breathed deeply, trying to sate his appetite by filling himself with the aroma of food.

"Pasta?" asked Jesse, but already knowing the answer.

"Yes, one of our staples."

Jesse quickly scanned the room for the aroma's source. However, he didn't see any food lying out. He saw instead a triangular shaped room with pale blue walls, a white ceiling reflecting the sunlight, and what looked like a one piece linoleum floor. All one the curved edge of the room in front of the window were almost two dozen potted trees, each one spaced every five or six feet from each other. Around the room were numerous large hexagonal, dark glass-surfaced tables. Each table was wrapped with what looked like chairs, but he wasn't sure. They had no backs, and only two padded sections, one about knee high and the other lower, each angled differently. Jesse felt they were chairs, but had no idea how they worked. On the floor in the middle of the room, there was a raised triangle section. On the wall opposite the door were several wooded panels. Jesse was frustrated.

"Where's the food?" asked Jesse gruffly.

"Behind those panels."

Jesse hustled over to the wall, followed by Feszj. Since they had no handles, Jesse fumbled to pry open the panel. Suddenly, the panel slowly pivoted forward and down exposing its plastic interior surface and some warm buns resting on a counter, smoking with steam. Jesse grabbed one, flipped it from hand to hand to cool it down, smelled it, and chomped a huge bite out of it, nearly devouring the entire roll all at once. Jesse mumbled his gratification, despite the intense heat of the bread stinging his palette.

"Nothing like a little hunger to make one appreciate a simple food like bread," said Feszj. Jesse mumbled something, before finishing off the roll. "Perhaps," Feszj remarked, "you would like to have a tray?"

Jesse shot a glance down the wall and saw nothing except for Feszj walking towards the far end of the wall. Feszj lowered the first panel, and simultaneously, all the other panels in the wall dropped forward, creating a platform for the trays to glide along.

"It is just a cafeteria, like at school," said Jesse, almost disappointed by its pedestrian quality.

Feszj smiled, but said nothing. He grabbed two trays with molded compartments and place them on the panel. As Jesse walked down to the wall to Join Feszj, he saw steaming

carrots and broccoli, a small salad bar with cucumbers, onions, peppers, spinach, and another vegetable he had never seen before which had what looked like a fuzzy leaf.

"What's that?"

"Amaranth, one of the most nutritious vegetables there is."

Jesse continued looking over the elections. He saw vegetable soup bubbling, and a large basin of ...

"Brown spaghetti?"

"Whole wheat," replied Feszj, "just like the bread you had." Jesse joined Feszj at the beginning of the buffet and grabbed some metal flatware. He slid his tray down and filled it with large mounds of spaghetti, marinara sauce, carrots, a salad topped what looked like Italian dressing, some more bread.

Jesse was ready to leave to sit when Feszj called him back.

"How about some butter?"

"Where?" Feszj pointed to a clear yellow oil filled with little white squares. "What's that?"

"It is our butter. Garlic in olive oil. One of the healthiest things you can eat. Olive oil helps regulate cholesterol, and garlic is a mild antibiotic. In your world, it is sometimes referred to as the Russian Penicillin. And it's very tasty."

Jesse raised his tray, indicating he had no more room on it for anything else, having already filled it with heaping mounds of pasta. Feszj understood and scooped out a little more on to his tray which was, compared to Jesse's, relatively empty.

"This place seems to be very health conscious," Jesse remarked.

"Of course. You would be as well if you realized that the vast majority of preventable diseases is due to a lousy diet. We work very hard here to eat well, even to the point of organizing the way we eat to inhibit overeating. We encourage people to eat their soup first — the aroma and the heat of the food reduces ones hunger and the fluid fills the stomach. Next, the salad and bread — the fiber swells when combined with the water, again satiating appetite. By the time one begins to eat the main course, many people are no longer hungry. People eat when they're hungry and don't eat when they are not. Because of this philosophy, people eat small portions but eat often, at least six times a day."

"Now, your spending all your days hugging *and* eating," commented Jesse.

"Maybe so," said Feszj, smiling, "but our society has no problem with obesity. Unlike your society."

Jesse caught a tinge of accusation in Feszj's voice, and it triggered the memory of Beedie's comment: Present. Jesse was going to remind Feszj of that, but didn't get a chance. Feszj kept talking.

"You see, corporate America sets a very rigid work day, organizing workers's times as efficiently as they can, so they think. In any case, this organization limits the average worker to only one eating period — lunch — which means that a worker is effectively limited to three meals a day — not the ideal way to eat. Add to this the alarming trend of shrinking lunch times as a growing number of employees eat lunch while working, and you can predict the endemic problem resulting from poor eating habits.

"On the other hand, corporate executives and other people of power and influence, because of privileges garnered by their position, may eat as often as they wish. Consequently, their eating habits are more conducive to a healthier lifestyle. Plus the fact they can afford health club memberships, the best health care, et cetera, and you can see why being wealthy in your society is the healthiest way to live, and in turn have the longest life spans. Again, another example of class extermination against the poor."

"But not all rich people live long lives," argued Jesse. Yet he knew it was a feeble attempt at argument, and he really wasn't sure why he kept debating. Feszj would certainly have a response. Jesse had become convinced by this time that there was nothing he could say in this dream that would not be somehow contradicted or debated. But, as he continued to think to himself, when he wakes up everything will be back to normal — the way it should be.

"Quite true. Many wealthy individuals abuse the privileges they possess. They eat poorly when they could easily eat well. They overeat simply because they have been conditioned to do so. After all, in a world of all-you-can-eat buffets ..."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Jesse, "*this* is an all-you-can-eat buffet. What's the difference?"

"We do not pay for our food, so there is no need to feel obligated to maximize our meal's value by eating more than we need. There is always ample food, so there is also no reason to hoard it. We simply eat when we're hungry, and stop when we're not hungry; and the food is always available when we're hungry. What is absent here but pervasive in your society is the omnipresent encouragement which coerces people to gorge themselves, convinced that it is somehow necessary in order to get their money's worth. It is a mentality that affects all classes, rich and poor. But here is the tragic part: It is a mentality which fosters a healthy economy. Because of the market economy's need for constant

expansion, illness and indolence become necessary for corporate survival. Essentially, the GNP lives off the sins and vices with which your insatiable society accosts itself.

"Face it. If everyone ate responsibly, and walked or biked to their jobs, your economy would collapse. Despite statements to the contrary, a healthy society is a menace. A sick society *trying* to get healthy is what makes a market economy boom."

Jesse had a thought, and was proud to have thought of it. "The fitness industry," he began, as Feszj listened curiously, "works the same way. People became lazier, so health clubs were invented. However, if people became less lazy and healthier, health clubs would close up."

"Yes. Go on," encouraged Feszj.

"So the market economy needs to keep the majority of people lazy just so they can be shamed into exercising, thus spurring increased purchases of treadmills, rowing machines, step climbers, aerobic tapes, sit-up devices, and on and on."

"Exactly." Feszj beamed with pride. "Which explains why after almost a quarter century of your so-called fitness craze, a higher percentage of the population is obese than before."

Feszj motioned with his tray to a nearby table and began walking in that direction. Jesse turned to follow and then it struck him.

"There's no one here."

"They are probably out preparing for the Festival. You may see people enter occasionally while we eat. And occasionally you will see people walking by the windows, although it's hard to see past the trees. Here," said Feszj placing his tray on one of the tables, "have a seat."

"How many people live in the community?"

"Anywhere from between 150 to 180 people."

"That small? And with such large buildings."

"But think Jesse. We only have a dozen or so buildings. A small town of 180 people in your country may have upwards of fifty or more buildings. Which do you think is more efficient?"

The question did not require a response. The answer, as both Feszj and Jesse saw it, was obvious.

Jesse placed his tray on the table but couldn't figure out how to sit on these chairs. So he watched Feszj as he sat in the top pad and placed his knees on the lower pad. Odd, Jesse thought, but since it was all that was available, Jesse did likewise.

"These aren't very comfortable chairs," stated a squirming Jesse.

"They are posture chairs which do take a bit of getting used to, but they effectively keep your lower back strong and flexible."

"And these tables. They seem to be overkill. Quite a lot for just eating on."

"These tables serve several purposes. This is not only the dining hall, but the learning room, another research area, and community meeting room. No doubt you saw the podium in the middle of the floor."

Jesse stuffed his face during the explanation, still adjusting himself trying to find the best sitting position.

"Here. Let me show you." Feszj continued staring at Jesse as he continued. "Computer, please turn on."

Suddenly, in the middle of the black glass table a small red light appeared just under the surface. Jesse momentarily stopped eating. He would liked to have said 'Neat,' but his cheeks possessed of a squirrel-like bulging and found it next to impossible to say anything without spitting food everywhere. However, Jesse's raised eyebrows said enough.

"Every table in the room is a computer terminal, and from this terminal, we can do and see practically anything. For example — computer, show Mount Tever."

In front of Jesse, appearing above the middle of the table and rapidly taking shape, was a three-dimensional picture of a mountain, so lifelike, it looked like an actual model. In fact, he was almost positive it was the mountain he saw in the distance when he first came down the path into Vilmar. Dumbfounded, involuntarily gulped down his food and Jesse almost instinctively reached out to touch it, only to see his hand swallowed up by the image. Jesse jerked his hand away, fearing it might be cut off completely if he left it there too long.

"There's nothing there." Jesse scrutinized the image, trying to find some indication, some hint that it might be a hologram rather than a sculpture of some sort, aside from the fact that the image hovered several inches above the table surface. Jesse stuck his hand in the hologram once again, then started waving it back and forth through the image.

"Wow, this is great! Can I try one?"

"Go ahead."

Jesse was about ready to speak, but then stopped. He thought of something.

"Where do I speak?"

"Just talk. The computer will hear you. If the room were full of people, however, then we would use voice recognized coded commands and headsets with earphones. But they aren't necessary now. Just speak."

Jesse turned to look at the table and, still feeling funny speaking to nothing and no one in particular, spoke.

"Show me the Statue of Liberty."

The mountain remained. Jesse turned to Feszj.

"What's wrong?"

"You need to preface each command with the word computer so the computer can distinguish between conversation and requests."

"Oh." Jesse was ticked off Feszj didn't mention that so he wouldn't look like a fool, again. Jesse started over. "Computer, show me the Statue of Liberty."

The mountain disappeared and the following words floated over the table and slowly spun around:

PLIZ SPESIFΔ

"Please specify," said Feszj, anticipating Jesse's confusion. "It means the computer needs more information. Apparently, there is more than one Statue of Liberty in its data memory."

"More than one? How many are there?"

"Computer," said Feszj, "list all."

Again, the first image vanished and was immediately replaced by a display of five miniature 3-D images with captions. One of them was the Statue of Liberty Jesse had in mind. But the other four seemed much more interesting. One appeared to be a bronze sculpture of a book with people in various poses climbing all over it. The other three were too unusual to figure out. One looked like a globe with interconnected cubes, and each cube having a long pole extending towards the center of the sphere but without reaching it. The other two were amorphous mixes of color and substances about which Jesse had no clue.

"What are all these other ones?"

"Earth isn't the only place in the universe," said Feszj. "Apparently, other planets have their own statues, or what look like statues. After all, these objects were translated into 'Statue of Liberty.' They may not actually be statues in our sense of the word."

This dream is getting weirder every moment, thought Jesse.

"Computer, off."

Hey!" snapped Jesse. Instantly the images disappeared, and the red light in the middle of the table was slowly absorbed into the blackness of the tabletop.

easily distinguishable. "But living together also admits, something which the ethos of marriage denies, that people change over time, and that people may not change in ways which reinforce the relationship. People may grow apart, as they often do. Marriages, however, implicitly ignore this possibility, insisting that you and your spouse are stuck together for the rest of your life. Divorce was invented to account for this oversight.

"Even adolescents and children younger than you are falling into this trap of monogamy, with pins taking on the significance of engagements and class rings becoming wedding rings, and all the while sacrificing any desire to expand their horizons and experiences at a time in their lives when this is necessary in order to understand the world. On the other hand, they may understand your world all too well, and are desperately seeking the enclosing qualities of "going steady" as a way of shielding them from the violence and inanities which surround them.

"In our society, people interact freely; make and perpetuate relationships if and when and as they wish; and grow apart or together as their unencumbered experiences may dictate. This freedom to interact openly with whomever a person chooses and enriching one's life by learning from these different individuals and by drawing upon their varied experiences and influences is denied to much of your population where its lack manifests itself in forms of racism, sexism, and discrimination of all sorts. It builds tension and frustration, and due to its repressive qualities, may eventually lead to violence. All this should be obvious to you. It is demonstrated every day in the expressed hatred displayed between your mother and father."

Jesse, since he had too much food to swallow, spit it out.

"What are you talking about?" asked Jesse. His eyes widened and his face reddened. "What do you know about my parents? What do you mean they hate each other?"

Feszj froze for a moment. Apparently, he expected a calm admission of acceptance to the situation.

"Hell sure, they argue," yelled Jesse, "but all couples argue now and then. What makes my parents different?"

Now, if one looked at Feszj, one might think that underneath the calm, though surprised exterior, he was panicking.

"You mean you don't know why your parents hate each other?" Feszj fumbled for time. He appeared unprepared for this news and frantically tried to give himself time to think. "You mean they never told you?"

"No they haven't. Why the hell would they tell me they hated each other?" Jesse rose from his chair, eager to stand up, his rear end tingling. He demanded answers. "What do you know about this?"

"Hi, Feszj. Hi, Jesse. How's it going?"

Just at that point, Beedie walked through the doors. "Hello, Beedie," replied Feszj, relieved by her arrival. "You're just in time to take Jesse on a tour of the building."

"That's great," said Beedie. She sidled up next to Jesse, wrapping her arm around his waist and giving an affectionate squeeze. She started speaking very quickly. "We'll start in the basement where the water reclamation center is. There, I can show you how ozone bubbles and hydroponic plants work together in cleansing and filtering the water ..."

"Enough!"

Jesse exploded in rage and shoved Beedie aside to stand alone. Beedie walked back to Jesse, trying to hold his hands, but Jesse sprinted to the other side of the table. "Get away from me, both of you." Frightened, Beedie stopped. "I've had enough of all this," said Jesse, with a snarl. "Every time I want to find out something, something else comes along to interrupt me. I wanted to know what this project was I was going to be working on, but I was interrupted and I never found out. Now, I wanted to know how you know so much about my parents, but again I'm interrupted. It's like you're trying not to tell me what I want to know, and only what you want me to know. I hate not knowing stuff that involves me. But one thing I hate more is being treated as a child. You think I'm not old enough to tell the truth to. You think I can't handle it. So you avoid telling me."

He glared at Beedie, her face full of worry, then at Feszj and his face full of resigned understanding. "But no more. I refuse to let it happen again. No more fooling around. Feszj, you said I could leave at any time, right?"

Feszj looked tired and drained as he stood in the Dining Hall. He said nothing. Instead, he nodded solemnly.

"Then I choose to leave now."

"No!" Beedie rushes up to Jesse. "No, not now. There is so much to see and do, so much more to show you. Please stay. Feszj!" She rushed to Feszj, who head was now sinking into his chest. "Feszj, you have to convince him to stay. There is so much more to teach him."

Jesse watched the scene in front of him while considering his options. *If I leave now, I'll never know what this project is or why he's saying such things about my parents. But I do have the power to threaten to leave. Maybe that will spark some action. But isn't his still only a dream? It's amazingly life-like.*

"No," said Feszj, in a deep morbid voice, "I will not convince him of anything. He must convince himself." Beedie stepped back from Feszj, aghast. Feszj mustered up enough strength for a smile. "Don't fight it, Beedie. You know in your heart, it is the only way. Forced learning is no learning at all." Then, through the watery distortion of his eyes, he looked at Jesse. "Perhaps," he continued, "he is not suitable for this project."

Jesse spoke up with a devilish complexion in his face. "I tell you what I'll do. I'll stay only if I get answers to all my questions. My parents, this project, what this place is."

Feszj shook his head. "No. I can't."

"Why not?" asked Beedie.

"It is too soon."

"That's my only offer, Feszj. Take it or leave it. Take it or I leave."

Feszj said nothing. Beedie grabbed Feszj by the arms. "Feszj," she implored, "you must accept it."

"I hate to think I am being blackmailed." Feszj sounded bitter.

"Oh come off it, Feszj!" said Beedie, quickly turning angry. "You stand up on that soapbox so long you can't even see the obvious. Look at him." She pointed towards Jesse. "He is more than suitable. He's perfect. Right now, he is challenging you, of all people, to answer his questions. He is not afraid of questioning authority. He is not afraid of insisting they justify their behaviors. He will stand up to them. He will fight for what he believes is right, and he will not stop until the right prevails. He is exactly what we need. He is exactly what they need."

Feszj gazed in bewilderment at Beedie. "How did you learn so much?" he asked, in a soft wavering voice.

"I had a good teacher."

Feszj wiped his face clean of moisture and took a deep though choppy breath. He walked past Beedie and around the table to stand in front of Jesse. Jesse hid his nervousness as best he could. After all, he felt he couldn't let Beedie down after such a vote of confidence.

"Jesse," began Feszj, "it is obvious that you have several ardent supporters in this community." Jesse looked at Beedie, who grinned eagerly. "There are others in this community who are less ardent, but are willing to give you all the chances and opportunities you need to prove yourself. But both groups realize how difficult it is to assimilate to our way of life. That's where I come in. I am the teacher, and it is my responsibility to provide you an environment in which you can learn as much as you can. But sometimes I forget," he said, looking at Beedie, "that not all learners's environments

are the same. And that a teacher needs to learn as much as he or she can from the student so appropriate feedback can be used in adjusting the learning environment."

"In any case, enough of the speeches," said Feszj with a less subdued expression, though far from the jovialness to which Jesse has grown accustomed. "I agree with your terms. What do you wish to know?"

Jesse thought for a moment, longer than necessary so he could privately gloat about another victory. "Well, I'd like to know how you know so much about my parents?"

"You're quite sure?"

"*Very* sure." Jesse finally felt in control of the situation.

Feszj's face remained expressionless. He took a deep breath through his nose.

"As you wish," said Feszj.

Jesse smiled in triumph.

Eight

Feszj drew Beedie next to him, wrapping his arm around her waist as a father would his daughter, and motioned for Jesse to precede them to the door. As Jesse walked past them and approached the door, he faintly heard Feszj whispering something into Beedie's ear.

"More secrets?" asked Jesse sharply, his head snapping towards them, followed by his body, hands on his hips. His remark startled Beedie, but Feszj hardly reacted — his face showing no surprise.

"Since I agreed to answer your questions," Feszj replied, "I now need Beedie to run the errand I had planned to do myself. There are still a few things that need to be done on this world." Jesse thought he might have heard a tinge of impatience in Feszj's voice just then, but he wasn't sure.

"Where's she going?" asked Jesse, with a blunt prod.

"Jesse," said Feszj, his eyes darker and more penetrating than usual, "don't let your paranoia cloud your impressions of us. It is unbecoming of you. Besides, you and I have things of our own to do." Feszj gestured to the door. "After you."

"Where are we going?"

"We are going to the fifth floor."

"Fifth floor?" said Beedie, troubled. "Feszj, are you sure? I mean the fifth floor might be too much for Jesse to handle. I mean ..." Beedie trailed off into silence as soon as she noticed Feszj staring at her. A sympathetic smile appeared on his face.

"It is the only way."

Feszj spoke calmly which reassured Beedie, but the damage had been done and Jesse became increasingly nervous. He leaned against the door to open it — his arms suddenly weakened through anxiety. In the hallway several bystanders milled about the door, one of whom was a hefty man with a thick black beard hiding much of his red face. Jesse recognized him from the research shop. The yelling, Jesse thought, must have echoed so loudly in the dining hall that people in the exterior hallway and on the floor converged on

the window and peered inside to see what was happening. They were all standing silently, looking at Jesse. Not with the kind of faces one has when looking at a criminal walking by — a morbid combination of curiosity and repugnance — but with concerned and worried faces as when a friend goes off into the operating room. They had to have eavesdropped, he further thought, because they all seemed to know where he was going.

"Good luck, Jesse," came a voice from the on-lookers. Spontaneously, the small group moved up to Jesse, engulfing him in hugs, supportive pats on the back, and verbal encouragement.

Feszj stepped into the hallway with Beedie and paused to let the group express itself. Beedie, in the meantime, slid past and, in a brisk walk, went down the hallway around the curve and out of sight. Soon, the group stood back allowing Feszj to escort Jesse through the hall.

"Hey Jesse." He stopped and turned around to face the man from the research shop. "We'll see you at the Festival, okay?"

Jesse nodded an automatic response, not knowing what to do or say, his mind preoccupied with thoughts about the fifth floor. Feszj lead Jesse down the hall, and for perhaps the first time during this visit, neither spoke to the other as they walked. Feszj was apparently willing to let Jesse dwell on his concerns undisturbed.

They arrived at the stairs, which appeared through an open archway in the left wall. Jesse looked up. He saw one continuous climb with windows on both sides of the stairwell. The steps seemed to get brighter the further up it went.

"What's on the fifth floor?" asked Jesse.

Feszj, inspecting the long straight stairwell, replied, "The first step in understanding your destiny." He then looked down at Jesse. "Eventually, you would have climbed these steps, but not this soon. Yet, you wish to know, and wanting to know is the most important motivation in learning." Feszj brought a hand around Jesse's back and both started ascending the steps. Feszj could feel the hesitancy filling Jesse's body. "Don't be afraid. Nothing will harm you," he said, escorting Jesse upwards. "However, you will be challenged."

"Challenged?" Despite the coolness of the stairwell, he felt hot. A bubble of sweat emerged on his forehead.

"Yes, but it won't be a physical challenge. It will be mental. Psychological. Spiritual. It will be a challenge which may, however, physically exhaust you. Your views of the world, your opinions, your interpretations of events past and present, they will all be exposed to critical evaluation. Everything you thought was true, everything you thought

was common sense, they will all be assailed. Things you have never seen before, things you have never heard, things you have never dreamed of, will all come to life for you. The little world you have constructed around yourself, inhabited, and sheltered within will be insufficient to contain all the new thoughts, opinions, facts, interpretations, beliefs, and feelings to which you will be introduced. Your former world will explode."

The stairs, for some reason, seemed to be getting steeper and steeper to Jesse. He used his sleeve to wipe sweat off his brow. His back and shoulders hunched forward, his head craned upward looking for the light at the end of the tunnel, and he maintained a steady and plodding rhythm up the steps. He was no longer in a hurry to reach the fifth floor now, and fortunately for Jesse, Feszj neither sped up nor slowed down. He remained by Jesse's side the entire climb.

"Then," Feszj continued, "just like muscle fibers which must be constantly torn and broken down to encourage the growth of stronger muscles, you and I, as well as the community, will together rebuild your mind and provide you a new vocabulary so it will be stronger. You will understand more, you will know more, you will see more, as you learn to observe life and people and history with new eyes and a new soul."

Jesse tried to swallow to quench his parched throat but his mouth was even drier. He wondered if he had made a mistake. He could deal with exercise. School work hardly affected him any more. And though hating it, he is even prepared to give oral reports. He knew what to expect in all these cases. Though familiarity may breed contempt, there is always something comforting about knowing what is going on, no matter how miserable it may be. But Feszj's description of this new type of learning, this method of education, sounded like nothing he had ever experienced. It was unknown, and it terrified him.

He wondered if he should back out before it was too late. Yet he really couldn't, and Jesse cursed his stubborn pride. Beedie spoke so highly of him, he felt obligated to see it through to the end. But he really wasn't sure about Feszj. *Sure, he's responsible for teaching me*, he thought, *but does he really want to? I really don't know what he thinks of me.*

"Feszj?"

"Yes, Jesse?"

"Do you think I'm a good student?"

Feszj stopped on a landing. "Why do you ask?"

"I just want to know."

"You're not being graded here."

"But am I learning what I'm supposed to learn?"

"What are you supposed to learn, Jesse?"

"I—." Jesse flared up in renewed frustration. "Hell, I don't know. You're the teacher. It's your job to tell me what I'm supposed to know."

Feszj almost couldn't help chuckling, but he squeezed his lips together and stifled it before it became too noticeable. He further hid his indiscretion by covering his grim with a thoughtful stroking stroking his beard.

"Perhaps," said Feszj, "I ought to have asked instead: What have you done here?"

Jesse clamped down on his face with a furrowed brow, and wondered if he should say anything anymore. "I don't know. I've just been shown around mostly. Told this, told that ... "

"And what have you seen?" interrupted Feszj.

"Not much. Just the farm, and this building."

"Think carefully, Jesse." Feszj's face became much more inviting as he leaned down, resting one hand on his knee and another on Jesse's shoulder. "Let's explore what you have seen by asking what you haven't seen. Have you seen trash or other pollution?"

"No."

"Have you witnessed any fights or heard any foul language?"

"No." Jesse decided not to mention his meeting with Catiana.

"Have you met anyone who was not happy to meet you and did not immediately treat you as a friend?"

"No."

"Then, Jesse, I believe you have been presented with quite a lot for only a few short hours with us. And from what you have seen, you have also learned a great deal."

"Like what?"

Feszj stood up to his full height, though still keeping one hand on Jesse's shoulder.

"You have learned," Feszj began, "that humans need not be distrustful, spiteful, vindictive, mean, violent, abusive, uncaring, or even competitive for a community to prosper. They are not innate human characteristics which cannot be prevented from being expressed openly. They are all learned behaviors, and as such, can be unlearned or never taught at all. Anyone that says, for example, that competition is instinctive is culturally illiterate. There are many cultures, not just our world, but in your world which often eschew competition. For centuries, especially before Western influences infiltrated their culture, the Inuit of Canada had no competitive structure; and the Mixtecs of Juxtlahuaca, Mexico regard competition and competitiveness as a crime. These two examples alone dismiss the notion that competition is an innate behavior. Furthermore, cooperation seems

to be the modus operandi for the vast majority of other species in your world. After all, it is hard to imagine a species surviving, much less growing, if it has an ingrained necessity to compete with its own kind."

"But that doesn't make sense. What about all these animal shows on TV? You see all kinds of animals eating other animals, competing to survive."

"First of all, there are far fewer carnivores than there are herbivores in the world. But watching a cow eat grass is not the most stimulating viewing. Because you live in a market economy, what you see on television is only that which will attract an audience which the media can sell to advertisers, and thus stay in business. Unfortunately, violence, death, killing, and competition, attracts attention in your society. What you have on television, therefore, is a skewed and highly biased representation of what goes on in the world.

"Moreover, survival is a matter of necessity; competition is a matter of choice. If survival is assured — for instance, if animals are fed rather than having to hunt for food — they still will not compete. Animals shy away from competitive situations whenever possible. It is easier and less stressful to cooperate than to compete. And all studies have shown that a less stressful environment is a more healthy one."

"Well," said Jesse, trying to contribute something intelligent and yet delay the inevitable arrival on the fifth floor, "maybe human cultures learn to cooperate."

"True, but if one can learn cooperation, one can easily learn competition as well. But even if we admit that competition is innate, it begs the question: Why do we humans wish to fight and resist, suppress and overcome their innate tendencies to compete in order to learn to cooperate? Obviously because cooperation is much more attractive to social stability, security, and health, than competition.

"But if we admit that both competition and cooperation are learned behaviors, then the issue is a social one rather than an evolutionary one, and the question before us becomes very simple: Which do we want?"

As rhetorical questions go, this one was simple for Jesse to figure out. It seemed to him that it could easily be answered that we ought to have a cooperative society. He was sure this was what Feszj wanted to hear. And considering the answer was implicitly understood between the both of them, Jesse went straight on to an objection.

"But wouldn't a cooperative society have to get rid of sports?"

"Of course."

"Well, I'm not sure I want that. I like sports. They're fun. Competition can be fun."

"Yes, that is true. Yet it will take time to explain to you why thinking competition is fun is the greatest mistake of all."

"Why?" said Jesse. Then he continued defiantly, "What's wrong with sports?"

"All in due time. First, we are at the fifth floor."

Jesse looked behind Feszj and himself and saw two exit doors, one on each side of the stairwell, with a large number 5 carved into each one of them. *That was quick.* Jesse sweated with increased vigor. *Too quick. Shit.*

Feszj opened the door behind Jesse, and escorted him into a large and extremely quiet room. The floor, for the first time, was carpeted. The ceiling was composed of odd shaped tiles with irregularly shaped polyhedron projections. The walls had what looked like a cloth covering. Encircling the room and hanging off the wall were several paintings. One appeared to be a painting of the mountain he had seen in the distance walking towards Vilmar, but he wasn't sure, having forgotten much of its details. Another featured a group of frolicking children wearing enormous smiles, painted in crystal clarity over a background of blurred greens and blues. Several other paintings were considerably different — some consisting of intertwining geometric patterns, and others of collages of speckled and smudged paint.

At the far end of the room was another of the computer tables, similar to but smaller than the ones in the dining hall. But the most dramatic item in the room was a huge square black chamber sitting in the center which went from floor to ceiling. Its surface was smooth and glossy, and on the far side next to the computer table was an open hatch leading into the center of this gigantic black box.

Jesse cringed and froze. He fomented and nursed the increasingly disturbing idea that the only likely justification to be here in this room was that he would have to go inside the chamber for some reason.

Feszj entered the room behind Jesse, closed the stairwell door, and proceeded past him.

"Come this way, Jesse."

"Am I going in there?"

"Yes."

Jesse didn't move. He thought back to all the horror films he has ever seen. He imagined Feszj's voice to be indicative of those evil and slimy mad scientists who sweet talk their victims into their chamber of horrors.

"There is nothing to fear. Come, take a look."

Sneaky, Jesse thought. "Nice try."

"Jesse," said a slightly exasperated Feszj with, whether he knew it or not, an inflection which contained a mild scold. However, his tone returned to its usual soothing calm. "Is there anything I can do to allay your anxieties, Jesse? As you can see, there are no locks

on any of the doors in this room, nor on the chamber. There is nothing here that will hold you down or prevent you from leaving. If you want, someone else can be with you in the chamber."

Still, Jesse refused to budge. Feszj began walking over to him, and Jesse sprinted for the door.

"Jesse, wait, please," yelled Feszj as he stopped in hopes not to scare Jesse off. Jesse also paused, standing poised in the open doorway, ready to bound down the stairs and outside to his freedom. "You must trust us, Jesse," said Feszj. "If we were going to harm you, would we not have been able to do so much earlier? Would I not have tried to bring you up to this room so much sooner? Would I have told you you could leave at any time?"

Jesse relaxed as he considered Feszj's comments.

"Jesse," continued Feszj, "we need you. Your world needs you. But you must trust us. Otherwise, we can't help you help your world."

Jesse found himself beginning to tremble, and his inability to control it frightened him.

"I don't understand," said Jesse, his words shivering. "You keep talking about me saving the world. What am I supposed to do?"

"Come in, Jesse, and I will explain everything." Feszj started walking towards Jesse. This prompted Jesse to quickly step out the door. Feszj stopped. For a moment, Jesse and Feszj stood staring at each other in silence, each appraising the other.

"No, Feszj. You tell me now. What am I here for?"

Feszj considered Jesse's request. He stood in front of Jesse for what seemed like a long time. During the quiet, Jesse could hear a low pitched humming for the first time, like air rushing by a car window, but much softer. It probably had something to do with the air conditioning system of the building, he thought, even though it didn't have that mechanical rumble with which he was more familiar. He then caught a small snatch of faint conversation echoing up through the stairwell. He turned his head towards the voices, but it was too mumbled to make anything out. There were no other sounds in the building.

"Jesse?"

Jesse snapped his head back into the room. Feszj hadn't moved from his spot.

"Yes, Feszj?"

"You make things very difficult."

Jesse beamed a self-satisfied grin. "Who said teaching was easy?"

"It doesn't have to be difficult. You can open yourself up to what this community can offer you."

"You haven't answered my question." Jesse reasserted himself. It felt good to be able to do that.

"You want to know why you're here? You want to know what this 'project' is?" Jesse nodded stiffly through the questions. "Do you have any idea what this 'project' might be," quizzed Feszj, "considering what you heard Beedie and I discuss downstairs?"

"No, I don't," Jesse said flatly. These mind games annoyed him, and he didn't want to be bothered by puzzling it out. "Why don't you just tell me?"

Feszj raised his right hand in a half-hearted gesture to plead his case to delay the explanations, but his face was spiritless. He balled up his hands in frustration, his face hardening for a moment. Then his body lost energy. His face went flaccid, his hand uncoiled, and his arm dropped limp to hang at his side. Feszj sighed with resignation.

"The project, Jesse, ... is you."

* * *

Jesse hardly reacted to Feszj's revelation. Then it hit him.

"I knew it!" exclaimed Jesse. "I'm just some sort of experiment for you."

"No, no. You're not an experiment ..."

"Oh, sure. What are you going to do with me in that big black box of yours?"

Feszj tried to remain calm against Jesse's rising antagonism. "You said you wanted to know why your parents hate each other. This chamber will show you their history."

"Now how the hell can you do that?"

"You are making things more difficult than they need to be, Jesse."

"Again, you are ignoring my question."

Feszj dropped his head, took a deep breath, and thought for a moment. "We're moving too quickly, Jesse."

"Answer it!"

"I can't!" countered Feszj. Immediately realizing his outburst, his body sagged. "I'm sorry." Feszj sounded almost defeated. "The technology that makes the chamber possible is far too advanced for you to understand." Jesse seemed to have reached Feszj's breaking point. But instead of feeling superior like it was supposed to, Jesse instantly felt sorry. *Why do I do that to people, he wondered. I've hurt Catiana, and now I'm taunting Feszj. What is it about these people that makes me want to hurt them?*

Feszj continued. "Of course, your society could have developed one of these chambers by now if the human species on your planet hadn't spent its entire legacy fighting each

other or exploring the perverted pleasures of torture and mutilations while hoarding or discarding what knowledge it discovers. Hundreds of great inventions in your past became lost to the ages because of ignorance, neglect, and destruction. The Library at Alexandria, the greatest depository of ancient knowledge, sacked and burned to the ground. Everything was destroyed. The ancient Greeks invented the first analog computer, the first steam engine, as well as experimented with jet propulsion. Nothing came of it. An obscure magician/physician in ancient Babylon designed and used a battery. Buried in the sand for centuries. The ancient Egyptians built their famed pyramids with poured concrete, while your scientists wasted hundreds of years trying to figure out how they moved these huge 20-ton blocks around.

"And you were probably taught that the Montgolfier brothers flew the first balloons, and that a fellow Frenchman named Rozier was the first man to fly in one. You never learned that members of the Nazca Tribe in ancient Peru rode in hot air balloons over a thousand years earlier. The tribe also engaged in brain surgery, with a survival rate better than any late nineteenth century London hospital.

"All of these advancements, and countless others — ignored or lost. Trampled into dust by the indifference of societies led by short-sighted rulers more interested in the acquisition of land or a place in Heaven than in the compilation and dissemination of knowledge. Even now, your society still considers information proprietary. Corporations operate secret research and development labs, jealousy hoarding whatever discoveries they make, and struggling to uncover information other labs may have already uncovered but are equally secretive. So despite your industries's erudite talk of efficiency, the whole enterprise is a colossal waste of time and a mindless duplication of effort. At some point in your history, a market value was applied to information and knowledge and from then on were treated as products, commodities. This is another method of preserving class hierarchies. For if knowledge is power, only those who can afford to pay the price for this product will become powerful. Those who cannot become powerless."

Feszj spoke with a strong and deep resonant voice, and one punctuated with snatches of invective and disgust. But Jesse stood enamored with the speech. He enjoyed Feszj most when he throws his entire heart and soul into assailing American institutions.

Maybe Beedie was right about me, he thought. Underneath it all, isn't this what I really want to do? To be in a position where I could tell adults that it's all their fault, that they screwed up, and explain to them why the world I am inheriting from them is a mess?

"Yes, Jesse," Feszj went on, "this is what your world has done and is still doing now. And I'm sorry if I sound cynical, but it is frustrating to watch your world for so long with

so much potential wasting it every moment. After all, humans have for centuries worked very hard to proclaim their superiority to all other animals, seemingly only to have the opportunity to demonstrate its fallaciousness. Of all the animals on your world, only humans kill for sport as well as food. Only humans harbor grudges and desire revenge. Only humans seek to inflict cruel, painful suffering for its own sake. Only humans organize themselves in masses to engage in war against their own kind. Only humans enslave their fellow humans, and enslave themselves to others just to purchase items for survival. Then there are those who resist enslavement by committing crimes, for these individuals see no difference between being trapped in prison and being trapped on the streets. This telling fact alone, the gradual elimination of distinctions between incarceration and freedom, indicates obviously that the humans in your society, in all their arrogance and hypocrisy and blindness, fail miserably to live up to any potential humanity may have offered."

Feszj paused to calm down once again. He took a deep breath.

"Anyway," resumed Feszj, "do you now understand why there are certain things that cannot be explained, at least right now?"

"Yes."

"Good." Feszj was slowly settling down, his breathing slowing, his muscles becoming less tense. "Now, if you'll step back into the room out of that doorway, I can show you the chamber."

The chamber. The project. I'm the project. Experimentation. It came back to him with a rush.

"Oh, no, you don't. You're not experimenting on me."

"We're not experimenting on you. Please understand that."

"No, I don't understand that. I don't understand any of this."

"We are here to teach you."

"Teach me what?" Jesse folded his arms across his chest. "What are you talking about?"

Feszj, after mumbling something about there not having been enough preparation, commenced in a very somber and clear tone, almost soothing and tranquilizing, one very different from his previous diatribe.

"You are here so we can show you a better way of living in your world. A way without violence. A way without pain or suffering. A way without humiliations. You are here to learn all about us, so you can return to your world and teach your population this new way to live, this new way to utopia."

Jesse broke out into raucous, uncontrollable laughter. The stairwell literally shook with Jesse's hysterical upheaval. Feszj's expression remained blank and unaffected.

"Yeah, right. Nice joke." His laughter evolved into a snarl. "Don't treat me like an idiot. Tell me the truth, and stop shittin' around." Jesse tried to sound tough by imitating what his Dad says whenever he lies. However, the moment Jesse said it, he felt uncomfortable and realized that profanity wasn't necessary to make his point, especially in front of Feszj.

"Simply put, Jesse," said Feszj with the same calm expression, "the truth is that you are here so you can learn to change your world and make it into a paradise." Jesse's toughness, which was anemic at best, faded into fear as Feszj went on. "This is the most noble, most selfless, and most important act you could ever do for mankind. You are on the verge of immortality."

"Why me? I can't do anything. I'm just in ninth grade. No one will listen to me."

"Every ninth-grader has the ability to tear down walls, Jesse, even if only one brick at a time. However, walls are being repaired just as fast as they are being dismantled, and many people who will grow to despise you — for your message will threaten everything that these individuals hold dear. Their superiority, their wealth, their prestige and influence. You will flay these superficialities aside until they have nothing left to support their position, nothing left to justify their hegemony. They will be terrified of you, for you will take away their self-esteem, precarious as it is, by taking away their domination.

"Yet with all that in mind, be comforted by the fact that you will not be alone. We will be with you every step of your journey. We will guide you, prepare you, even speak for you if need be. And people will listen. They will realize they desperately need to listen to what you have to say. Some will cherish your thoughts and emulate your actions. A few will flock around you, eager for more wisdom, not wanting to miss a single utterance.

"Unfortunately, you will all too soon realize, perhaps tragically, that convincing people is not something grounded in logic or debates concerning the validity of arguments. It is more a conversion of wills, and this conversion will only occur if one can be presented with something that seems real, real enough to accept as being true and replace their previous notions. Yet the power of those who will resist and fight you, along with their ability to prop up tantalizing alternatives, is considerable. And in the end, you will come to understand that a person's capacity to incite fear, foreboding, and hatred, as well as change and hope, is determined not by what a person says but by what a person is prevented from saying."

Jesse waited for a sign, anything, that this explanation was some sort of joke. It never appeared. The seriousness of Feszj's speech never abated and kept working its way into Jesse's psyche as an ominous cloud of dread floated around his soul. He could feel his stomach churning and his chest palpitating. *Wasn't this what you wanted, Jesse?* However, the way Feszj described it, with its sacrifices and failures, the struggle and alienation, it didn't sound so appealing anymore. In fact, it was down right petrifying.

"I — I don't know if I'm up for this." He felt sorry that Beedie would be disappointed, but ... oh well.

"No, I think you are. Beedie is right. You have the unyielding temperament and the skeptical nature necessary to shake up your world's foundations."

"Ah, c'mon Feszj. I mean, this is a dream. None of this means anything." Jesse said this trying to boost his convictions, though it was clearly waning. "I'll wake up and forget all about it. None of this is really going to happen."

Feszj stared at Jesse.

"Even if this were a dream, why would anything I have said be less compelling?"

Jesse stared back, his breathing quickening, his leg beginning to twitch. "If this *were* a dream?"

"That's right, Jesse. I'm sorry, but this is not a dream. Everything around you is real."

Ready to deny it all, Jesse prepared to speak by opening his jaw, but nothing came out except a stuttering hiss. His body shivered as his muscles stiffened in terror. In his bubbling gut, he knew it was true. At last, it sank in. He had wondered before how he, in his own dream, could have known so much about the world and all its darker aspects. He never liked history all that much. Yet now, it finally hit him. It was the only possibility that made sense. *Oh, my God.*

Finally, he got out the word, "How?"

"As I mentioned before, we possess technologies you have yet to imagine. Suffice it to say that we have transported the electrical essence of your mind here to the planet Terah. Your previous body is still laying in your bed, but devoid of any brain activity. Your mental essence was implanted into the brain of a body we cloned just for your visits."

"I'm a clone?"

"No. Your body is a clone. You are still Jesse."

Jesse stated slowly shaking his head in disbelief, but soon the shaking became more and more violent, as if he were trying to shake out every last doubt and fear he is experiencing.

"No, no, no. It can't be true."

"Jesse, don't get scared. Go over and look at yourself in the chamber."

Chamber? A trap!

"No, you won't get me in that thing." Jesse spun around and darted out the door.

"Jesse! Wait!"

Feszj called after Jesse, but the bounding of two and three steps at a time down the stairwell quickly put distance and noise between the two.

"Wake up, Jesse," he chanted feverishly to himself. "For God's sake, wake up."

He reached the base of the steps much too fast. Frantically maintaining his balance, Jesse erupted into the hallway and bashed into the far wall, just missing one of the triangular windows. Hearing Feszj's voice and feet descending the stairs behind him, he sprinted down the hallway towards the exit, which was just around the bend.

When he spied the exit, his heart jumped. The hallway was much busier than before. A stream of people was coming through the doorway heading towards the dining hall. He determined he had no choice but to barrel through the crowd.

"Outta my way!"

Heads reacted to the scream and the group saw a young man speeding down the corridor towards them, his face ashen white and chest heaving for air. Many didn't know which way to move. Out of the doorway, against the walls, or back into the doorway. Jesse had no patience for their indecision and showed no compunction against shoving people aside and shouldering others to the floor. He fought through the doorway, knocking people away with his flailing arms. He burst through the outside door, flattening a young woman in the process, sending her reeling and wailing in pain into the iron plants as she clutched her hand and wrist. Jesse must have broken it with the door as she reached for the handle.

"Sunas!" Realizing who he had just hurt, a pang of concern caused him to stop momentarily, only to see people filing out from the building calling for him to wait. He stumbled over her legs lying partially on the sidewalk as he escaped but soon regained his lost momentum.

How do I get out of here? He scanned the area, but there were many more people around than before, all descending on the building. Some of the crowd who saw the collision between Jesse and Sunas started running to assist. One of the them looked familiar as well.

Ymo!

"Jesse, wait up," Ymo called.

Jesse left the crowded sidewalk and began fleeing over the grassy field. However, the iron plants, tougher than they looked, gave way reluctantly and slowed his progress. Jesse looked around and noticed the entire crowd under the dome watching and converging on Jesse, nearly encircling him. The nearest exits out from under the dome were blocked with carts full of produce and people decorating the overhang pausing to stare at the odd spectacle of a teenager leaping through the grass.

Damn it all! I'm still trapped.

"Where are you going to go, Jesse?" Jesse jerked his head back behind him towards that all-too-familiar voice and saw Feszj walking towards him, emerging from a line of on-lookers. "Even if you leave the community, where will you go?"

"Get away! I want to go home!" A few no's shrieked from the crowd. *Was that Beedie?*

Jesse backed over the sidewalk, flipping his head from side to side. When he reached the other side of the walkway, he misjudged the step and tumbled down on to the grass. Crawling away some and then scrambling to his feet, he was suddenly blocked by one of the community living quarters, running straight into one of the large window panes facing the interior of the dome.

He stepped back from the window and viewed his shocking reflection. No longer a blond-haired boy of thirteen. Staring back at him was a tall, well-proportioned young man of almost sixteen, with unkept ink black hair which fell to graze his shoulders. He lifted a thick arm to touch his smooth narrow nose, sliding his hand to feel the stubble on his cheek and chin, unscarred with acne or pimples. The image panted in exact rhythm with Jesse.

"That's not me," he whispered.

But it was. And though totally confused, he also considered what this body had done — things he could not have done before. He remembered how he lunged down those steps with an ease that now astonished him. He thought of the power his arms contained as he muscled his way through the crowded doorway. He then remembered the thick hands he used to crush Catiana's face, and the force used to fracture Sunas's wrist. He had strength, but one he abused people with. He possessed the potential to cause damage and could cause more if he didn't control himself. It was a responsibility he never considered before.

"Jesse?"

Jesse, ripped from his reverie, glanced down in the direction of the voice to see that small Hispanic-looking kid again, the same one he saw hiding from him back on the road to Vilmar. This time, the child hugged and clung to his leg.

"Why are you running away?" said the little boy. "Did we do anything wrong?"

Jesse wanted to say: *They want to experiment on my brain.* He wanted to scream: *They want to turn me into a zombie.* But he didn't say any of that. He couldn't. Instead, he found himself engulfed in this little boy's innocent eyes as he wracked his memories to figure out what they had done wrong. They showed him around. They fed him. And right from the start, they treated him like a long-lost friend. They opened up their community and showed him a place where no one was afraid of being alone or unloved.

Running through all the events of his visit over and over, looking for something he may have missed, his head started aching. He couldn't think of anything. They had done nothing wrong.

"We don't want you to leave," his eyes filling with disappointment. He wrapped himself tighter around Jesse's thigh. "We're sorry."

"No no, don't cry. It's not your fault." Jesse slunk down to the ground and rested on his knees. The boy flung himself at Jesse and hung on. He squeezed as hard as possible, as if he were trying to get inside Jesse's body.

By this time, Feszj had silently approached and was standing above the two. Jesse raised his head, a shock of fear coursed through his body, and he struggled to shimmy away. Sensing his fear, the boy clutched harder at Jesse's chest, grabbing his tunic in the back. "Don't be afraid," said the child. "It's only Feszj. He's the teacher."

Jesse sat on the cool damp grass, but remained stiff and poised to react. His face dripped with sweat, his muscles cramped up, and the weight of the child holding on was wearing him down. He then saw Beedie emerge from a crowd filled with faces filled with concern. She advanced cautiously towards Jesse and took a place next to Feszj.

"It's okay, Jesse," she said, softly. "It's not your fault."

This incensed Jesse, he had energy enough for one final outburst, a scream that echoed throughout the interior of the dome. "It's not my fault. It's not your fault. God damn it all! Whose fault is it?"

Jesse, exhausted and perplexed, a mind spinning from hyperventilation and numbed by a raging torrent of psychological and intellectual turmoil, finally gave way to the pressure. He released all his tension, dropping his shoulder and head against the glass wall behind him. Worried, the little boy released his hold on Jesse. Now, completely limp and unencumbered, he let gravity suck him into the ground. After a few moments, he rolled his head up towards Feszj, looked at the teacher — his new brown eyes desperately in search of answers — and spoke with a breathy voice.

"Why?"

"Why what , Jesse." Feszj walked closer.

"Why was I running away? This place looks so happy, so beautiful, so perfect. What was I running away from?"

Feszj knelt down next to Jesse, placed one hand on his thigh and another on Jesse's forehead, stroking his hair. "You were running away from yourself."

"Wha—?"

"As a way of protecting you from the vile pursuits of people caught up in the rampant competitiveness throughout your society, distrust of other human beings is inculcated into the population at a very early age. It is your mistrust, something totally inappropriate here, that is causing the problems. Here, Jesse, you must let down your guard. You must trust us."

"How do I know you won't hurt me?"

"You don't. All my promises, arguments, or pleadings mean nothing unless you believe in your heart that we will not harm you. It is all a matter of faith."

"I want to believe," said Jesse coughing , his voice weakening. "But I'm scared."

"That's okay, Jesse. The more you learn, and the more experiences you acquire, the less scared you will become."

"Is he dying? ask the frightened little boy. Jesse grunted a laugh, and wrapped his arm around the child, playfully mussing up the boy's hair in the process.

"No, Kai," said Feszj, smiling at the child's innocence, "I think Jesse has just been re-born."

* * *

"Just like on the baseball diamond, or in any other competitive situation, trust doesn't exist except in the minimal amount necessary to assure that each will compete. You do not play a game with the idea that your opponents will do what you want them to do, which is to play tough but, in the end, lose. Competitive games are filled with deceptions which augment distrust between opponents and increase distractions causing goal performance to suffer, anxiety to rise, and reinforcing animosity between people. Respect for people doesn't exist either. That has to be earned, often grudgingly, always fleetingly, and invariably with qualifications useful in reducing the significance of the victor and victory, as in statements like, 'We weren't at full strength today,' or 'Our guys didn't have their heads in the game,' et cetera. Anything to save face, as well as undercut victory."

Feszj spoke to Jesse while the two, along with Ymo and Sunas, walked to the grassy field up beyond the trees on the other side of the road. Jesse, though still queasy from this

experiences under the dome, felt more confident now that he has resigned himself to trust and accept his new-found friends. He stopped second guessing everyone's motives, and once he had done so, was immediately calmer, more relaxed, with a growing sense of freedom enveloping his actions and feelings.

However, his thoughts still spun from the revelations he just heard only a few minutes earlier. As he sat on the ground recovering his strength from that mad dash through Vilmar, Jesse propped himself up against the glass wall. Feszj remained crouched down on one knee facing him. Behind Feszj stood Beedie, Ymo, and Sunas, still clutching her hand. The rest of the crowd had dispersed to continue their festival preparations, but not without a great number of well-wishers coming up to ask how he was feeling and offering their encouragements on a speedy recovery and extracting light-hearted promises to return so they could show him around. In addition, more than a few ladies hinting their desire to dance with him at the celebration. Many of the children he had met before had come up to him for hugs as well.

Sunas nursed her now swollen hand, but according to her, nothing was broken. She had merely jammed a couple of fingers. The pain that seemed to warrant a more severe injury was due more to the surprise of a door bursting into her hand. Jesse had suggested putting ice on the hand, but Sunas declined, insisting that being with Jesse at this critical time would be more beneficial to Jesse and the community. Ymo, with his perpetual grin, was exuberant as usual. Once Jesse had regained some of his composure, Ymo promptly came up and energetically shook Jesse's hand. Unfortunately, Jesse had not fully regained his hand strength, and the squeeze caused Jesse to wince. Ymo apologized profusely, to which Jesse smiled and said, "Practice," and the two laughed off the incident.

Beedie had returned to her routine in the water reclamation center, but not before giving Jesse some special words of advice.

"Learn as much as you can; experience as much as you can. Both will help you understand your world just as much as our world. Feszj is a great teacher. We three have all been his students at one time or another ..." Jesse looked at the others who all nodded. "... and many of us in the community have been before where you are now. We all understand."

She kissed Jesse tenderly on the cheek, stroked hair off his forehead, rose, and walked away. Jesse turned to Feszj.

"What did she mean by that?"

"Beedie has never been one to take things slowly," said Feszj, a warm smile of remembrance showed on his face. "I, on the other hand, tend to be more methodical in my methods."

Here we go again with the delays, thought Jesse.

"However," said Feszj, "perhaps this is as good a time as any to explain some things." He got off his knees and sat against the wall alongside Jesse. Ymo and Sunas took up positions on the grass facing Jesse.

"As I have stated before," began Feszj, "this is the world of Terah. On this world, we have no wars, no conquests, no battles or skirmishes of any type. There is no rampant acquisition or destruction of land. Here, land is freely available. Land is not owned, nor bought, nor sold to the highest bidder, preventing those without means from ever experiencing grass under their feet, a blue sky above, and fresh air to breath."

"We have parks," Jesse said, tired.

"Yes. National parks, in your society, became necessary to fight off this encroaching global urbanization, a fight that wasn't necessary until the Industrial Revolution dotted the landscape with towering monoliths billowing black death from its carbon-capped peaks. But ironically, national parks have also provided an excuse not to stop the acquisition. If people now have a place to go to experience nature, why worry about clear cutting an area of trees to put up a shopping mall or residences? But as the costs to travel to these secluded nature reserves become more and more prohibitive, the poor will eventually succumb to the urban blight. After all, the first step to class extermination is to isolate the class."

Jesse had to agree again with this familiar refrain of class extermination. Actually, there was no longer any reason to disagree. Feszj's understanding of the American social scene was simply too impressive to resist. There seemed to be no point to debate. Maybe he was just exhausted, but Feszj seemed to have all the right answers. On the other hand, as Feszj mentioned before, it was *their* interpretation of history, *their* explanation of the course of events. Was it right or wrong? Jesse still wasn't sure, but it did seem to make sense.

"We have no capitalism or market economy," Feszj continued. "We have no corporations fighting among themselves for the honor of providing only people who can pay the price they are charging a product that may help keep people alive, like food, clothing, and shelter. Everyone in our society receives food, clothing, shelter, education, and anything else they would need to satisfy their individual development which, in turn, assures the spiritual prosperity of the community. Your society praises the overindulgent consumption of private goods and services at the grave expense of public goods and

services. The greater the influx of money into the private sector, the less that is available to the public. That is why you can have a booming economy and yet see health care, education, public transportation, community housing and other public services suffering the strain of poverty. That is why you can have both a stock market breaking records on a regular basis, and schools increasingly begging for text books, computers, and educational supplies. We have no ..."

"Wait a minute," Jesse interrupted, a bit stronger after having caught his breath. He did have one objection, the one Beedie mentioned. "I keep hearing about what you don't have. What do you have?"

Feszj nodded in approval. "What we have is intimately linked to what we do, and what we do, as well as what your society does, is based on the dominant belief structures of society. In other words, what one does is based on a large extent on what society believes."

"What society believes?" muttered a doubting Jesse. "What about what I believe?"

"What a person believes is dependent on the intermingled beliefs garnered from a variety of communities. Your school community, your church community, your sports community — all inject different beliefs, opinions, knowledge, and ethical and moral positions into your character, out of which you draw upon an often uncoordinated hodgepodge to influence your choices. Remember Jesse, everything you are, everything you believe, everything you do is based on your experiences and environment."

"Well then," said Jesse, not to be put off the topic, "what do you believe? What does your environment and experiences teach you?"

For a long moment, Feszj remained quiet, thinking through his next comments, his head resting on his palm as the fingers stroked his beard. Jesse thought he might have insulted Feszj when he mimicked his words, but Feszj acted as though nothing inappropriate was uttered. He simply stroked his mustache, pinched his nose, and began to speak once more.

"Because of an unique moment in our history when the right set of contingent elements met," said Feszj, "we became a totally cooperative society. Now, everything we do is with the idea of helping someone else. Our every thought concerns developing ways and methods of assisting others in achieving their goals. Everyone's help is freely given; everyone's needs are immediately addressed. Everything you have seen and will see in the future has been constructed using the cooperative efforts of hundreds of generations of human ingenuity and effort. Furthermore, we believe — no, more strongly — *we know*

that competition has nothing beneficial to offer. Therefore, we sculpted an entire world accordingly, designing every single competitive activity into oblivion."

"Are you saying," said a disbelieving Jesse, "there's no competition here at all?"

"We abhor the notion that a person's success should necessarily be dependent on the forced failure of another, which is essentially what competition is all about."

"No sports?"

"We have no sports or competitive games of any kind. They are the most vile of all competitive creations. Their sole purpose is to celebrate competition — to celebrate success at the expense of failure, to glorify and ritualize the domination of one human over another. In our society, everyone strives together to assure that all achieve. Granted, because of certain innate and contingent abilities — height, weight, muscle strength, intellectual abilities — one person's achievement may be different than another's. But it was not gained at the expense of another, which is customary in your world. Nor does increased achievement in our world warrant any additional social benefits. In fact, it is repulsive to think that the individuals in your world are condemned to their unequal positions in society due to a fluke of nature — of being born to the right family, with the right environment, and accessible to the right experiences. The differences in abilities is accepted by the community, which utilizes these differences to enhance the welfare of everyone in the community, and never to enhance the welfare of one person at the expense of another."

"I don't know. I don't think I can give up sports, especially baseball. I really love the game."

Feszj, Ymo, and Sunas all shifted uncomfortably at Jesse's comment. The three looked at each other, nonverbal understanding coursing between their eyes. Only Feszj smiled, though. Actually it was a slight grin. The other two, Sunas and Ymo, were less comfortable with the situation and their faces showed concern. Yet they remained silent for the moment, allowing Feszj to continue his dialogue with Jesse.

"I always worry the most about this stage in a person's learning," said Feszj, to all three this time, as if he were describing his actions to medical students in a dissection room. "It is at this point when I begin breaking down some of the most cherished beliefs a person possesses, excavating holes in one's world view into which I pour different, more humane beliefs." He turned to Jesse. "You would be surprised how difficult this task is to accomplish, Jesse. People fight back, resist, stubbornly holding on to fallacious thinking if for no other reason than that they're comfortable with them. After all, people must believe something; and without good reasons to believe or good reasons why they believe, they will be quite content with bad ones. This is what we don't want to happen to you.

We will provide excellent reasons for you to believe. It is up to you to release your hold on the bad reasons. We want you to believe in cooperation. We want you not to believe in competition."

"Oh, I see what you're trying to say. You're right."

"I am?" said Feszj. The other two were surprised at the sudden conversion, but Feszj remained curious.

"I can see your point. Professional sports has become too caught up in money. Everything that is done is to get higher salaries for superstar athletes. The agents play games with the owners, signing bonuses, salary caps and all that. College players and high school players being drafted before they graduate. It's all for money. You're absolutely right, Feszj. All this money-money-money attitude of the players takes away from what the game is all about, and ruins it for everybody. Playing for the joy of playing, and not for the money. That's what it should be. Sports shouldn't be a job. It should be fun."

Feszj, Ymo, and Sunas all listened attentively and all understood right away what Jesse actually meant.

"There is a big difference," said Feszj, "between being a reformer of sports and trying to clean up its excesses, and being an opponent of competition. A reformer still claims there is something good in sports that needs to be preserved, if the excesses can be cleared away and the innate goodness of sports can be tapped. But the problem is that there is nothing good in sports to tap. The very structure of competition provides the ideal medium in which excesses can flourish. Reformers may eliminate excesses now and then, but they will always come back. What reformers fail to see is that one cannot manufacture moral goodness from something that is morally wrong. They refuse to admit to themselves that competition is morally wrong. And they refuse for many reasons. One, they may not realize that competition is morally wrong; they haven't read the research, or they refuse to accept the research because it defies common sense — as if common sense is somehow always right. Two, their livelihoods and their careers may require them to believe in sports at all costs. Athletes, coaches, sporting goods manufacturers, sports commentators, sports philosophers, et cetera — all would be unemployed if sports ..."

"Wait a minute," said Jesse, shaking his hands to cut off Feszj. "Let me get this straight. You're telling me that all sports are bad? Are evil, even? And you're going to try to convince me that I should just stop playing all sports right away, cold-turkey? Just throw down my baseball bat and glove and walk away, never to turn around again, am I right?" Jesse practically laughed out loud at the possibility.

"Yes." Jesse's joking skepticism vanished. Feszj's simple reply chilled his heart, and made Jesse realize if anyone could do all that, Feszj could. Jesse was scared.

"Why? Why do you want to do that to me?"

"Jesse, there is nothing to fear," said Sunas, crawling up next to him and holding his hand. If her hand was sore, she gave no indication of it, not even a wince. "It is very easy to give up competition once you open up yourself to what exists all around you — to all the benefits of cooperation. You don't have to compete anymore, Jesse. That's the point. You can give it all up, and be an even better person for it."

Her imploring weakened his resolve. And as she squeezed his hand, he looked into her shining eyes and for the first time saw more than just concern, more than just affection. He knew right then, Sunas loved him. But he had seen those eyes before. When Beedie comforted him by stroking his hair and offering some advice before she left, she had those same deep searching eyes. Did Beedie love him, too? And what about Catiana? When he first met her, her eyes covered him with warmth and serenity.

He wanted to ask Sunas if she felt the same way about him as he was beginning to feel about her. He guessed it would make him more willing to try to change, but he was too embarrassed to bring up the subject surrounded by Feszj and Ymo. Instead, he brought his other hand around his body to clasp her hands in his. Ever so slightly, he sensed her body tremble, though not from fear. Leaving his hands within Sunas's, he turned and spoke to Feszj.

"I really do love baseball."

"I know you do. But Sunas is right. Even in the best of circumstances, in the most pristine of conditions, competition is still wrong. Imagine, for instance, the best possible moment in your baseball career. Perhaps the temperature was in the lower 70s, a cool dry day with a slight breeze gliding in from center field, the grass was short, but green and healthy ..."

As the description continued, Jesse thinks back, and does remember that 'perfect' day. He gently interrupted Feszj when he began speaking in a day-dreamy voice. Feszj stopped talking to hear Jesse, while Ymo and Sunas leaned closer and listened as well, fascinated by his story.

"It was Memorial Day weekend last May, about a month into the season. A cold front had pushed through on the Friday before, and a thunderstorm drenched the field so the grass was well fed, the dust in the infield was matted down from the rain, and the winds, though blustery on Saturday, were now light. The game was played on Sunday at 12 noon against the Orioles, and everybody was really psyched-up for it. That same day, the league

held a cook-out brunch in between the fields before the all the games started. The place was crawling with kids and parents eating hot dogs and hamburgers, corn-on-the-cob, beans, soda.

"Our team got there early so we could eat our fill and still digest it in time for the game. We didn't want to be slow, bopping around the field like a bunch of bloated whales. The Orioles came later. They would be sorry for that. When it came time for the game, we were ready, refreshed, relaxed. The Orioles dragged there asses everywhere. It was funny to see them huffing and puffing. My pitches were never crisper, my infield was never sharper, our hitting never better. Face it, with a pound of food in his stomach, the other guy could only throw marshmallows. Curves that didn't break, fast balls with no zip. It was batting practice for us. Even our team nerd Jay Gorman got a hit. That's how bad this guy's pitching was.

"About half way through the game, the other team finally digested their food and started fielding and hitting better, but we were so far ahead in score, and had built up so much confidence, it didn't make any difference, even when Coach Lyons put in the second stringers. We still snagged all the grounders, made all the tags. Everyone was happy. We were happy, our parents were happy, our coach was happy. It was a great day. That was the day our season turned around. We were in sync then, and we kept that teamwork throughout the summer, until the play-offs...."

Jesse's voice trailed off, as he remembered that fateful day in August. Jesse looked at Feszj, embittered. "I remember other days as well."

Feszj understood. "I know, and we are all sorry, Jesse. But you will soon learn how wonderful this place really is. How much better cooperation can be. After all, if there is something important to be done in your world, like retrieving people stranded by a flood, you don't divide up the rescuers and say 'The team that brings back the most people in twenty-four hours wins a trip to the Bahamas,' even though proponents tout the effectiveness of competition. Citizens would be horrified. Think of the shortcuts that would be made in safety. Think of the lack of communication between groups as they scramble to track down survivors for themselves. Think of the invective that would be cast against victims if they don't climb a ladder fast enough, or get into a boat with extra alacrity."

Jesse dropped his head and nodded. Feszj went on. "In any case, was this your perfect day?"

"Yes, I would say that was *the* perfect day."

"Well, think about it again, Jesse. All that you imagined, all the good things like the food, the weather, the friends, the achievements, could have easily happened without competition. I even noticed that though you were gleeful about taking advantage of their ineptitude, you mentioned nothing about how the other team felt when they lost. Don't you think the overall experience would have been so much greater and more significant if your glory and joy grew from helping the Orioles achieve glory and joy as well, rather than assuring that they failed and only you succeeded? Would not the sun been a bit brighter, the grass a bit greener, humanity a bit more humane if your success wasn't as a result of someone else's loss?"

"But they worked just as hard as we did, even though they didn't plan very well. But that's not our fault."

"Not your fault? Who told you that?"

"No one had to tell me that. It's true."

"Truth is just convention that is accepted without any discussion. Once we stop debating, we either accept fully or dismiss entirely," said Feszj, winking at the other two youths. "But no matter," returning to Jesse. "What is it, Jesse, that drives you to compete?"

"Hmm?"

"In other words, *why*? Why do you compete?" said Feszj, focusing all his attention on the young man. Jesse felt uncomfortable under that strong gaze, but thinking he had nothing to be ashamed of, especially so as he held Sunas's hands, Jesse told him why.

"Well, it's fun."

"Ahh." Feszj nodded slowly in understanding. "You probably get exercise as well."

"Yes."

"And baseball builds teamwork. It's also the challenge of pushing yourself hard, trying to anticipate the other's moves. It tests your body and your mind."

"Yes, all that." By now, Jesse was vigorously bobbing his head up and down.

All three sitting there heard a young man speaking confidently and with a voice much stronger than his weakened condition would seem to warrant. Feszj frowned, however, knowing what had to be done next was for Jesse's own good, and his world's good.

"Platitudes, Jesse. All of them," said Feszj. "Everything you say can exist without competition. Why do you *compete* to accomplish these things, and not cooperate?" Jesse thought, but said nothing. Jesse felt at this point that no answer would satisfy Feszj.

He was just like dad, he thought. Always demanding a reason why, but never really wanting to know. So Jesse would merely clam up, mumble the standard 'I dunno,' and

get the usual verbal and physical beating. It made little difference if he answered the question or not, except that it would infuriate his dad more if he replied, and the beating would be that much more painful.

"You have learned to say nothing when asked why. A lesson from your father?" Jesse eyes opened wide in astonishment. Again, it was as if Feszj could read his mind. To know what he was thinking, and where all his thoughts came from. Was nothing secret from him? "Please, Jesse, you have been doing great. Don't withdraw into a shell of feigned ignorance. Think hard. Why compete instead of cooperate?"

Jesse thought hard. He searched deep into his memories for the reasons for competing. He knew reasons must be there somewhere, but they eluded him, like ghosts in the night. He asked the question again to himself, *If cooperation does just as much and is just as good as competition, why have I only been competing?* but still the answers he grasped at were only mirages.

"I don't know," said Jesse. I really don't know." Feszj sensed his sincerity.

"It is a very difficult question," said Feszj. "You compete because it is all you have. It is all you are offered. By limiting your options, your society has seen to it that you must compete, you can only compete, to have any inkling of these 'good' experiences, wholly distorted and gained at a monstrous cost. And since any self-esteem you might get from competition is tenuous and fragile and always threatened to be taken away, you fight harder and harder to keep what you have. After a while, competition is a necessity. You become addicted to it. None of your coaches, parents, teachers, or advertisers told you about that, I suppose?"

"No."

"You see, Jesse," said Feszj, getting to his knees to face Jesse, "in the final analysis, you have been deceived."

"What?"

"Everything that you so enjoyed about sport, everything that you have been told of the benefits of sport, is a deception of the grandest scale."

"Yeah, right." Jesse practically spit at Feszj. Feszj was unaffected.

"Do you remember some of the stories you father told you about baseball while watching those games in front of the television. From its unpretentious beginnings in Cooperstown where Abner Doubleday drew the famous diamond in the sand; to the time Abraham Lincoln, lying on his death bed, told Abner to keep baseball going, the country needs it; to Babe Ruth's called home run, to hundreds of other stories."

"Yes, the story about Lincoln. That was amazing."

Feszj sighed in disappointment. "See how easy it is to believe stories about baseball, no matter how ridiculous or fictitious they may be."

"What do you mean?" said Jesse, his anger increasing. "You mean that never happened?"

"None of those stories ever happened. Doubleday never invented baseball. He was attending West Point at the time. He would have been AWOL if he were actually in Cooperstown then. Lincoln never spoke after being shot in the back of the head. That story was made up by a sports announcer in the 1930s. Babe Ruth never pointed to the center field bleachers. He raised his middle finger to the Cubs bench which was razzing him about his weight. The gesture was charitably reinterpreted for the newspaper readers."

Jesse shook his head in disbelief. "What about the time when Rube Wadell struck out the side in the bottom of the ninth after he waved all his fielders into the dugout?"

"Never happened, Jesse. These are myths that have grown around the game. And just as baseball can deceive, so can society."

"How?"

"Myths about competition have been fostered that sustain its powerful grip on society in spite of the volumes of evidence that even your world's researchers have uncovered. And uncovering the facts about cooperation wasn't hard. What is hard is getting people to accept these facts and dismiss the myths with which the supporters of competition reinflect every generation. The information is there and unambiguous, but few are listening, and even fewer believe. And the reason is obvious. It is easier to believe in competition than cooperation."

"Why's that?"

"Because of the thousands of years of social training and cultural engineering, it is easier in your society to think of one's own self and one's own welfare above all else than to think about other people and their welfare. It is easier to be arrogant and conceited than humble and compassionate. It is easier to see the results of one's personal successes than the more long-term results from the donation of time and money to a charity or education. Your people want quick fixes, but at the expense of a more humane and civilized society."

"But what about sports?" Jesse tried to get the subject back around to something with which he was more familiar.

"Since they exacerbate the inculturation of the quest for immediate results, sports are worthless."

"Wait a minute." Jesse sat up off the wall. "Sports involve long hours of practice and dedication. Quick results? That's silly."

"Is it?" replied Feszj calmly. "How do you know all your practice has been successful? You must play the game. Competition is a never ending cycle of feedback loops. Practice — results, practice — results. It is all about immediate results. You need a constant stream of results to vindicate the practice.

"School is no different. It is a constant stream of graded papers and tests, reports, dittos, copies, readings, ad infinitum. You perform, they grade. Practice — result. On to the next project. Why do you think most students write so poorly? Writing is a process of constant development, of re-writings, re-editings, and re-evaluations. There is, or at least should be, no end product. But rarely is this method used in schools, where one or two papers are developed over the course of several months, evaluated and improved, where re-writing an old paper is as much a learning activity as writing new papers. However, since productivity and efficiency are the catchwords of the educational process, the pragmatic philosophy of quantity rather than quality dominates any theoretical approach."

As Feszj spoke, Jesse thought back to his schooldays, and recalled numerous instances which supported Feszj. All too often he would be handed back papers with a letter grade on top, a few spelling and grammatical errors circled, and little else. Only once, when the paper was so riddled with errors was he asked to re-write the paper. So all he did was correct the spelling and clean up the grammar, and he earned his teacher's approving check mark. Minimal work, and then on to the next project. Feszj described to a tee his educational experiences.

"Again, I aver," said Feszj, forcing Jesse to shake his head clear of his distracting memories, "sports are useless."

Feszj was good at wandering off the subject, even though he never seemed to get lost in his ramblings. He effortlessly pick up strands of interrupted conversations and topics and continued as if nothing happened. Then Jesse wondered, *Is he trying to goad me into fighting against his rigid stand against sports?* For a moment, Jesse considered the possibility of simply agreeing with him for the sake of argument, but Feszj would probably see through that in an instant. Jesse decided to accept the challenge.

"Well, I still don't think sports are totally useless. I like sports," said Jesse, now on the defensive and struggling to hold on as long as possible to what he finds comfortable and familiar, though Jesse suspected that this is exactly what Feszj might have predicted would happen.

"Most of the time you probably do enjoy sports," said Feszj with his usual resonant voice, "but that's because your good feelings are associated with the memories of good times. Do you remember our conversation an hour or so ago?" Jesse nodded politely, but

wasn't quite sure to which conversation he was referring. "You enjoy sports because of the fond memories of bouncing on your dad's knee in front of TV that it triggers in your unconscious. You also enjoy sports because it permits you to claim a certain amount of prestige in society, and possibly an increased level of self-esteem because it is a socially-condoned activity. But take away the activity, what do you have? No more prestige, and self-esteem one will violently fight to maintain since there is no other way of maintaining it. Without sports, you are nothing, because sports, essentially, has given you nothing it can't just as easily take away. Why do you think so many athletes who retire fall into depression, and why some desperately try to come out of retirement? In a cooperative society, you always have a place where what you do is valued by the community. The pursuit of prestige is no longer significant in a cooperative society, and self-esteem gained by helping others achieve is never threatened because it is never lost. You can always help others achieve."

Feszj paused for a moment to let his statements sink in, but Jesse was unable to comprehend its significance and was quickly losing interest. Feszj apparently sensed this and continued on a different track. "But good feelings are only half the issue. People lose as well. How do you feel when you lose?"

Jesse thought for a moment. He remembered how last year he gave up a ninth inning double which drove in three runs and lost the game. It was all his fault, and he felt miserable. Coach benched him the next game. His teammates shunned him, not wanting his bad luck to rub off. Dad didn't say a word to him. How could he; he wasn't home all night once he stormed out of the house after another argument. Mom was the only one who let him cry, but it was no solace to hear her say that it was only a game.

"Losing isn't always bad." Jesse resisted.

"Losing is *always* bad," insisted Feszj. "When have you ever felt good about losing? When you played well?"

"Sometimes when I play well, it doesn't matter if I lose."

"Doesn't it though?" Feszj pulled down his eyebrows and stared penetratingly into Jesse. "You certainly don't feel the same after you've played well and won, as opposed to when you've played well and lost. Give me any two players, and I can tell just by the way they look, the way they walk, the way they talk, who lost. There is no doubt it affects us. Besides, what do you gain from losing?"

"We learn from losing. Not to make the same mistakes. To work harder. To try harder."

"These are all adult justifications. What do you think?" asked Feszj, genuinely curious. "What do *you* gain from losing?"

No one has ever asked Jesse before what he thought about losing. He realized that these reasons were the ones his Dad always used, and he never questioned them. *Maybe Feszj is right again. Maybe I'm accepting too much for granted.* Yet, when his Dad spoke, his assertions seemed to make sense. Now however, Jesse was having difficulty reconstructing his father's thinking.

"Well, they make sense, don't they? Losing forces me to do better."

"Why did you do better?"

"Well, I don't want to lose again."

"But Jesse, as you said before, losing doesn't affect you. Why should you care whether or not you lose?"

"Well ... "

"On the other hand, if you actually learn from losing, then losing is good for you. Why would you want to win, then? What inspires you *not* to lose? What inspires you *not* to learn the lessons of losing? Is it because you like winning more than losing?"

"Heck, I always like winning."

"But if you won all the time, wouldn't that prevent you from learning?"

Jesse's voice stumbled. "I don't know. That doesn't make sense. It's getting too confusing for me."

Feszj pressed on to the logical conclusion. "So, if you like winning, and strive not to lose, then losing is not something good. The only thing we learn from losing is that it is something we wish to avoid — at all costs."

Jesse looked humiliated. Worried, Sunas stared hopefully at Feszj. Feszj immediately recoiled from his dialectical bullying.

"I'm sorry, Jesse. I don't mean to confuse you, but there is much to discuss and you can see how difficult it is to give up long held beliefs. You are confused because you are trying to rectify what you have long felt to be true, with what now seems to be more true. We are opening up your choices and forcing you to expand your vocabulary and your options.

"Still, we must pursue this line of thinking, and I need your help. I'm still having trouble understanding the benefits of losing, if any. Tell me again — and really concentrate this time — what have you learned from losing?"

Jesse searched his memory to find out what he did learn. "I know that I always try harder the next time after losing." But suddenly, in a candid moment the hows and whys

of which couldn't be explained, Jesse reached a critical level of comfort and began verbalizing openly to Feszj on what he really thought about losing. "On the other hand, I can't really remember when I wasn't trying hard. In fact, even when I worked hard, sometimes one of my teammates would mess up and we would still lose. No matter how hard I worked, we still lost."

Though they said nothing, Ymo and Sunas were elated to hear Jesse opening up and examining his unfettered emotions honestly. Sunas squeezed Jesse's hand more intimately. Feszj could hardly control his exuberance, and encouraged Jesse to continue with his uninhibited thinking.

"It has been said, Jesse, that losing is a group effort, just like winning?"

"Yeah, I've heard that. I've also heard that a team is only as good as the weakest player. If that's the case, then losing sometimes is the fault of the weakest player, because they are more likely to screw up royally and screw the team in the process. I could play as hard as I can and still lose because of one bozo slacking off."

"Often," said Feszj, "you had no control over winning or losing."

"Well ...," said Jesse, then sat in silence for a thought-filled moment, "What do you mean?"

"It means that no matter how hard you try, often victory lies exclusively in the domain of luck. A teammate or opponent trips, a referee whistles a bad call, a coach makes a poor choice of plays. No matter how well any play or action is executed, victory or defeat all boils down to an accumulation of good or bad luck."

"Well, I don't know about that," replied Jesse, withdrawing back into his mental shell, "but I still think I worked harder after losing. And I'm a better player now because of it."

"Yes, you might well be a better player, but are you a better human?"

"What do you mean?"

"Think about it, Jesse. After all, you can't fully count on your teammates to perform adequately to your standards. You can't trust them, so you work harder to make up for their deficiencies. You lose faith in your coaches, so you learn the theory of the game on your own. You think the umpires are blind, so you learn the rules in order to challenge their calls. You're whole development as an athlete is driven by a complete and arrogant lack of faith in every level of the sport organization."

Jesse wanted to speak, to challenge Feszj's perspective of sports, but he didn't. Once again, intuitively, it seemed to make sense.

"But no matter. When I asked what else you learned from losing, I wanted to know if you learned anything about life outside of sports, about morality, about humanity, about those things which are important to human beings. What does losing teach you about life?"

Jesse sat silently, pounded into submission by the truth, his lips beginning to twitch.

"For that matter," Feszj went on, "what does winning teach you about life?"

Jesse continued his silence, staring straight ahead into the distance at some of the members of the little town of Vilmar. Many smiling and laughing with others breaking out into song, they arranged and set up tables on some of the grassy sections in front of the living quarters. He could now see lights glowing inside the buildings as the windows receded into the shadows — shadows which lengthened across the grounds and made Jesse unconsciously feel a slight chill.

"These are very difficult questions," said Feszj, bringing Jesse back into the conversation, "primarily because questions about life revolve around living and loving rather than winning or losing. Your society works very hard to avoid referring to welfare recipients as losers, as homeless people as losers, poor people as losers, illiterates as losers. Because once you classify these marginalized people as losers, it is automatically implied that there are winners; other people who beat them; other people who forced them to be impoverished, illiterate, homeless. Consequently, the victims are not at fault. Someone else did it to them. But who? Will anyone take the credit for this glorious victory over one's fellow humans?"

"No one will, but it is not hard to find the winners. Take the corporate executive whose yearly bonus might be enough to purchase 50 homes. Take the actor or actress who makes as much money in one movie as could feed ten thousand people for a year. The wealthiest person in America is worth the equivalent of enough newly built schools able to educate over one hundred thousand students."

Feszj laughed derisively, catching Jesse off-guard. "Your society is all about winners and losers. That's what a competitive society does. It makes winners and losers just like it makes toasters and hair spray."

"I don't understand any of this," said Jesse dryly.

"What sports does is immunize you to the horrors of competition in society. It trains you to accept winning and losing. It tells you that opulence is acceptable, and that poverty is unavoidable. And just like in sports, it tells you that winning and losing are facts of life — that some must win and some must lose — and this social law can never be transgressed."

"Well, of course," insisted Jesse. "Someone has to lose. Not everyone can win. How can it be any other way?"

"Why not, Jesse?" asked Sunas. "Why does anyone have to lose?"

"But—. You can't play a game without winners and losers. That's how you play it."

"So," interrupted Feszj, "the rules force someone to win and to lose, correct?"

"Well, yeah."

"If that is the case, Jesse, can't you design a game with rules in which people don't have to lose? Where the rules demand people to work together for the accomplishment of goals? It would seem to be just as easy to do that rather than forcing people to win or lose."

"I guess," said a reluctant Jesse.

"Yes, it is just as easy. But your society works very hard to avoid this alternative. Everywhere one looks, one is expected to design and participate in structures which fosters competition between people — 'friendly' competition maybe, but competition nonetheless.

"Think carefully, Jesse. On one hand, people have argued that children have an innate sense of knowing what is fair, and point to instances where children have designed their own competitive games, structuring the playing environment so that competitors can have the greatest opportunity to play. Yet on the same token, when this same morally enlightened community of individuals reject competition outright, verbally expressing their displeasure at its unfairness, crying and moping for hours after losing a game, adults as well as the winners accuse them of being sore losers and unsportsmanlike.

"Now consider this. What is your society doing to the losers — those who object to the structure of the activity, the ones who express their disappointment though righteous indignation, the ones who ask the obvious questions "Why should they have to lose? Why should anyone have to lose?" which are rarely answered. Society humiliates them and shuts them up. In the end, the more competitivists squelch these types of rebellions, the more impotent losers, cooperativists, and non-participants become in the design of their own society. By appropriating the language of debate, which is itself a competition, the winners and supporters of competition have forcibly acquired the moral high ground not because they are morally right, but because they stifle opposition, and are going to win and keep the high ground any way they can."

* * *

Sitting there, puzzled, Jesse wondered what Feszj was trying to prove. *What is he getting at? Why can't he just let me play for the fun of it.*

"But the games are fun," insisted Jesse, almost pleading with Feszj to have mercy.

Feszj took a deep breath and smiled in a fatherly way — not showing any teeth, just a benign grin. A grin twinkled in his eye as well.

"You have lived under the shadow of competition for so long, coming out into the light can be painful. But still, we must try to open our eyes and see." Jesse sighed. Feszj patted Jesse on the shoulder. Jesse also felt Sunas stroking his hair and rubbing his neck. "You'll be okay," she said. "We're all in this together, so you're in good company."

"But it is so hard to change," said Jesse. "You want me to give up everything."

No, not everything," said Feszj. "Besides, all we are doing is replacing those beliefs which prevent you from opening up to the lives that surround you, with other beliefs — beliefs in universal cooperation — which will foster intellectual freedom, emotional stability, physical well-being, and spiritual tranquility. You body, mind, and spirit will, for the first time, be whole. By giving up the self-destructiveness of competition, you gain so much more."

"But it's so hard. Maybe I ought to just give up and buy into this..."

"No, no," interrupted Feszj. Sunas and Ymo jerked their shocked and unbelieving eyes towards Feszj.

"But Feszj," said Ymo, "if Jesse is willing to voluntarily let everything go, why not?" Sunas nodded in whole-hearted agreement. "It would make the whole process so much easier, and ..."

"Easier?" said Feszj, returning their gaze with one of disappointment. "Is that what you want?" Ymo and Sunas immediately backed down. "Easier," continued Feszj, returning his attention to Jesse, "is not necessarily better. Everyone in this community strives to achieve the best possible results of their endeavors. Results obtained easily does a disservice to both the person and the community. There is a lack of satisfaction in not performing the best that one can and should, and it short-changes the community by providing second-rate services and materials. Fortunately, in a cooperative society, people understand that shoddy workmanship causes unsafe conditions, the inconvenience of constant repair, and the interruption of other people's endeavors.

"Now I can understand why your friends would like the process to be easy." *My friends?* Jesse thought. *Yes. I suppose they are my friends. They stand by me, and share my pain. They support me, and never say a bad word about me.* "They do not wish to see you suffer through the struggle." *And Beedie's speech in the cafeteria. She hardly knew*

me, but still she stood up to Feszj and came to my defense at the point when I should have been written off as a troublemaker. They have shown so much faith in me, and I have yet to return the faith in them.

"But," Said Feszj, raising his finger for emphasis, "it is important for you to question and to challenge. Only when all your objections are stated and answered will your conversion to cooperation be that much more significant and profound."

Jesse felt odd puzzling his thoughts out. *On one hand, they want me to believe in cooperation; but on the other hand, Feszj wants me to fight it all the way. Plus, he says I should do my best in all my endeavors. I guess he would want me to do my best in resisting, because if I resist as best I can ...*

"Wait a minute," said Jesse. "You want me to resist so you can have the satisfaction of converting me. You're competing with me, aren't you?"

This time, Ymo and Sunas's face froze in shock at the way Jesse accused Feszj of competing.

"Jesse, said a nervous Sunas, "I don't think you understand what you're saying."

"I understand fine. He wants to compete with me."

"Feszj," said Ymo, "you must forgive him. He doesn't really understand ..." Feszj took Jesse's comment in stride. He raised his hands and gestured Sunas and Ymo into silence.

"Jesse, we may be in conflict, I agree. But conflict is not the same as competition."

"How so?"

"Conflict involves a difference or a dispute in issues like methodology or application, but these areas of discussion can be factually demonstrative and thus determined either right or wrong. In the end, we are still striving for the same goal; we either both succeed or both fail together. Competition, on the other hand, is the pursuit of completely different goals. My success over your success. In fact, more often than not when we compete we implicitly agree on the application and methodology of the activity. There is no necessity for conflict in competition whatsoever."

"Wait a minute. There's conflict in this world?"

"Of course. Without some conflicts, there would be little growth or advancement in any culture. There will always be disputes over what will be the best course of action. However, we always place the interests of the community above all other priorities. We don't let — can't let! — personal petty competitive passions for something so insignificant as winning an argument or a point of order get in the way of benefitting hundreds or

perhaps thousands of community members. Sure, there are conflict. Be we all know what the ultimate goal of our discussions will be.

"For example, we can disagree on whether our community needs an improved water purification system or additional research facilities. Our goals are in conflict, but we don't compete until one of us views the validation of an individual goal as leading to some sort of personal benefit, rather than the community as a whole. Competition only narrows one's ability to see alternatives choices, when they are at the expense of one's own. This clearly becomes a detriment of the community."

Jesse, still having trouble seeing the difference between competition and conflict, let the issue rest for the time being, but ...

"I still think you're competing with me," said Jesse, remaining adamant against Feszj's argumentative stance.

"Tell me, Jesse," said Feszj, "what will I win from this competition?"

"You'll have convinced me of ... um?"

"A cooperative way of thinking about life? Correct?"

"That sounds good."

"And what will you have lost in the process?"

"A competitive way of thinking about life?"

"Exactly. But has nothing I have described placed that type of lifestyle even in the slightest doubt?"

"Well...?"

"You see, Jesse, this isn't a game anymore — where the results are of little importance to life outside the playing field. This is a critically important venture for both you and your world. There is too much at stake for us to compete. If I win, you win, your world wins, we all win. We all learn to live together in peace and harmony. On the other hand, if you win, you will keep your anxiety-laden life, surrounded by a dog-eat-dog world, full of human maggots crawling over its own excrement fighting to survive. You will yearn and you will plead for the calm serenity of Vilmar forever lost because you 'won.' Don't think of yourself anymore; it is no longer of any value to you. Think of what you and your world will have lost in winning."

"Well, even after you have told me everything about competition, what if I still just don't want to convert? You can't make me give up competition totally. You can't control my mind."

"That may be true. I may not be able to break through logical barriers you raise in your intellect. But in your heart, after all is said and done and shown to you, you will know you

are living a lie. You will know deep down in your soul that cooperation is the only meaningful way to live. And you will lose precious fleeting moments of your life fighting that realization."

Jesse was silent for a moment, thinking. Then he said, "So, you want me to challenge everything you say for my own good?"

"I want you to challenge everything I say so you can become convinced as to what the Good is."

Jesse nodded. Jesse understood what he had to do.

"Still, you haven't told me yet why I shouldn't think sports are fun," Jesse said

"It may be that the process of learning to play can be fun," said Feszj, continuing where he left off. "When first learning a skill, children and adults alike find the accomplishments of incremental development and overcoming obstacles heartening. The passion for this sensation remains with you, even after the basic skills are acquired and the inanimate obstacles no longer pose enough of a challenge. The only other obstacle left in your way is the opponent. Unfortunately, you were psychologically prepared, if not addicted, to feeling good about overcoming — about beating — another human being. Furthermore, this conditioning smothers your ability to feel empathy for your opponent. Essentially, you cannot feel bad about beating your opponent. When an athlete chokes during a game, some of your world's psychologists have suggested that this is due to an internal propensity not to beat another trying to make itself known. What we have to do is to bring out this empathy locked away inside you. We have to eliminate this conditioned indifference or even antipathy towards your opponents, and re-expose you to the kindness and beauty of being friends with humanity. And to live and flourish in a cooperative world like ours, you must discard all pretense to competition. There is no room for it. There is no need for it."

Jesse was getting bored repeating himself, and even though he has heard almost every other reason as to why sports are no good, he has yet to hear of a justification against playing sports simply for the fun of it. So, he repeated himself. "You could play for the fun of it."

"Jesse, sports are only fun if you follow the rules, and the rules demand a winner or loser. Therefore, what should be objected to is the end. Sports, and competition in general, must be played to win, otherwise there is no point in playing. And one can only continue playing the sport when one strives for that end — to win. No coach is going to keep you on the team if you simply play to have fun. You play to win. Only then does one keep playing."

The headache came back as Jesse's brain frantically tried to keep up with the conversation. It was moving too fast, but it sounded good and he felt he ought to try to make some sense out of it. Feszj thought over what he just said and admitted to himself that it wasn't very clear. Still he ventured a comment.

"Are you saying that playing to win and playing for fun are two different things?"

"Look, Jesse, there are many things people do for fun. They fly kites, put puzzles together, ride bicycles, travel, and countless other activities — all of which do not require competition. Sports, on the other hand, is inherently competitive. Think about baseball. What would it be like if you never kept score? Would you try very hard?"

A curious thought. Jesse pondered out loud the possibility.

"If there were no scoring, I don't think I would try as hard. I can remember some of the routs our team had. There was scores like 27 to 4 against the Red Sox and 19 to 2 against one of the Blueville teams. Blow-outs always take away any desire to play hard. At that point, the game is already won. But is that the same as having no score at all?"

"You tell me. Granted, you don't play a game the same way once the outcome has been decided. The incentive to compete is lost at the very moment the game is won. But without a score, will you try hard?"

"Probably not?"

"Why?"

"Why bother? There's nothing to be gained by busting your butt going after a grounder when it doesn't make any difference whether you get it or not."

"And that's no fun, is it?"

"No, of course not."

"Then fun for you is directly linked to winning?"

"So? That's what I was saying before."

"So, it's not the sport nor the playing of it that's fun," said Feszj, ever so slightly raising his voice, which he does when he wants to make a point, "for the same sport is no fun if we take away scoring. Consequently, one cannot play baseball for the fun of it. You have to compete. You are addicted to competition. In your human disgrace, most of you are losing the ability to find enjoyment in non-competitive activities. Competition is fun. Winning is fun. That's all you know."

"But I like flying kites, and biking, and those things."

"You do now, but you are still permitted these by the social conditions of our society. Kids are allowed to have fun in irreverences. They are still allowed to just "play." Adults can't just play. That was tried in the 1970s, and failed. Adults now have to play

something, invariably a competitive game, whether it's cards, checkers, Monopoly, et cetera. Adolescents and young adults, however, are the worst. They have this all-consuming passion to be supposedly more mature, more like adults, that they consciously flee children's games and the urge to have fun by just playing. They are easily inculcated into the competitive ethic both through society's lessons, and their own willingness to absorb this "maturity." As we get older, we become less inclined to compete, but we more and more watch others compete. Although many still compete to the bitter end, the tragedy is that when people in your society age, they re-learn the pleasures of play at a time when they, by then, are unfortunately rarely in a condition to participate. But you're still young. You can still just play. Don't compete."

"But I like baseball." Jesse had practically no conviction left, having steadily eroding away. He sounded worried that a sport he has spent so long to learn and participate in is being strangled before his eyes. Baseball and sports in general were losing their luster — have lost their luster — as the blackness underneath was being exposed.

"Face it, Jesse," said Feszj, "for you to succeed, someone else has to lose. Do you like losing?"

"No. I don't think any one does."

"Then why do you work so hard, and so persistently, in achieving someone else's loss. Your success is based on someone else's failure — a failure you caused. To try to win is also trying to cause someone else to fail.

"As we just discussed, losing affects us, invariably in a negative way. Losing hurts. Thus, competition is actually justified sadism. We desire and enjoy hurting other people. But no matter how much one may claim that competition is between two consenting adults or children, it is morally wrong to willingly, purposely, and with forethought, hurt someone. Concession is not an excuse for pain and suffering. And the fact that such an activity is considered fun makes it an even more perverted pathological problem. That's why it is one thing to have an instrumental reason to play sports — exercise, developing teamwork, leaning discipline — all of which can be gained with less antagonism through cooperative activities. It is something completely different to have an autotelic reason to engage in sports or any sort of competition. To simply participate for the fun of it and to beat someone because it is enjoyable is the most vile reason of all. How do you feel now, Jesse?"

And that was that. It was almost incomprehensible, but Jesse just sat there transfixed by the calm passion Feszj exuded. Feszj smiled, though not in the way of a sneering smirk filled with haughty satisfaction as one might expect at this point. His smile expressed

regret and sorrow. Jesse understood well enough; after that bittersweet smile, the end had come. Everything Mom and Dad ever preached to him about being kind to others, sharing one's good fortune, never hurting anyone, was being violated in every instance he competed. It all came back to haunt him, every victory chant, every team cheer, every taunt. He was doing exactly what he morally ought not to do. Competition really is socially-condoned hatred.

What could be said now? Feszj was absolutely right, Jesse thought, and had known how it would finally come to a conclusion since the beginning. He was there with a counter reply at every twist and turn of the discussion. Feszj slowly and methodically chipped away at Jesse's beliefs, eventually ending with one thundering blow pulverizing the last fragment of resistance.

Jesse's head fell forward and his shoulders hunched. He wanted to cry, but he was too tired to make any tears. Sunas pulled Jesse towards her without resistance and hugged him. He did nothing, letting his arms dangle at his sides.

"But how did you do this?" asked Jesse, exhausted and numb, his voice almost inaudible. Sunas released her hold on him so he could speak more clearly. "How can a whole world totally get rid of competition?" he continued.

"Because," replied Feszj, "during every moment of our lives, we *choose* to eradicate it. We choose to make that possibility a perpetual reality. That's the answer. As I said before, cooperation and competition are learned behaviors. We have chosen to learn and promote cooperation. Your society hasn't."

"But why haven't we? Based on what I've seen, it would seem to make a lot more sense."

"It does, but many of your pundits are under the misconception that a totally cooperative society is communistic, anarchic, utopian, or even impossible. In essence, unAmerican. And just like yourself, the vast majority of the population cannot conceive of a world without competition, so they make no effort to that end. But as you can see around you, cooperation is just an alternative way of looking at the world, of treating people and themselves differently and decently. We are still productive, more so than in your world because we share all information and we don't waste time and effort trying to keep others from success. But our efficiency is not at the expense of human dignity or community solidarity. We are happier, because we are assured food, clothing, and all the essentials, including education, medical care, travel ..."

Feszj abruptly stopped when he noticed Jesse's eyebrows shoot upward.

"Yes, travel," said Feszj, responding to Jesse's unuttered question, "for two reasons. First, how else can a person accumulate experiences to better their lives and their community? After all, other people and other communities may have different methods to handle different conditions. These potential solutions help their counterparts elsewhere deal with these problems as they arise.

"Second, for any collaborative effort to succeed, the individuals involved must trust each other. One critical way to enhance trust is to share perspectives, to better understand how others see the world. Travel permits us invaluable access to these shared perspectives. From that, the vocabularies each person knows and uses to define his or her world constantly develop and expand which, in turn, increases its overall uniformity. Consensus decisions and collaborative actions can be better achieved then because the participants share a common definition of experiences and situations."

"I don't understand any of this," protested Jesse.

"Put simply, people work best together if each one knows how the other will act."

Again, Jesse nodded in acceptance. "I guess that makes sense." There wasn't much he could do, being slowly overwhelmed by the increasingly complex discussion. But the line jarred his thinking of cooperation. It struck him as something a coach may have told him about working together on a team, but as Feszj quickly moved on in his discussion, Jesse lacked the time to work out its ramifications. He hoped he remembered to get back to it later.

"In the final analysis, our lives in this world are guaranteed secure. The stress to survive is gone. It is a stress that constantly takes its toll on all but the wealthiest of your population. Food, clothing, shelter, are all in constant demand. In addition, a person's self-respect must be fought for. Again, it is not really the population's fault that these struggles occur. Your economy requires endless purchases to continue to grow and expand. To assure this demand, advertisers have tapped on to the idea of class distinctions and utilize the quest for status — essentially, rising through the class structure — to spur consumption. If people want to desperately not be associated with the lower class, a class almost universally reviled by education, business, government, and almost every other institution, they must buy the symbols of the higher classes ... at whatever the cost. Personal well-being is equated with personal possessions, which can never be enough because of the advertiser's ability to make consumers immediately discontented with purchases. Consequently, because of the demands of market economy, a person will never be happy with oneself.

"Increasing middle class debt is a symptom of this phenomenon. The wealthy do not need loans to alleviate their personal lives — their loans usually being reserved for business ventures. The poor are not allowed to get into debt. After all, there must be a lower class to hold up for public excoriation. It is the middle class scrambling to stay further and further above the rising poverty line, itself caused by every other person in the middle class doing the same thing. No one wants to be left behind and classified as poor. Keeping up with the Jones's is a completely middle class phenomenon.

"And in your specific case," said Feszj, re-focusing his comments towards Jesse's concerns, "the toys you desire, the video games you yearn for, the books you read, the television shows you watch are all representative of this behavior not to be in a ridiculed group. Whether it be nerds, or the homeless, it is a disgusting way of life."

"Why's that?" said Jesse, offended at being lumped with the judgmental masses.

"Think about it. You wouldn't willingly give money to a bully, would you? Of course not. You would probably never give money to people you despise. So, reviling a population limits one's desire to help. The wealthy have done a great deal to deflect hatred away from themselves, by reinforcing quaint notions like 'money can't buy happiness.' The wealthy would much rather have you feel sorry for them, and then you'll do things for them. On the other hand, feeling sorry for people on welfare is a no-no. They take your hard earned money (which the government took from you), and go out and buy drugs, and alcohol, and cigarettes. They waste it. By God, do something to get these ingrates to earn their keep. Force them to work if you have to.

"Yet through it all, wealth continues to rise to the wealthy, something you are taught is good; and that money should be accumulated in large amounts and reserved for the personal use of only a select number of people. For some reason you are also taught to hate people who lack education, lack vocational training, live in slums, and whose lives are precarious and often violently short. You are taught, furthermore, that a person should be ashamed if one feels any sort of sympathy for the plight this lower class population must endure. The wealthy, and increasingly the government, wants you to feel guilty when helping your poor. Remember though, it's okay to help people from other countries; soon to be the economic fodder of economic imperialism, the fault of their poverty lies in their governments's ineptitude and unwillingness to open and expand capitalist markets. Just don't send money to an inner city child of your country to purchase shoes or a decent meal, because in this case, it is not the ineptitude of the government at fault. It's the child's fault."

"Hold it. Let me get this straight," said Jesse, after a few moments of thought. "If someone is poor overseas, it's the government's fault. But if someone is poor in the United States, it's their fault?"

"Interesting, isn't it?" Feszj sported a huge smile.

"I don't know." Weary, Jesse shook his drooping head. Feszj went on.

"We have no racism here. It has no place in a world whose population works together very hard to assure that everyone will succeed. In your world, racism is necessary to establish a set of differences between people that can be used to contribute to that person's and that race's failure, insuring another person's and another race's success. Racism is just another form of competition. And as I mentioned before, competition is the attainment of success, either in money, status, prestige, self-esteem depending on the social demands, through the forced failure of another."

"Stop. Stop. I can't—... There's just too much to know. I'll never remember all this."

"You don't have to," said Sunas.

"She's right," said Feszj. "All you really have to know and understand right now is the competitive ethos. Once you appreciate that, everything else — all the pain, the suffering, the humiliations, and inhumanity, everything — falls into place."

"All falls into place," Jesse repeated. "You make it sound so easy, and so simple. But what if someone chooses not to cooperate? What happens then?"

"That is no longer possible," replied Feszj.

"Huh?"

"Our lifestyle was chosen for us many millennia ago, just as your lifestyle was chosen centuries ago. You cannot but compete in your culture — job selection, economy, politics, education — they are all competitive battles.

"Then we have no future," said Jesse.

"Not necessarily. There are still pockets of resistance, some who know what cooperation is and have tried hard to live that way. Though few and practically unknown, these communities exist and can provide a possibility for the growth of cooperation. But it is no easy task in your world. Competition will fight you every step of the way, because that ideology is prepared for fighting. Its strength was built through fighting. The best that can be done, since cooperation is a non-violent entity, is to simply present, and hopefully the rest of the community will acknowledge cooperation's humanity in all aspects of society."

Jesse's face hardened. "You want me to do too much."

"No, no," said Ymo. "You will only do what you can. That's all that can be expected — no more, no less."

"But how can one person change the world?"

"One person can't," said Feszj.

"Huh?"

"It takes people, many people, a mass movement, to make social change possible. But with our help, you will be able to do a lot more than you think."

Feszj then nodded to Ymo, who stood up and reached his hand out to Jesse.

"Let's go Jesse," said Ymo.

Ymo surprised Jesse by his sudden movement. He didn't feel he was ready to get up, nor did he really want to — having not yet assimilated everything that had been discussed. Yet dutifully and with the help of Sunas, he staggered to his feet. "Where? Where are we going?"

Feszj, groaning as he also stood up, said, "We've spent a lot of time explaining to you why competition is so evil. It's now time to show you why cooperation is so good."

* * *

"Perhaps the fundamental flaw of your society is its obsession with individuality."

Feszj continued talking as the quartet weaved its way along a small path through the trees. Jesse peered ahead trying unsuccessfully to spot the open glade between the trunks, though in the quieter moments — when Feszj would pause from his instruction — he could make out faint snippets of laughter. The forest seemed darker as the approaching sunset grew more noticeable. But through it all, Feszj's half-understood patter became a familiar and uniquely calming drone.

"The pursuit of individualism trains people to think primarily of themselves, to think egoistically and egotistically — ideas which are easily reinforced within a society structured on competitive practices. After all, many of your economic theorists agree that the market functions best when everyone pursues his or her own self-interest. To be selfish is to be economically solvent."

"But," questioned Jesse, much more animated and interested now that his life has become much more significant than before he entered Vilmar hours earlier, "if everyone is doing the same thing, if everyone is competing, then no one will be any better off than anyone else. Right?"

"Unfortunately, that is not right, simply because everyone possesses different advantages and disadvantages which are exaggerated by competing. Some are more intelligent than others; some are more handsome; others are stronger. But the vast majority of the population — people like you, your mom and dad — is somewhere in between all the extremes. They have nothing outstanding which might aid their competitive quest, and become the world's administrators, fast-food clerks, garbage collectors, ditch diggers, secretaries, librarians. Unless there are outside preventive influences, the vast majority of wealth and power will be accumulated by only a few. And this is, of course, exactly what has happened in the past and is still happening today.

"Now, granted, recent governments have stepped in to try to curb some of the excesses of capitalism — which tells us quite a lot about the more sinister, yet conveniently overlooked aspects of capitalism and competition — but it was too late. The greater mass of capital had already shifted to one small segment of the population, and there it will stay."

"Feszj," replied Jesse, "there are people who go from rags to riches ..."

"Like in Horatio Alger stories?"

Jesse drew a blank. He had never heard of him. Feszj read his quizzical face.

"Horatio Alger was a writer who penned character-building stories in which its heroes received small rewards, tokens of appreciation, or perhaps even a promotion for being fair and honest, diligent and hard working. The heroes, however, never became rich as is often assumed. The stories emphasized doing good deeds not for remuneration but simply because it was the right thing to do. Expecting rewards sullies the act — being good was reward enough. Over the years, the actual stories have been forgotten, replaced with imagined plot lines better reflecting the acquisitive consumerist mentality. One works diligently and hard because it pays well. Doing the right thing has now become doing what is profitable.

"In any case, for every one person who achieves wealth and success, there are thousands of others who fail. There must be more failures than successes? How else can your society support the wealth of the privileged few? Not surprisingly, the fact that the media highlight individual cases of economic successes demonstrates its rarity. After all, it wouldn't be of any newsworthy interest if rags to riches successes happened all the time. In any case, the more your media props up the scant few successes, the more the rest of you feel like failures. Moreover, as these successes speak on how they made it through dedication, perseverance, and perspiration, you and the rest of the failures feel it is your own fault you aren't successful.

"At least, economically speaking," Feszj added quickly. "Raising a family, sharing income with charity, volunteering time at a soup kitchen, reading to your children, the things that often mean much more to people than the latest software or hippest hi-top, does not make you a success. It may make you a benevolent person, a great parent, and a loyal friend, but never a success. Success, in your world, is clearly a competitive virtue."

"But still, people win lotteries all the time."

"Yes, that is true. But it is a drop in the bucket, compared to those who don't win and will never win. But what is a lottery anyway but a group of poor people tapping into and pooling their scarce resources so one of them may have it all. Worse still, what does someone accustomed to little money know about managing a vast amount of money? Because these transient millionaires originate from the consumer end of the economic spectrum, they quickly squander their wealth on homes, pools, cars, boats, and other luxuries with upkeep expenses impossible to maintain. All they know is how to buy; they have only vague notions of how to manipulate wealth or plan for the future, and invariably they foolishly invest in overly risky ventures proposed by unscrupulous financial advisors.

"But as you have just admitted by bringing up the subject, lotteries are a way of deflecting attention away from the basic foundations of the capitalist market place and into a rags to riches mentality. In the end, the lottery is simply a way to make the common person continually hope of becoming rich rather than face the reality of forever being poor. Revolutions arise when people realize the reality."

"But doesn't some of the money raised go into education?"

"That's the theory. All too often, however, the money remains in the state's general fund, from which it could be used for education, but it could also be used for any number of other expenses. Yet even if all of it went into education, what kind of message does that send? An institution grounded on the idea that hard work and diligence is the road to success funded by people infatuated by a get-rich-quick scheme. The irony is painfully obvious."

Even though most of the preceding discussion dealt with issues at the very fringe of his ability to comprehend, Jesse had to admit that the lottery/education arrangement reeked of illogic.

How does he know so much? Jesse thought. *How* Feszj knew things increasingly became much more troubling to Jesse than what he knew.

"But," continued Feszj, "the recent problems with the economic situation in your country concerning the predatory distribution of wealth is due to the gradual demise of the Soviet Union."

"Hold it." This was too outlandish for Jesse to let slide. "How does getting rid of Communism cause us problems? It should be the reverse."

"Oh, it helped some people, but not everyone. Perhaps you failed to notice that as the Cold War gradually came to a close there was a gradual increase in the gap between rich and poor. Why? Because one of the philosophical checks to overt and unrestrained capitalism — Communism — was no longer a serious threat. It was that very real threat of Communism, in spite of the fact that Soviet Communism was a horrifying parody of Marxist Communism, which spurred social reforms on the early Twentieth century — social security, unemployment insurance, welfare, unionizing, public housing, and a long list of other social benefits. But now, as Soviet Communism had sung its swan song and Chinese Communism weakens itself with capitalist investments and enterprises, unions around the world are under siege, lay-off are increasing, salaries are stagnant even as companies soar to record profits, and jobs are being out-sourced to reduce the cost of employee benefits and depress wages.

"Even welfare, the cornerstone of an enlightened and progressive society, is slowly being dismantled and withheld from the unemployed, forcing people to work in low-paying, low benefit, low satisfaction positions necessary for industrial growth. The similarities between this and eighteenth century England where enclosure laws forced people off their land and into the cities of the future — Coketowns — where ugly coal-driven factories spewed dirt and grime on to squalid tenements below and into the lungs of its wretched occupants. Without the specter of Communism to provide protection, the abuses of market capitalism are coming back to haunt you.

"But this is where your society has driven itself. Guided by the ludicrous notion that if everyone engages in self-interest — if everyone acted selfishly, in other words — a moral society will somehow be the result. Nonsense. In fact there is ample evidence in your world which demonstrates that a pursuit of self-interest destroys community. Here's the scenario."

Feszj stopped walking and briefly scanned the area. He then grabbed Ymo, placing him to one side of Jesse. Next, he placed Sunas to the other side of Jesse. He then stood next to Jesse and started explaining the situation.

"You have two prisoners," Feszj said, pointing to Sunas and Ymo, "both accomplices of a crime. Each prisoner is in separate cells and cannot talk to each other. The prosecutor arrives and gives each prisoner the same deal." Feszj walks over to Sunas. "If neither of you confesses to the crime, I can only prosecute you for a lesser offence and send you to jail for one year." He then walked over to Ymo. "If you defect, however — or you,"

turning and pointing at Sunas, "and provide evidence against your partner, I'll set you free, and give your partner ten years in jail. Yet," said Feszj stepping back to Jesse, "if both of you defect against your partner, that does me no good, and I can only put you both behind bars for five years.

"The question at this point, Jesse, is: what to do? What is the choice? What should the prisoners do? What would you do, Jesse?"

Jesse thought, tossing alternatives back and forth, but getting lost in a quagmire of options, counter-options, losses and benefits. Jesse threw his hands up exasperated.

"I don't know what to do? It's too hard to figure out."

"Yes. It is very difficult. But a decision is required. What will you do?"

"Well," said Jesse, seriously calculating the options, "if I shut up, I'm stuck in Jail for either one year or ten years. But if I rat on my partner, I have a chance of getting out. I'll probably fink."

Feszj nodded in agreement. "Good thinking. Unfortunately, the other person probably will think the same way, condemning you both to prison for five years. On the other hand, if you knew the other person will shut up, what will you do then?"

"Heck, if I knew he would shut up, I'll sing like a bird. A soon-to-be-free bird."

"But wouldn't it be more beneficial to both of you if you both shut up? Then each will only have to spend one year in jail. That's only two years between you, rather than ten. And if you both defect, that's no better because there is still ten years of incarceration between you. It would seem to be mutually advantageous to cooperate and both shut up?"

"Hell, I'm free. That sap's still in prison."

"Of course. But what does that do for your reputation? From then on, your partner will never have trust or faith in you. As other people find out what you did, they too will have no faith in you. You have effectively eliminated any sense of community between the you and anyone whom you might meet who knows what you have done. And what does all this mean in the general scheme of social interactions? Granted, if we limit the interactions between the prisoners to only one occasion, then your self-interested choice works. But in doing so, you have lost the trust of another person. If we are indeed social creatures, that decision destroys our capacity to interact by poisoning our relationships. Multiply these acts of self-interest with hundreds of other personal interactions, and do you see what happens?"

Jesse's eyes furrowed, as he slowly comprehended the inevitable results of individual and consistent self-interested decisions. Feszj went on.

"The interesting notion, therefore, is that while competition is more successful in short-term interactions (at least for the winner), when it comes to social cohesion, cooperation is more successful in long-term continuous interactions. To elaborate, if a competitive society is to continuously function on self-interest, it must admit that continuous trusting relations cannot function and assure that interpersonal and other interactions are reduced to the minimum number of contacts. Personal relationships must cease, and one-night stands become *de rigeur*. Business partnerships slowly end as take-overs and mergers guarantee predictability. Cut-throat competition reigns, until all competition is monopolized. Families collapse, violence increases, third world exploitation runs rampant, civil unrest ... Gee, it sounds like a lot like what's going on now in your world right now.

Jesse sighed — his competitive-based decision shown up for the mistake it is, and his world worse off because of it.

"You know," said Jesse, "I can't understand why, if the evil of self-interest is so obvious, other people don't see it as well. What is keeping people from changing?"

"But other people do see it. They see it all the time. But instead of admitting there is a problem with the system which helped these successes prosper due to self-interest, your leaders tinker with the system after the fact trying to curb its excesses and alleviating its symptoms of abuse. It's like a barn with its door open. All the quick horses escape, but then they kick the door closed behind them to keep the other slower animals 'safe and secure' within. This certainly secures the position of the wealthy, but also placates the masses with a newly instilled sense of defeatist ennui. In the end, nothing changes except the players; the abuses constantly return because the competitive system is built upon the abuse of self-interest.

"The main reason why people overlook this cycle of abuse-correction-more abuse is that the pursuit of Individualism — Remember? That's what we were originally talking about — restricts one's temporal understanding of and relationship to the surrounding world, shrinking it to a mere few decades — one's own immediate past and future. Keeping with our makeshift analogy, the longer the barn door remains closed, fewer and fewer animals will remember it was once open for all to exit. Eventually, the animals will come to believe the door never really opened for them to leave. It was just an illusion. Once admitting it was all an illusion, a nihilistic fatalism pervades throughout the barn and overwhelms its inhabitants.

"Therefore, if one cannot recall something happening or doubts that something ever happened in the past, they will not conceive of it ever happening in the future at all, much

less again. How other people have fared in the past or will fare in the future, then, are of little concern, at least economically speaking."

Feszj emphasized those last two words. He went on, starting to check off each following point on his fingers. "Morally speaking, people always believe — because they cannot envision otherwise — that the future will contain the same moral foundations and moral truths as the present, while absolving themselves of blame for their parent's past moral indiscretions. It wasn't their fault. Once again, individuals only concern themselves with the present.

"Socially speaking, the individual views community with suspicion and as an intrusion interfering with one's private concerns, as one tries to find space in a crowded barn. Furthermore, and a logical result of this separation from community, to protect this space a person sees individual rights as somehow innate or unalienable — abstract concepts — rather than socially determined and sanctioned, which is odd. After all, these ideas didn't exist until a society and age devised a vocabulary with which to express these concepts and write them down. So in spite of the romanticism derived from the supposedly eternal qualities expressed by individuality, everything you are today, and everything you will be in the future, you owe to your community and all its influences. Yet by thinking individualistically, you effectively abdicate any responsibility you may owe in return to the community.

"In the end, and this was the point I started to make, individuality hampers a person's ability to cooperate because cooperation implies that no individual is of superior worth and that everyone is dependent upon someone else for assistance as well as their own essence. That every experience in the past and future affects the present; and that the present community is responsible for the past and future."

"Wait, wait, wait. Back up a minute," said Jesse. "How can future experiences affect me, and how can I be responsible for the past?"

"Good questions," said Sunas, easily overhearing their conversation from behind. Jesse smiled in appreciation at Sunas.

"Yes, they are," said Feszj. "The future affects you every time you make plans. Going on a vacation? You make room reservations, order plane tickets, accumulate spending money, get time off from work, et cetera. This one future event affect many of your present actions."

"Okay, I can see that. But I still don't see how I am responsible for the past."

"This is more difficult to explain, but you can understand if you think carefully." Feszj looked at Jesse who nodded in agreement.

"You own a computer, right?"

"Yes."

"Two years ago when you received it as a birthday gift ..."

How did he know that?? The mystery gnawed at Jesse.

"... it was state of the art technology. It was a wonderful piece of machinery. But today, it is obsolete. In two years of technological changes, your perception of the same object has also changed. The social forces around you have made you change your opinion of your gift."

"I see."

"Or music. If you listen to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the first time, you get a certain feeling about the work. Listen to Stravinsky, or even the Rolling Stones afterwards, and your and everyone else's impression of Beethoven changes. These present social forces have acted upon the perception of the past and irrevocably altered how your community understands its history. And how your community understands its history is responsible for how your community behaves in the present."

"Yes, it makes sense. But how am I responsible for the moral actions of the past?"

"Because those moral actions still influence you today. Your behavior is intimately linked to the moral climate of the past. Every time you meet an African-American, you come face-to-face with arguments for and against your once peculiar institution. You deal unconsciously with your ancestors standing atop the auction block barking to the customers in Charleston, South Carolina concerning your newest shipment of black gold, or your ancestors printing abolitionist newspapers on ink-leaking presses in the back room of a general store in Illinois. Every time a woman goes into the voting booth, you face the suffragettes marching in step down the streets of Philadelphia, and listen to political personalities like Grover Cleveland express the view that sensible and responsible women do not want to vote. Your existence is filled with the cumbersome weight of hundreds of years of history. You are responsible to the past, therefore, for continuing, developing, or ignoring the moral arguments that have been passed on to you."

"You must realize, Jesse, that individualists, even if they must acknowledge their debt to community for their social upbringing, work hard to maintain merely a superficial connection with community. Individualist, then, could hardly function in such an atmosphere as ours. To many in your culture, relinquishing individuality to community is an offensive and humiliating prospect. To us, on the other hand, it is the only humane and respectful way of treating fellow community members and fellow human beings. In our society, consequently, there are no scapegoats. No individual is blamed for a problem that

may occur. Everyone takes responsibility for the problem. In turn, everyone also becomes part of the solution.

"Just like our animals, your society has given up in creating a future worth looking forward to. The past of the animals is all fantasy; the great barn door opening is just a myth — a fanciful golden age for animals when the door did not exist, and they could come into the barn for shelter whenever needed and leave for food and exercise whenever desired. This mythical past offered no future.

"'But we have seen the outside,' said the cockroach." Sunas's voice taking up the fable surprised Jesse. He turned and smiled to see Sunas and Ymo falling into their roles and preparing to act out the tale.

"What are they doing?" Jesse whispered the question to Feszj.

"The story of the barn is an old tale which practically all of our children learn at one time or another." Feszj brought a finger to his lips. "Listen."

Ymo replied to Sunas. "'You have seen the outside? Ha! So you say,' said the cow. 'The outside does not exist,' said the goat." Ymo's voice changing for each character. A low grumble for the cow. A cantankerous rasp for the goat.

"But still, the tiny cockroach continued, undaunted by the size of her detractors," said Sunas. "'But I have seen the outside. I, and my friends the ant and the centipede, have crawled through the walls, squeezed through its holes, and emerged into the forgotten land of our ancestors's dreams.'"

"The cow blew his nose at the cockroach, sending her flying across the ground," said Ymo, feigning a sneeze at Sunas, who fell to the ground and rolled over, covering herself in crunching leaves. "The goat stomped his feet on the cockroach, trying to grind her into the dirt." Ymo walked over to Sunas lying on the ground, then raised and held an imaginary hoof over her.

"But the roach raced across the ground and escaped the deadly hoof," replied Sunas, scooting out from under Ymo's foot. "The cockroach crawled up a beam and continued to speak to the group from its high safety. 'The stories are true, I say. We have feasted on the endless bounty of green grass beyond, basked in the warm sun, and found no wall to impede our progress. And all above us was a ceiling awash with a blue that went on forever.' But her story would end there."

"Swooping down from the rafters," continued Ymo, his arms outstretched and circling Sunas, "came the owl who pecked the cockroach off the beam, crushed the cockroach's body with her beak, and swallowed." Ymo, with exaggerated pantomime, grabbed Sunas and forced her into a ball on the ground. "'Poppycock,' said the owl, flapping up to her

resting place in the rafters. 'Tis unsavory to fill our children's heads with such wistful and wishful nonsense.'"

"But one after another," said Sunas, emerging from her ball, "all the insects, the littlest creatures of the barn, came forward and repeated describing the glorious world beyond the wall."

"And one after another," said Ymo, "instead of being heard, they were crushed under hoof or eaten. The larger animals would not listen. And they told the other smaller animals — the mice and the rats, the squirrels and the rabbits — not to listen as well. 'We will have no more of these fanciful fictions,' said the owl. 'We have all that we need here,' said the goat. 'It would do you all well to ignore these lies and return to your business,' said the cow with a menacing snarl."

"But it was hard to ignore so many stories from so many different creatures," said Sunas. "Many animals sat and silently dreamed about the miraculous place and wondered if it might, even a tiny bit, be true. The smallest mouse tried to dig under the walls secretly, not to invoke the wrath of the mighty cow, but the ground was too hard, having been compressed by the weight of all the animals."

"The larger creatures," said Sunas, "like the sheep, tried to push down the walls silently so as not to arouse the suspicions of the owl above, but the wood was too strong. These failures discouraged other animals from trying. Soon, all their heads drooped forward to the filthy dirt floor and forgot about the outside."

Feszj stepped into the impromptu play. "At this point, Jesse, a person like myself, would enter the scene and ask the audience, usually children, how they would finish the fable. How would you finish the fable?"

Jesse considered what Ymo and Sunas acted out for him. "Well, if all the animals worked together, then they might get out."

"Exactly," said Feszj. "The children come to understand that, individually, all the animals's efforts come to naught. Yet if they all work together, combining their unique abilities, there is a possibility. The smallest animals could dig at the foundations; the termites could weaken the wood beam by devouring its interior. The larger animals could then combine their weight and strength to topple the walls. The question is whether these animals have the ability to convince themselves and can convince the nay-sayers living among them that by working together, all walls which were built can be unbuilt."

Cackling laughter and loud cheery voices from beyond the trees interrupted Jesse's thoughts. Sunas and Ymo grabbed Jesse by the arms, frightening him in the process, and

started pulling him along to the field. Jesse hesitated, though, looking towards Feszj. Was there something more Feszj needed to explain?

"Go ahead," said Feszj, shooing the three off with a shake of his head and a wave of his hands, "I'll catch up."

Having Feszj's blessing, Jesse grinned, glanced playfully at Sunas and Ymo, and bolted out in front, dashing ahead of the other two along the narrow path. Suddenly, Jesse had a startling thought. He stopped dead in his tracks. Sunas and Ymo, trying to catch up, rammed into him from behind, sending all three flying to the ground. Feszj hustled up to find out what happened.

"What's the matter, Jesse?"

Jesse, sitting still on the ground, looked up at Feszj. Sunas and Ymo sat motionless as well, worried.

"It's all true, isn't it? I can't believe it. I'm actually on some other planet. My God. I'm actually talking to an alien."

"Aliens," corrected Ymo, bursting out in laughter. Jesse saw the humor in the term's inappropriateness and started laughing as well. Ymo and Sunas sprung to their feet, heaved Jesse up by the arm pits, and all three dashed off to the field. Feszj, trotting slowly, followed behind.

* * *

Emerging from the tree line into the open field, Jesse saw on the hill the remaining three teenagers from the group he had first met many weeks ago. He stopped at the field's edge where the grass — once lush and green, but now yellowing in preparation for the approaching winter — began. Ymo and Sunas tugged at Jesse but gave up when they realized he was not going to move. They watched him as he inhaled deeply of the cool Autumn air. Jesse slowly followed the line of trees around the field with his eyes, re-tracing every pine tree, every maple and evergreen with his memory. He wanted to look around; he wanted to remember. He wanted to embrace again the relaxation he felt laying on the soft ground bedded with pine needles and loam.

He looked up the hill to the far edge of the glade. There, slightly hidden in the shadows was the place where he first awoke. He raised his arm and pointed to the spot. "That's where it all began," he said to no one in particular. Yet Sunas understood, and wrapped her arm around Jesse's waist. He now had a history in this new world, and he absorbed himself in his own brief past, and recalled the first words he heard.

"Hello, Jesse."

Ah, yes. The sweet perky nightingale voice that floated in the air.

"Hello? Jesse?"

It was that same voice, along with a delicate tap on the shoulder, which now interrupted his thoughts.

Oh no. Catiana.

"Hello, Catiana." Jesse heard Feszj speaking behind him. Jesse looked back to see Feszj greeting with a hug the young woman with brown tanned skin and black hair. Over Feszj's shoulder, Catiana saw Jesse watching them. She released Feszj, turned to Jesse, and held out her hand.

"Hello, Jesse," she said, smiling. Jesse paused.

What do I do? She's acting as if nothing ever happened.

Jesse examined Catiana's smile — that disarming all-enveloping smile, framed by two flushed cheeks and round mauve lips.

Snap out of it, Jesse. She can't possibly have any interest in you anymore. Hmm. I could've sworn I knocked out one of her teeth. Jesse continued to scrutinize. No bruising, nothing misshapen. She still looked perfect. God, how long ago was that punch?

He stood wary, paralyzed by indecision. *No one who's been punched can be trusted. She'll act like everything is okay; then, when I approach, knee me in the balls. I guess I deserve it.*

Feszj and Catiana waited patiently for Jesse to shake hands, which never happened. Slowly, Catiana put her hand down, the smile replaced by a worried frown.

"Is there anything wrong, Jesse?" asked Feszj.

Jesse spoke slowly, hesitatingly. "We've met before."

"So?"

"Well ... " Jesse searched for the right word. "We had ... an altercation."

"An altercation?" Feszj eyed Jesse curiously.

"Actually, Feszj," spoke up Catiana, "it was all my fault. There was a misunderstanding, and I lost my temper." She looked at Jesse. "I'm sorry, Jesse." Then back at Feszj. "I'm sorry."

Catiana dropped her head to Feszj, who reached out and pulled her into a comforting embrace.

Dumbfounded by the scene, Jesse suddenly blurted out, "No, no. It wasn't her fault. It was my fault. I'm the one that hit her." The two released each other and looked over at

Jesse. His breathing slowed. His voice wavered. "I made her lose control. I made her mad on purpose."

"Why did you do that, Jesse?" asked Feszj.

"I don't know."

"No," said Feszj, "there is a reason why. Don't be afraid to tell us what it is. You are afraid, aren't you?" Feszj nodded, and Jesse mimicked. "You're afraid of being punished. But no one here will punish you or harm you. You're safe to explain anything without ridicule or retribution. The last thing we want to do is frighten people into silence. We can't change anything unless people tell us why."

"You don't punish anyone here? Even if someone ... hurts someone else?"

"No. Punishment solves nothing. In fact, punishment is cruel, and primarily an act of revenge in one form or another."

"How so?"

"Remember what I have told you over the past hours. That everything we are we owe to our influences, our environment. Everything we do is a natural outgrowth of those influences. Essentially, our present behavior has been determined by our past environments. Punishment ignores the fact that our actions were years in the making. Punishing us for what one must do is wrong. It is simply an act to satisfy one's abhorrent desire to inflict pain and suffering on a fellow human being in return for one's own pain and suffering. But two wrongs don't make a right."

"But a person could have chosen not to commit a crime."

"Ah, but the question is not whether you *could* have chosen otherwise. Given the exact same conditions and exact same influences, the question is whether you *would* have chosen otherwise. And since you didn't choose otherwise, you would not and could not have chosen differently."

Jesse bobbed his head back and forth. Feszj picked up on the message.

"Now I know that sounds confusing," continued Feszj, "but remember. Because of all the influences you have lived through, heard, felt, experienced, et cetera, you are destined to act only in a certain way at a certain time. No one has free will; that's a myth. You only think you do because you, and everyone else are unable to predict how all these various influences will guide your actions. So every decision seems unique to you, yet it was predetermined nonetheless."

"How do you predict behavior then?"

"We can't. The best we can do is provide the proper environments and influences so a person will be inclined to act appropriately in the future."

"Well, how do you get people not to do certain things?"

"It's not hard. We explain to the individual what the appropriate behavior is. For example, children are very malleable, and they desperately wish to please because they need to learn what is involved in surviving as a social creature. Consequently, you don't punish a child by taking them out of the situation. You explain the right way to behave, and then put them right back in to see if they have assimilated the lesson. The onus of punishment only teaches children, and adults, to avoid punishment. Whether that means behaving properly or behaving secretly, it always means behaving to avoid punishment, not because behaving a certain way is the right thing to do.

"That doesn't work. Look at my world." Jesse caught himself saying 'my world.' It sounded strange yet powerful, but he had no time to consider its significance. "You have to punish the criminals, otherwise they keep committing crimes. I mean, what about murderers? What if someone killed Ymo or Sunas? Are you just going to stand there and let it happen?"

"Your world is not our world," said Feszj. "We do not have murders, or rapes, or any other violent crimes, because of the environment we have painstakingly constructed. We have worked very hard to prevent people from having even the urge to commit crimes. Your world has yet to understand this, made evident by its continued archaic use of punishments. Punishment may alter behavior, but not for the right reasons. An act of revenge can never be a right reason."

"I give up," said Jesse. "I can't win."

"Who's competing? Are you trying to win an argument? For what reason? I would like to think I am only presenting our point of view. It is up to you to accept it or not. But we force nothing upon you. The worst thing we have done is to open up your mind to so many alternatives that your old worldview's explanations are no longer suitable."

"I guess," said Jesse, tired and exasperated.

"However, for your benefit," said Feszj, trying to bring Jesse out of his despondency, "I will accept your premise." Jesse's face perked up. "If someone killed anyone in this world, I would probably want to strangle that person personally."

"Well, there you go. You want revenge."

"But Jesse, what I want, and what is the right thing to do are sometimes two different things. And what this society continually works very hard at doing is crafting our experiences and environments so that what I want to do is also the right thing to do. Unfortunately, your society constantly cripples itself at every turn. As we have learned, competition is not the right thing to do because of the psychological pain it the losers. Yet

many, if not all, of your social institutions, like sports, economics, and politics, promote competition. Many of your influences and environments, therefore, actually encourage you not to do the right thing."

"I'm sorry. I just don't see it." Jesse shook his head. "If you can't punish criminals, like murders, society is sunk. There's nothing left to do. It's all over. Everything falls apart."

Feszj nodded in understanding. "But this is where your society wants you to end." Then Feszj seemingly changed the subject. "Would you blame the victims of murder for getting themselves killed?"

"No, that's stupid. You don't blame the victim."

"Right. But this is what your society does every instant and has trained you to do the same."

"What do you mean?"

"We are all victims — of our environment and our accumulated influences. Your society wishes you forgot that inconvenience. Everyone has free will, it says; consequently, the criminals themselves are to blame for their violence. But more importantly, the successes of your society, the millionaires and politicians, are now permitted to say it was hard work and dedication which made them who they are. Thus, they can justify their superior social positions based on their character rather than having the necessary influences and environment — rather than the luck of being in the right place at the right time. The fortuitous nature of existence and the luck of circumstance have been removed from the social vocabulary to permit personal domination.

"But once you realize that everyone does what they are taught to do, even kill, that is when a society begins to prosper. This is where we begin. Only then will there be a societal inclination to assure that every person is taught properly, that everyone's environment is appropriate, that no one deserves more or less simply because of one's luck or unluck. It requires a tremendous amount of effort and resources, something your society may be reluctant to expend, but it is the right thing to do."

And Jesse stood there, transfixed, unbelieving. Everything he knew about his world was being turned on its head in front of him, and there was nothing Jesse could do about it.

Around him, Sunas, Ymo and Catiana listened to Feszj's every word, and followed his every gesture. The three other members of the helpcrew had by this time walked down from the middle of the field, circled Feszj, and perched themselves on his every inflection. Jesse, just standing there, looked around to see these teenagers completely enamored with Feszj. And perhaps for the first time, Jesse understood why.

There was a long pause after Feszj stopped speaking, as if everyone wanted to bask in the light and warm their souls with the wisdom Feszj emanated.

Finally, Feszj spoke. "So, Jesse. Why did you hit Catiana? We all need to know."

Jesse hesitated. He himself wasn't quite sure why. Perhaps it was publicly confessing in the center of the group which deterred him. Catiana stepped up next to Jesse, lifted his hand, and gently wrapped her fingers around it. He instantly felt that feeling again, that tranquil yet anxious sensation in his gut he had when he first met her.

"It's okay, Jesse," she said, "I'll stay with you."

Jesse let out a big sigh, and began explaining himself as best he knew how. "I don't know. It's hard to explain. It's as if I wanted to get the edge. You know, be in charge. I mean, I was the center of attention and all, but I wasn't really in charge. Things were happening to me, and I felt I was losing control. So, I guess I got stubborn and forced everyone to pay attention to me."

"And being in control is important to you?" asked Feszj.

"Well, I just want to know what's happening. I like to know what's going on."

Feszj nodded. "And why did you hit her?" prompted Feszj.

"I didn't really want to hit her. I ... " Jesse thought that sounded stupid as soon as he said it. But could he really tell them he was jealous. That she wasn't spending enough time with him. That he wanted to be alone with her instead of with a group. His fist was his way of saying 'Pay attention to me.' He hit her because he loved her. Did that make any sense?

No, it didn't. Jesse suppressed this possible reason. Perhaps it wasn't that at all, he pondered. *I was the center of attention, but they were guiding me around. The very same effect as a baby in a carriage.*

"I didn't like being treated as a baby," he asserted, bursting forth from his thoughts. "They weren't treating me with respect. They made fun of my handshake; they screwed up the stretching. I couldn't take it anymore. Besides, she hit me first."

"I see," said Feszj. "You were probably asked to do too much, too soon, without adequate explanation. We're sorry."

"No," said Jesse, talking to the ground, "it was my fault. I was just being dumb and stubborn."

"Paranoid?" asked Catiana of Feszj.

"Perhaps. It's built into his environment. He comes from a paranoid society."

Jesse, still looking down, heard Catiana's comment and silently agreed. *Yeah, that's probably right, too.*

"But Jesse," continued Feszj, "has learned quite a lot in his first lengthy visit with us. I think it would be best to start over. Catiana?"

Catiana released Jesse's hand and turned to face him. She once again raised her right hand to be shaken. Normally he would have shaken hands, but Catiana felt so good to hug. He really needed a hug. Would he be deemed a hypocrite if he willingly hugged only her?

"When in Rome, Jesse," said Feszj, again as if he read his mind.

Jesse smiled. He grabbed Catiana's hand, pulled her towards him, and gave her a strong squeeze. Catiana squealed in surprise and delight.

"I see you've overcome your aversion to hugging," said Catiana as she giggled.

"I've never had an aversion to hugging you," he reply, whispering in her ear so only she could hear.

In moments, the group cheered and enveloped the two with a group hug of their own. Soon, Jesse was being hugged by one person after another as Catiana re-introduced them. Again, the introductions were rapid, but he tried harder this time to remember the names: Amora — a thin, almost bony, and shy Black young woman; Taleg, an Asian-looking young man slightly shorter and slightly stockier than Ymo; and Lasho, a muscular, olive-skinned man (*Middle Eastern?*), taller than Jesse, with a solid square face, and unusually taciturn for this group, which made Jesse nervous. All of them had well-formed cheeks, probably from smiling all the time. He also realized that each person was of a different age. Catiana was the oldest at eighteen. Next came Lasho at seventeen, then Ymo — sixteen, Sunas — fifteen, Taleg — fourteen, and finally Amora, the youngest, at thirteen. An odd little coincidence.

"Not really," said Feszj. "Each helpcrew is designed to have a variety of ages, so the older students will learn how to lead, and the younger ones will learn how to follow."

"But back at that ball game, weren't there child leaders there as well? You're having students lead, then follow, and then lead again?"

"Children learn to lead the gamecrews first. But help crews are different. They don't play games, except in warm-ups. They have responsibilities around the community. One day they could be clearing the road of debris from a recent storm, the next day they could be cleaning the dome's solar cells, the next doing things in the produce storage building. They spend several hours a day performing these community enhancement projects, usually in the afternoon. In the morning, they are at their studies."

"Don't you have problems with kids who want to play all the time?"

"Why? Wouldn't you want to play all the time?"

"Well, sure. But you can't play all the time." Then Jesse thought about what he had said. "Can you?"

"You have been raised in a world which likes to compartmentalize everything. Take exercise, for example. Our culture links exercise with our lifestyle. We walk or run everywhere in the vicinity. We bike to and from neighboring towns. We engage in exercise whenever we do farm or construction projects, cleaning and repair, or any of a variety of other manual jobs. Exercise is automatically part of our lives. We don't earmark a special time for exercise. Unlike your society.

"There, exercise is seen as a distinct component added to your daily existence, like work. Even your school physical education programs stress the addition of exercise to everyday life. By placing exercise in that light, it appears as something that could be considered extraneous. It might be nice to exercise, but it is not necessary.

"Exercise at this time, go to school at this time, go to your job at another time, play at a fourth time. A time for that favorite show on television, or piano lessons, and thousands of other things that create a patchwork of compartments in your lives — a very inefficient use of your time. Economically speaking, however, by compartmentalizing different parts of life — exercise, education, entertainment, art, music, et cetera — your society's demands fuels the market. This intense subdividing of wants makes it necessary to buy more services and things to accommodate all these multiplying and conflicting aspects of your desires pursuing their own course and justification for existence. Your free market capitalist structure does everything to prevent one from becoming whole."

"I don't get it"

"Your world has yet to learn how to incorporate all these things into one unending life-long activity — where there is no distinction between play and exercise, school and job. It all flows together. We all continuously engage in creating the art of living."

"How is that possible? There must be some jobs that people don't want to do."

"True, that was the case. But now, many odious jobs have been taken over by machines or, if that were impractical, eliminated. It is inhuman to force a person to perform an onerous task simply to satisfy the greed and desires of another human. Today, there are no tasks that people do not want to do. In a cooperative society, everyone wishes to enhance the life of the community and everyone in it. Everything that one does, therefore, benefits both the individual and the community as a whole, and everyone wants to do that. In exchange for this commitment to the community, the individual requires more than just play. Everything that one does must be emotionally fulfilling, intellectually challenging, physically demanding, which, put together, leads to a spiritually rewarding

existence. It is society's responsibility — everyone's responsibility, essentially — to provide its members the environment and the means to accomplish this basic task of life. We have created a synergistic relationship between the community and the people within. We have created an ideal community by providing everyone within meaningful things to do. It is a task at which your world fails every single moment."

Jesse nodded in resigned agreement.

"Catiana," said Feszj, changing the subject and his tone of voice, "why don't you take the group out for some warm-ups?"

"Great!" She motioned the helpcrew towards the middle of the glade and they started jogging away. Jesse was about to join them when Catiana caught his arm.

"Jesse," she said, "would you like ...?"

"No, no, no. Not this time. I'll just follow everybody else."

"Okay." She then stroked his face with her hand and said quietly, "I'm sorry, Jesse. I should have been more patient."

"I'm sorry, too," he replied.

They jogged, hand in hand, to the middle of the field and quickly joined the others. Once in the center of the field, Catiana instructed the group to make a circle (which was already in the process of being formed), close their eyes, stretch their arms out to the side so each person can touch the finger tips of the person next to them, and to breathe deeply. Jesse caught on right away.

"Breathe deeply," said Catiana. Jesse felt her fingertips to his right, while Sunas was to his left. "Listen to the wind singing," continued Catiana. Jesse was confused. There was no breeze, now that it was almost evening. "Listen to the sun singing. Listen to the trees singing."

Jesse tried, but couldn't really hear anything.

"With music filling your mind, begin to feel the warmth coming from your partners fingertips. Feel the group's warmth filling your fingers. Now your hand. Feel your hands become weightless as its warmth carries it for you."

Jesse, for a moment, got scared. He really could feel the warmth Catiana was talking about. But it was a pleasant, relaxing sensation which did make his hands, and soon his arms, lighter. Then, he heard the singing. His head filled with a sonorous chorus of humming, and it seemed to massage his mind. It was odd, and frightening, but also calming and invigorating. He gave into the feelings and sensations, and soon he was inundated with the vibrations of the sun, the trees, and the wind's singing.

"Feel your body absorb the warmth up through the arms, making them also lighter. Feel the warmth approach your heart from both arms."

Jesse did.

"Feel the warmth reach your heart together."

At that moment, when the warmth converged inside his chest simultaneously, his heart exploded with heat, flooding his whole body with lightness.

"Feel your body float above the ground. Feel the song of the wind lift you up into its rapture."

He no longer felt the ground beneath him. He wanted to open his eyes to see if he were really flying, but it would ruin his ecstasy. In the end, believing he was flying, he felt, was no different than actually flying.

Catiana remained quiet for what seemed like a long time. She then said, "Now, come down to the ground and absorb the power of the group within you. The power that was passed along to you by your neighbor. It is now part of you."

Jesse could slowly feel the ground again. He felt stronger, and more at ease. The warmth from his hands receded up his arms and into his heart. But though his hands chilled again in the evening air, his heart remained hot. He opened his eyes, looked around, and saw the other serene faces around him. In a candid moment of self-reflection, he admitted that this was where he belonged; because as they floated above the field and time stopped, they were one.

Once everyone had rested and recovered from their meditations, Catiana called the group into a small tight circle with her in the middle. Jesse remembered that this was how it started with him. However, this time Jesse quietly took his place in the circle and remained patient until he learned what he was to do.

Without saying a word, Catiana closed her eyes and stiffened her body, hands at her sides and feet together. Jesse whispered to Sunas, on his left.

"Is she in a trance?"

"No. She is just pretending. However, her falling is not. It is up to us to make sure she doesn't fall to the ground and get hurt. Her eyes are closed, so she places her safety entirely in our hands — literally."

Catiana began swaying and tipped over. Ymo caught her and pushed her over to Sunas, who pushed her back to Taleg. And on it went, from one person to the next. Lasho even let Catiana fall to within a couple feet of the ground before he caught her. Yet she maintained her rigid form, never worried that someone would not be there to protect her.

After a few minutes, Catiana opened her eyes, stood up in the middle and asked who would like to be next. Everyone turned to Jesse. Jesse saw six pairs of eyes anxiously waiting for a response. He got the hint.

"I'll go next."

Catiana replaced him in the circle ring as he replaced her in the middle. He closed his eyes, stiffened his body, swayed, and then toppled over on to Taleg. Soon, he was being passed from one person to the next, gently and securely. He imagined that the constant touching would have made him uncomfortable, but the opposite was true. He felt safer and more protected while in everyone's grasp. Tension left his body despite his rigid form, and he relaxed with the rhythmic, almost hypnotic, swaying.

This went on for almost a minute when all of a sudden as he tipped over, no one was there to catch him. He kept falling. He quickly opened his eyes, his body stiffened with fear, as he shuffled his feet underneath in a futile attempt to catch himself as his arms braced for the ground. He bowled into Amora, his shoulder in her belly, and sent her flying as he went sprawling to the ground. Unhurt, Amora started giggling uncontrollably. Jesse looked back at the circle and saw everyone smiling, except for Lasho. He was on one knee, arms extended poised to catch something, his face emotionless.

"I was there for you, Jesse," said Lasho, tersely. "We'll always be there for you."

Jesse smiled. He still wasn't sure about him, but for some reason he felt he could trust him more than anyone. Lasho held out his thick hand and helped Jesse up. Taleg retrieved Amora, the circle reformed, and the game continued until everyone had been in the center.

Catiana, moving more rapidly as the sun sank behind the trees, went on to another game. Everyone again formed a circle, but this time Catiana joined the circle, standing on Jesse's right. Everyone in the circle was also farther apart. Everyone then extended their arms to the person on each side and grabbed each other's wrist. They stepped back until the arms were stretched tight. At that point, Catiana said, "Step." At that point, everyone took a small step towards the middle. Jesse did as well, but the group nearly fell down pulling Jesse off balance.

Catiana spoke to Jesse as the circle re-formed. "The trick is to keep the arms stretched tight as you feet step further and further into the center. The key is to lean back. The locking arms will keep you from falling down."

Jesse didn't quite understand what would happen, but he hoped it would become obvious as he went through with it. Again, the arms were stretched tight and Catiana said, "Step."

This time, as Jesse stepped forward, he had to lean back slightly to keep his arms stretched. Immediately, he knew what was going to happen. Every time Catiana said step, his feet would continue to come out from under him and he would have to rely on the balance of the group to keep him from falling. *Fascinating*, he thought.

Again, Catiana said, "Step," and everyone's feet slowly and carefully inched forward as their bodies leaned back a little bit more. Each step length adjusted to the amount of give and take in the arms. Each step constantly correcting the circle's increasing imbalance. Each step a delicate dance between too much and too little. And everyone altering the formula in their own unique way to maintain the balance, to maintain the integrity of the unit. One or two false step could be compensated for by the group. Too many, however, and the group falls.

After a dozen steps, Jesse's feet had moved only about a foot inward towards the center. But even now, his shoulders and forearms were getting tired. It was a slow and arduous process, a process requiring constant assessment and vigilance. One had to gain insight into the intentions of the others in the group. One had to be conscious of others adjustments, and self-conscious of one's own and how they all work together. A person had to anticipate future moves by the partners; and based on their steps, one gains certitude or trepidation about their own steps. Every step was a silently determined consensus decision.

Catiana spoke unexpectedly. "Okay, what do you say we stop here?"

Most of the group nodded in approval, but Jesse was shocked and put off. He had hardly broken a sweat, and the challenge was still increasing. "Why? I'm just getting the hang of this."

Ten minutes later, the group had crept forward only another foot. But now, as the circle was on the verge of collapse and their arms started to ache and their calves began to cramp. Again Catiana spoke.

"I really think this would be a good time to bring the game to a close."

This time the group was much more vehement in ending the game, which frustrated Jesse even more. Jesse couldn't understand why they don't just continue until they fall down. Why shouldn't they work to their maximum potential? Why aren't they pushing themselves to their limits? Again he rejected the suggestion and refused to end the circle, if only to prove his point.

Members of the group began talking frantically now, offering advice and encouragement to each other.

"We need to throw more weight towards Amora."

"It hurts so much!"

"I'm losing balance over here!"

"Keep moving the muscles."

"Bend your knees!"

"Try pulling some more."

"That's it!"

"Relax and contract."

Shortly, the comments blended with groans. Jesse, feeling strong, craned his stiffening neck and briefly scanned the grimacing faces of the group and smiled. *This is what games are all about. A personal test.* Jesse returned his head to its neutral position and closed his self-satisfied eyes to concentrate on the balancing and to control the soreness creeping up his forearms into his shoulders.

All of a sudden, Jesse heard Amora scream and found himself instantly falling backwards and landing flat on his back. The circle collapsed as Amora released her grip and fell to the ground, clutching her arms and vigorously massaged them. Gasping for air, she both cried and apologized.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I couldn't hold on," Amora whimpered.

Lasho and Catiana jumped up from the ground and ran over to her and began massaging her legs and back. Ymo and Taleg rested on their backs, chests heaving. Sunas crawled up next to Jesse, and plopped her head on his shoulder. Feszj strode over from the edge of the field where he watched the games and stood over Jesse. But before he could say anything, Jesse spoke first.

"Boy, that was fun."

"Was it Jesse?" replied Feszj.

"Oh yes. It was invigorating. What a challenge."

"Yes, it is a challenging activity. But didn't you see Amora?"

"No."

"So you failed to see Amora biting her lips? You didn't notice her face watered with tears, or her body writhing in hopes of providing relief to her burning muscles, as she valiantly hung on to keep the circle standing?"

"She was in real pain," said Sunas, as she lie on the ground, rubbing her forearms. "We were all in pain."

"What's wrong with a little pain," said a defiant Jesse. "Haven't you ever heard the expression, 'Into each life a little rain must fall'?"

"But Jesse," said Sunas, "pain is something to be avoided."

"You can't avoid pain," was Jesse's curt reply. "It's part of life."

"Quite true, Jesse," said Feszj. "However, in your idea of the game the participants willingly seek and endure the pain. Though it may be a part of our lives, it is unnecessary, even irrational, for us to go actively seeking pain. We already know what pain is. One doesn't need to stick a hand in a flame to understand that fire burns; or jump off a tree to know hitting the ground hurts. Pain is not something we have to continuously re-live or re-experience to know it should be avoided. So, more to the point Jesse, what logic is there in this constant search and infliction of pain upon ourselves and others?"

"Well," said Jesse, thinking, "you have to be able to deal with pain when it arrives. You have to be able to tolerate it."

"No," said Feszj so abruptly that it startled both Jesse and Sunas. "That philosophy just makes pain and suffering acceptable, and defers any responsibility one may have to alleviate the misery of fellow sufferers. Tolerating pain makes it easier for your society to sleep at night."

Feszj took a deep breath to calm himself and continued. "Now granted, keeping a community strong is not always a painless process. We try to avoid pain, we try to work around it, but in the end, it must be dealt with sometimes. But this doesn't mean we build a tolerance to pain and suffering. It means exactly the opposite. One must become so averse to pain that when it does arise, our community instantly comes together to eliminate it."

"But," said Jesse, wracking his brains for some justification for his increasingly obvious indiscretion — anything to save face, "doesn't pain make the lack of pain more cherished, and life more enjoyable?"

"Yes, we all cherish a life without pain. Our community has struggled hard over the centuries to achieve that eventuality. After all, these are our institutions; and we, therefore, determine how much pain and suffering they produce. But tell me how does making people suffer make them enjoy life more?" Jesse remained mute. "One learns to despise a life filled with orchestrated experiences of pain, just as much as one learns to abhor cooking if they slice and burn their fingers every time one prepares a meal. Life is made enjoyable by the accumulation of enjoyable experiences."

"Your philosophers worry that a world of complete pleasure will be boring. But they fail to realize that one of the goals of a vibrant community is to provide ample variety of experiences to enhance the interactive lives of its members. And in the event that a member of a community suffers from boredom, there are many other communities available to join, and many other experiences to absorb."

Finding that defence of his actions hopeless, Jesse attempted a different tact.

"Why didn't she just quit? Supposedly anyone can stop at anytime in this world."

However, as soon as Jesse got out the words, he immediately realized that the question begged a reply which Feszj was trying to make all along. Jesse knew he was sunk, so he shut up, laid his head back down on the grass, closed his eyes, and listened to the expected answer.

"To Amora, the rest of us, and now you," responded Feszj, "the cohesion of the community is more important than personal suffering. She was not going to stop until the community as a whole reached consensus — until everyone agreed to stop."

"Why is consensus so important?" said Jesse, not moving his head from the ground. "What's wrong with just a majority"

"Majority rule means minority ruled. It is the easiest and the most primitive level of the democratic decision-making process. It is also the least democratic, for upwards of up to one-half of the voting population will be forced to obey laws and government mandates it had no wish to obey. Such coercion makes no sense in an enlightened society. Only when everyone agrees to a law is there a truly free society."

"But our country it too big. We can't possibly get three hundred million people agreeing on anything."

"That may be true, but surely smaller groups can reach consensus — and that's how one starts. But even then, your society fails to act on this potential. For example, in your classrooms, wouldn't children be more apt to obey rules of behavior that they all agreed upon, rather than rules imposed upon them autocratically from above? If your society wishes to inspire your youth with the democratic ideal, traditional educational methodology is the absolutely wrong way of going about it."

"It's too hard. I mean, it's hard enough trying to get two people to agree on anything. Have you ever ordered pizza?"

"Jesse, I'm surprised at you. What happened to this passion for challenges?" Jesse shrugged his shoulders, embarrassed. "It only seems impossible, Jesse, because you haven't been taught how to reach consensus and haven't spent much time practicing the procedures. But there are communities in your world with almost one hundred members who vote only through consensus, and they seem to be surviving quite well. It is all a matter of learning how to negotiate, how to present thoughts and ideas, learning how to give and take. Understanding that nothing will ever be accomplished unless a consensus is reached; and that everyone makes a community — and that one person can break it. Thus,

the lesson of the circle game. One person rejects community, and the ring breaks and the members fall."

"But I didn't break the circle."

"Are you sure? Physically, you were still holding on. But you were holding on for personal reasons, weren't you? For personal achievement. For individual fame and aggrandizement. But achievement at the expense of another, or the group, is worthless. Achievement without community is meaningless. There will be no one around with which to share your accomplishment — only to glorify it."

"Is that so bad?" asked Jesse.

"It is, if you remember that the group whom you want to glorify you consists of all the failures. Have you forgotten that your success is dependent upon the failures of others; and, thus, your glory is dependent upon the others accepting their role in life as failures. After all, you'll find no quarter with those who do not see themselves as failures to your successes.

"Finally, you must understand that the community is not supposed to be the pedestal from which you tout your victories. The community exists to protect its members — to shield them from pain, suffering, and humiliation. The community, therefore, ought to have nothing whatsoever to do with competition."

Feszj holds out his hand to Jesse and Sunas and helps them both up. Feszj then directs Jesse's attention to Amora, now surrounded by Ymo and Taleg — who already helped each other off the ground and went over to Amora — as well as Catiana and Lasho.

"If no one comes to the aid of another," said Feszj while Jesse looked at the group attending to Amora, "then people lose faith in the community's ability to recognize the needs of its members. At that point, the community dies. In the end, it is a fine and delicate balancing act knowing how much a person can give and take."

And then, Feszj remained quiet as Jesse watched as Catiana massaged one of Amora's arms, as Taleg massaged the other, and as Lasho continues to massage her back, each one trying to alleviate the muscle cramps. Jesse stood there watching Ymo straddling one of Amora's legs vigorously kneading her legs upward towards her heart.

Jesse stood there in the cool lonely shadows which rapidly crept over him. The sun descended behind the trees and a moonless sky enveloped the glen. The stars popped into view above, and the wind died down allowing his foggy breath to hang in the air and circle his head.

"I'm sorry, Feszj."

"I know."

Jesse heard wafting over the field the sound of music and revelry. It drew his attention back towards the dome.

"In any case, Jesse," said Feszj, noticing Jesse's distraction, "our time is running out. Soon you will be waking up at home and will need to vacate this body once again. We need to go back to the dome. Sunas?"

"Yes, Feszj?"

"Why don't you stay here and help out Amora." Sunas said nothing, reluctant to agree. Feszj went on. "Jesse and I will be fine. Amora needs you more than we."

"Okay," said Sunas, still uncertain, but accepting Feszj's reassurance.

Feszj, Sunas, and Jesse walked over to Catiana, who was still attending to Amora, "Catiana, we are heading back to Vilmar," said Feszj, as Jesse kept his head down. "Sunas will remain to help you. Do you need any other assistance?"

"Don't you need to get back to Vilmar?" asked Catiana.

"We do."

"With Sunas here to help, we'll be fine. Thanks."

Feszj paused for a moment as all eyes peered at Jesse, seemingly waiting for the inevitable. Jesse felt the pressure, but whether it was from the stares or from his new-found sense of duty, he couldn't tell.

"I'm sorry, Amora."

"Why, Jesse?" asked Amora, "Why did you let me suffer?" She posed her question out of simple wonder. Her voice possessed no tinge of anger, and there was no indication of any pent-up hatred or vindictiveness. Her face showed no animosity towards Jesse. If anything, there was probably some sympathy in her eyes.

Jesse couldn't answer. Overcome with remorse and unable to deal with the absence of punishment, he had nothing to say. He simply stood there, his head down, his hands stuffed into the front pouch on his tunic. He avoided everyone's eyes, yet suffered everyone's gaze. He felt miserable. After a few moments, Feszj broke the silence.

"Amora, Jesse comes from a society which seems to believe that the inducement of pain and suffering and humiliation are all necessary for the enjoyment of life."

"But that doesn't make any sense," said Ymo.

"No it doesn't, said Feszj. "Not to us, at least."

With that, Feszj said his goodbyes to the group. Jesse, on the other hand, said nothing. He turned around, eagerly wishing to leave the field, and headed out ahead of Feszj. He didn't care if his actions were rude or inconsiderate. Feszj, with his long strides, caught up with him and strode along side without comment.

When Jesse felt that enough distance separated him from Amora, he spoke.

"I guess she won't want to play that game again."

"Oh, I don't know." Feszj, turned around and called back to Amora. "Amora, would you like to play that game again?"

"Sure," said Amora.

Feszj nodded. "Maybe tomorrow then." Feszj returned his attention to the young man. "You see, Jesse, Amora has faith that her community will not let her hurt herself. She also has faith that you have learned a valuable lesson from this experience, and you will not let her hurt herself again. And she has complete faith in herself that she can do her part to maintain the community despite hardships."

"But not everyone feels the same pain. What if someone gives up before another person has reached their maximum?"

"The goal of the game," said Feszj as he started walking towards the path in the trees, "resides not in everyone necessarily reaching their maximum every time." Jesse grunted in surprise. "As you noticed, Catiana and Lasho had plenty of energy left to tend to Amora. Taleg and Ymo soon joined them. They are physically conditioned for the activity, more so than Amora. So there will always be a difference in abilities, and differences in pain thresholds, and that is what the group must understand. Everyone in the community must learn to empathize with each other. They all know what pain is; they have all experienced it before. It is this unforgettable knowledge of pain, or personal suffering, which inspires us to alleviate it in others."

Jesse and Feszj walked through the forest without saying a word to each other which made the sounds of twigs snapping, owls hooting, and the eerie squeal from distant bats audible. However, during the entire tromp through the trees until they reached the road to Vilmar — which Jesse could now see glowing, its lights shining through the glass dome — Jesse heard nothing. He, instead, ruminated on his disaster in the field. Eventually, his guilt became too great to contain. He stopped on the road in front of Feszj, spun around and faced him.

"Maybe I don't belong here."

"Why do you say that, Jesse?" Feszj spoke in what seemed to Jesse to be a forced aloofness, as if he were trying to hide his anxiety.

"After what I did, I don't think I'll ever fit in." Jesse's head sagged.

Feszj smiled and lifted up his head with an affectionate finger. Jesse looked up at Feszj, yet it was more difficult to see him. As the dusk receded into night, Feszj's face

blended into the deep red and dark blue sky glistening above. The sparkle in his eyes shared the heavenly expanse with the twinkle of stars cutting through the infinite hues.

"Everyone belongs here, Jesse," he said, his voice pure and full. "Everyone, just by the very fact that they are human, deserves a place like this — a place in which to live and to love and to learn. This belief is what guides all our actions. The question, therefore, is not whether you belong here; it is whether or not you can assimilate our philosophy of living — which really shouldn't be that hard. After all, you have all the tools within you, and many of the experiences necessary to make that eventuality possible. Even though your world has been trying to promote the self-same philosophy for thousands of years with little enduring success, the building blocks are there for all to try to assemble."

Feszj stepped back from Jesse, now becoming completely lost not only in the sky, but in the trees behind him as well. Jesse could hardly distinguish his outline. *Is he stretching out his arms, or are those tree limbs?*

"Compassion," Feszj said as the air echoed with his voice, "the ability to feel and understand other people. Cooperation — the ability to bring together a variety of abilities to everyone's benefit. And Community — to provide the necessary environment which allows compassion and cooperation to flourish. These are the three parts in the philosophy of our world, every one of which is emphasized in all we do — from the most basic game to the most complicated construction. And much like the three points of the triangle, remove one of the points and the object falls to the ground flat. For without Compassion, you can't have Cooperation; without Cooperation, you can't have Community; and without Community, you can't have Compassion.

"Compassion, Cooperation, Community. Very simple, very basic, very powerful, and nothing new. And the attainment of these three elements is not that hard, if only you and your society had the will to do it. You see, the difference between our culture and yours is that we practice what we preach. We don't sermonize on the virtues of compassion and then rush down to the stadium to cheer on the local football team to 'Fight! Fight! Fight!' and 'Kill the bastards!' We don't contradict ourselves in the same breath by encouraging our youth to cooperate and work together to successfully compete to beat an opposing team. We don't extoll community by promoting sporting events which bring out the best in nationalistic and jingoistic behaviors — where the very architecture of stadia incorporate home and away sections, and school colors determine who the good guys are and who are the bad guys."

Feszj's apparition moved out from the trees and Jesse could now see his outline standing in front of the glowing air above Vilmar. At the same time, Jesse noticed the stars

once again, but this time he studied them more closely. Jesse had rarely seen stars in the night sky at home before, and never had he seen stars with so much brightness and clarity.

"Do you see how large the sky is? How its expanse makes you seem so small?" Jesse grunted in agreement. "Remember, even the smallest element of nature is both a part of the universe and helps construct it."

Jesse felt odd. For some reason — for some wonderful reason — the solitude and the quiet of the outdoors was not frightening, unlike in his town where no one felt safe walking at night despite all the garish lights. Here, it was appealing and alluring just to have the possibility of sleeping outdoors and knowing nothing will happen to you, except perhaps a leaf falling on your nose or waking up too early to the splendor of the rising sun.

Yet, at the same time, the warm glow of lights from the community enticed him back to the dome. To where people treated him with dignity and respect; where he wasn't beaten or teased or humiliated. To where people whom he doesn't know hug him and strike up a conversation as if they had been friends for years and had never been apart. There was something about this world that made him feel completely at ease.

"Come, Jesse," said Feszj, interrupting his reverie, "let's go home."

That's it, thought Jesse. No matter where he was in this world ... he was home.

* * *

Jesse and Feszj entered the town through the same entrance through which they first arrived. Just before Jesse stepped through the opening, he happened to notice in the distance several huge objects hovering over the farmland. He thought his eyes were playing tricks on him. Plus, the bright lights under the dome made it extremely difficult to see into the darkness over the fields. Yet something out there was reflecting light.

"What is that?" asked Jesse of Feszj.

"Those are the transport ships."

"They're huge. Are they ... floating?"

"Hovering, yes."

"Amazing."

"Still infatuated with technology?"

Jesse blushed. "Well, it does make life easier," was Jesse's weak response under his breath, hoping, and yet not hoping, Feszj didn't hear. Feszj smiled and said nothing.

The two passed under the decorations of dried corn and their stalks and walked past two jack-o-lanterns, each carved with a wonderfully intricate pattern of triangles backlit with candles inside the empty shell. The interior of the dome was bustling with activity.

"There are a lot of people here," said Jesse.

Hundreds of children and adults scurried around from group to group gleefully watching musical and theatrical performances as well as craft and cooking demonstrations.

"The Fall Festival is a large celebration for the entire area. People from Dunlo, Marston, Tipgen, and several other local communities come to join the celebration." Feszj peered out on to the grass. "It looks like we also have some teens from Barvail entertaining the children."

"How do they all get here?"

"Some walk, hiking across the countryside. Many ride bikes. Others hitch rides on the transport ships."

"Where do they all stay? I've only seen these few homes."

"Some will move on with the transports. Others will room inside the quarters, as Vilmar's residents willingly vacate them as a courtesy to our guests. A few will go into the forest and bed down. But most, residents and guests alike, will simply camp outside under the dome or out on the fields, with conversations between old friends and new friends lasting well into the morning."

Ringling the interior in front of the living quarters were numerous tables filled with a variety of dishes for all to consume. The music — provided by a collection of minstrels standing next to the bubble, the conversation, and the laughter saturated the air under the dome. Feszj tugged Jesse's tunic to one of the nearby tables and pointed to some scrumptious looking treats.

"Would you like some pumpkin pie, Jesse?" asked Feszj.

"Sure."

The smiling middle-aged man in an apron behind the table brought out two plates from underneath, carved out a hefty piece of pie for each, and handed them to Jesse and Feszj. While the man was preparing the meal, Feszj struck up a conversation with him.

"So, Nyle, are your pies as good as always?"

"Better," said the man in a hefty voice.

"Impossible," replied Feszj.

"Eat for yourself."

Jesse took the plate, but paused, just staring at it.

"How?" said Jesse. "Where are the forks?"

"Where are the forks?" said Nyle, exaggerated for effect. He pulled up his sleeve and showed Jesse and Feszj his empty hands. He shook his fingers quickly, and a fork magically appeared in each hand. Jesse would have applauded if it weren't for the plate in his hands.

"That's neat," Jesse said, taking the fork from the Nyle's hand, and trying to peer up his arm to see where the fork originated. Nyle's face beamed.

"Don't bother, Jesse," said Feszj, noticing Jesse's attempt to discover the trick. "Nyle has been doing that trick as long as I can remember, and it still amazes me. He does it so well."

"So, Jesse," said Nyle. "Are you enjoying yourself?"

"You know me?"

"Everyone in Vilmar knows you. More so after your dramatic gallop across the grass."

"I'm sorry about that," said Jesse, looking down at his pie.

"Hey, no problem. You had your reasons. Besides, you're our guest today. I'm sorry that the community created such distress earlier."

"No, it wasn't your fault."

"Perhaps, but we'll do better next time. Eat up. It's one of my better batches."

Jesse sliced a piece of pie off with his fork and put it to his mouth. His face lit up.

"This is delicious," he said, slightly muffled by the half-chewed pie. Jesse quickly ate a second and third piece. Suddenly, he was very hungry.

"I'm glad you like it," said Nyle, catching Jesse's attention by once again showing his empty hands, waved them in front, and produced two cotton napkins from thin air. Jesse smiled in amazement.

"Thank you, Nyle," said Feszj. "We must be going, however. We are running short of time."

"I understand," replied Nyle. "Care, Jesse."

As Feszj and Jesse turned around to proceed further along the path, Jesse asked, "Care?"

"It's another way of saying good-bye or so long."

"Oh." Jesse gobbled down another piece of pie. As the two walked down the path, Jesse sampled not only more pies like pecan and rhubarb and what appeared to be blueberry, but muffins, breads, pastries, salads, fruits, and many other desserts.

Positioned in various places around the bubble, groups had gathered to watch several different acting troupes perform. Jesse paused to watch the group from Barvail. The teens, positioned in front of a curtain — the sole indication of a stage, were surrounded by

a slew of children sitting on the grass entranced by what seemed to be the same fable acted out earlier by Sunas and Ymo, though with much greater theatrics, and minimal props like small bales of hay and planking for symbolic walls. The actors and actresses garbed themselves in elaborate costumes. The actor playing the cow, for example, wore arm length gloves and hip boots with hoofs at the ends, a brown and white hide draped over his body, and a cow mask which helmeted his head and covered his eyes and nose.

As Jesse moved along, a little boy came running from behind and tugged at Jesse's tunic. It was Kai.

"Hey, Jesse, come with me," said Kai, trying to drag him across the grass. Jesse resisted, looking at Feszj, who just shrugged his shoulders.

"A few diversions won't hurt," said Feszj.

As Feszj followed behind, Kai led Jesse across the grassy infield to where a mixed collection of children, adolescents, and adults, were trying to construct human pyramids. The strongest adults on hands and knees on the ground, their shoulders and bodies touching each other side by side; on top of them, teenagers, and then on the very top, the children. Once the top was placed on, another person would be added to the base, widening it by one more, and a new side of the triangle was constructed, ending with an even higher level on top of the pyramid. What was unusual was that each row faced in opposite direction.

"I've got another," yelled an exuberant Kai .

A gaunt-faced woman with stringy blond hair smiled at Jesse's arrival. "You look like a second tier person," she said, surveying his physique. "Take your shoes off and follow me." After he removed his boots, she brought him over to a pyramid, already four rows high, and just beginning to assemble a new side. A hefty gentleman got on his hands and knees and nestled up against the his neighbor. Then Jesse was helped on the the second level, and gently positioned with arms overlapped with a lanky fellow with red hair and freckles next to him. A muscular young woman was quickly helped on top of Jesse and the man next to him. Soon, amidst growing cheers of encouragement and advice, younger and smaller children were using his backside as a step to climb up to upper levels.

However, the pyramid did not last long. It buckled on the far side opposite Jesse, and with shrieks of delight, the pyramid imploded into a massive heap of bodies. The gaunt-faced lady, other assistants, and on-lookers quickly waded through the sprawling and writhing mass of arms and legs making sure no one was hurt — and no one was. Once the last person was helped off the ground, all involved — the participants as well as spectators

— mightily applauded their joint efforts, accompanied with hearty embraces and jovial slaps on the back.

As another pyramid was being constructed, Feszj began to escort Jesse away from the group. But not before Kai ran up, hugged Jesse's knees, uttered a quick thank you, and quickly returned to the pyramid.

On their way back to the sidewalk, Jesse and Feszj passed a bearded storyteller who, with a strong penetrating voice, weaved a tale of mystery and adventure of climbing Mount Forgullen, facing the winds and the snow, and meeting strange creatures and visiting a mysterious and wondrous underground city. The audience, perhaps the largest in the dome, sat silent and attentive, absorbed in the journey.

"Who is that?" asked Jesse.

"I'm not sure, but he's probably a transport pilot."

"How do you know that?"

"Not only do the pilots fly ships, because they visit many different towns all over our world, they hear many tales. Part of their responsibilities is to learn these stories and recite them in other towns and communities. Do you see that small group of people farther behind him in the back?" Jesse nodded, seeing a group about ten yards distant. "They are also pilots. I know a couple of them. The brunette woman is Czan, a wonderful spinner of yarns, with a voice that can imitate practically any animal you could imagine. And the bald man, Ryani, another fine storyteller and a fine singer as well. In fact, they are all accomplished spinners. But that group is over there listening to the new pilots telling their stories and learning the craft. The pilots get together at every chance they can to share presentation methods and techniques and advice to help develop the style of the newcomers as well as to hone the skills of the more experienced. One is never so good they can't learn something new."

Feszj and Jesse walked further on, and then turned down the sidewalk heading into the bubble. Jesse wanted to continue around the circle to see the other exhibitions and stopped at the corner.

"Why are we going into the building?"

"We have just enough time to visit the fifth floor."

Jesse gulped, and his body stiffened. He had forgotten all about the fifth floor; he had forgotten all about his world. Lost in the beauty and comradery and festivities of Vilmar, Bridgedale seemed so dirty and violent, with only a few friends waiting for him there — friends which seemed to him now to be more interested in juvenile cruelties.

"You do want to find out why your parents hate each other?" probed Feszj.

"Yes, I suppose." Jesse was not at all convinced it was a good idea, but he had made such a fuss earlier, he had committed himself to this outcome just so he wouldn't look like a jerk.

Feszj and a despondent Jesse walked toward the entrance. Jesse looked at the pavement, not wanting to see what he was missing and feeling worse than he already did leaving the Festival.

"Where are you going with Jesse, Feszj?" A nearby voice jerked his head up. "He owes us a dance."

Feszj and Jesse turned around to see Beedie, standing with her hands on her hips, and flanked by two other women, both Asian looking, thought Jesse. Jesse glanced at Feszj, who just shrugged again. However, by that time, Jesse was already surrounded by the women, and literally dragged to an area in the dome in front of the minstrels where several other groups of four waited for the music to begin.

"I don't know how to dance this way," protested Jesse.

"Don't worry," said Beedie, as the foursome held hands, "we'll guide you through." She sported a devilish smile.

The music began and the quartets moved to the rhythm of a spirited jig. Jesse had no clue about what to do or where to go, so he spent much of his time being jerked back and forth by the trio of ladies around him. Still, he managed to enjoy himself — due in large part to the beautiful smiles and childish giggles of Beedie and her two friends — despite the awkwardness of his steps.

The song ended and Jesse mimicked all the other dancers as they bowed to their partners. Beedie's two friends expressed their thanks and kissed Jesse lightly on the cheek. Beedie, on the other hand, said nothing and instead pounced upon Jesse, kissing him full on the lips with gusto. With eyes wide open, Jesse met her lips with his, never expecting anything like this, but relishing every moment.

Feszj walked unobtrusively out to where Jesse and Beedie wrapped themselves in each other. However, his presence did not go unnoticed.

"Hey, Feszj. Are you going to play a tune for us?"

Curious to learn the origin of the voice calling for Feszj, Jesse turned away from Beedie and followed everyone's gaze to a man standing on the small platform where the minstrels performed. Holding a trumpet, the burly gentleman strode to the front of the stage. It was the man from the research shop, looking more red-faced than usual.

"Kondanin, you know I'm not very good," said Feszj. Jesse had heard him play his flute and thought he was being overly modest.

"That never stopped you before," the good-natured Kondanin yelled back. The crowd, overhearing the exchange, roared in laughter. Feszj grinned broadly, joining in the merriment. He gamely proceeded to the platform, pulling his flute out from underneath his tunic on the way.

"You may regret your request," said Feszj, as Kondanin helped him up on to the platform.

"You're too modest, Feszj," said Kondanin, smiling. "We all know that the song birds around Vilmar take lessons from you."

Feszj smiled, nodded politely. Kondanin relinquished the stage to Feszj, returning to his place with the minstrels. Feszj stood alone in front and in spite of his commanding presence around Jesse, seemed shy and uncomfortable on stage as he readied himself to perform.

"Before I begin playing," said Feszj, "I have the great honor of introducing to the community of Vilmar, and to the residents of all the other communities sharing our celebration, our newest friend." Feszj paused and gestured to the young man in the crowd with his flute. "Jesse."

Instantly, the entire assemblage erupted in cheering. Spectators near-by hugged him and assailed him with good wishes. Beedie snuggled up next to Jesse, and wrapped her arm around his waist. Jesse had once thought that such a display of enthusiastic support would explode his ego, but it did exactly the opposite. His face turned crimson as he shrunk in humility. He had been given a tremendous responsibility, but he still doubted whether he could live up to it.

Eventually, the audience quieted down, and all eyes looked to Feszj. He put the flute to his lips and he played.

The music filled the dome as people throughout its interior slowly turned to its source and listened transfixed in awe. The pyramid makers dismounted this human edifices. The plays and the storytellers suspended their performances in mid-line. Those eating put down their food; others stopped chewing or swallowed. Within seconds, the dome was silent except for the soaring lines of melody which enraptured the crowd and a vibrato which pulsed inside everyone's body. Jesse stopped breathing as he felt his soul drawn out of his body to sail along side the lilting sounds of Feszj's flute. He heard Beedie sniffing, and twisted his head to see her eyes closed and tears streaming down her face. Jesse then looked around and noticed almost everyone — man, woman, and child — wiping their faces clean of the wetness Feszj's music produced. No one checked their emotions — not during this wonderful release.

Soon — but all too soon — the melody came down from its musical empyrean and gently rested its listeners back on the ground. The music ended, and for a moment the dome hovered still as the tune floated around and infused itself into the spirit of the crowd.

Suddenly, Feszj began playing a different tune, a sprightly 6/8 reel. The band came out of its spell and took up the song, while the dancers quickly grabbed new partners. Once the song was well underway, Feszj exited the stage self-effacingly, weaved his way through the dancers, held up for an occasional hug by appreciative listeners, and eventually found Jesse fumbling through another dance as a joyous Beedie urged him along.

"Jesse, we must be going. I'm sorry, but time is running very short."

Jesse ignored Feszj. He was apparently having too much fun, and Feszj might just walk away if he didn't acknowledge his presence. But Beedie did. She stopped dancing, which brought a reluctant Jesse to end his dancing as well.

"Please, not now," said Jesse.

"You must go, Jesse," said Beedie, smiling as sympathetically as she could. "There are things you must learn." She hugged Jesse. "I'll be here for you. We'll all be here for you."

With that, Jesse and Feszj waded through the dancers, reached the sidewalk, and approached the door to the bubble. Jesse looked back to the crowd and saw Beedie standing alone among the revelers, staring back at him. He waved, trying to look brave. She cheerfully waved back. Yet, just before he stepped into the solitude of the dome, he snuck one last glance at Beedie and thought he saw her wiping her face clear of tears.

* * *

Jesse and Feszj stood next to the hexagonal computer desk and peered inside the black chamber. Inside were ultra-white walls forcing Jesse to squint. There were no wall seams and no corners. The inside chamber was actually a huge perfectly smooth, perfectly white sphere. A narrow ramp extended into the middle of the globe and about three feet off the bottom.

As Feszj prepared the computer, Jesse distracted himself by recalling what he had seen out the windows lining the stairwell walls when he climbed the steps. So self-absorbed had he been the last time he slowly trudged up the stairs, he failed to glance out the windows, or if he did, he remembered nothing from it. This time, however, he made a point of looking out the windows and peering into the rooms. He viewed what he thought looked like a huge biology lab through one of the left-side windows, a room filled with

glassware, petri dishes, stainless steel sinks, wires and tubes hanging from the ceiling, and dozens upon dozens of apparatus of various colors, shapes, buttons and lights which Jesse had no hunch at all as to their use. And throughout, the room overflowed with plants. This is where, Feszj informed him, the community, linked with other communities around the world, performs its horticultural research. About a half dozen people wearing shimmering satin-like smocks inspected various holograms floating above computer tables smaller than the tables in the dining hall, while other technicians peered into large round screens and performed what looked like microsurgery on plants.

"Why aren't they partying?" asked Jesse.

"Not everyone wishes to party, nor do they have to."

"But partying is fun."

"Everything we do is enjoyable, whether it be research or relaxation. That's how we have constructed our environment."

"Why have parties at all then?"

"But the celebration isn't for us. It is for our guests, remember?"

Out the right side window, he saw what appeared to be day care facility, though completely empty. Tiny chairs and tables, bookshelves and toy racks, along with several hexagonal computer desks, filled the space. The room was empty.

"At least these kids are out celebrating," said Jesse.

"Well, the room is almost always empty anyway," replied Feszj. "In fact, it was more than likely unoccupied all day."

"Who takes care of the kids then?"

"We all do."

"But ... you're all working?"

Feszj nodded to himself, understanding Jesse's confusion.

"You see, Jesse," Feszj began, "unlike your society which spends a tremendous amount of time and effort isolating children from the community, we try to get the children involved with community activities as soon as possible. It is necessary in their development to know that they are important and necessary parts of the community, and that their presence and assistance is greatly appreciated. And even though they can only do so much, there is always something they can do. This empowers them, for they feel they are doing something vital for the community. In addition, they watch how the adults interact cooperatively, and instinctively mimic their actions. After a while, cooperation becomes second nature."

A sudden, quick dart by Feszj towards the wall abruptly ended Jesse's daydream. Feszj disappeared through a doorway hidden behind one of the paintings and emerged moments later carrying a crystal white jumpsuit, with hood, gloves, and slippers attached.

"Please take off your shoes, Jesse. And you might as well take off your tunic."

Jesse sat on the floor and unlaced his boots as Feszj unfastened the rear of the outfit. Feszj's motion made it look like it was zippered, but the quick downward thrust was silent, without that characteristic metallic scrape to which he was accustomed.

Jesse stood up and removed his tunic. Feszj handed him the suit, which was extremely light and thin, almost like silk. He stepped into it and the material stretched almost effortlessly to conform to his body. It didn't feel like he was wearing anything over his other clothes. By the time he had his gloves and hood secured, he was completely white, except for the clear plastic face covering with a hole for the mouth.

"Why the face mask?"

"It keeps you from being blinded."

"What!?"

Feszj chuckled. "Don't worry. You'll be fine."

He escorted Jesse to the chamber opening. "Just walk out to the end of the ramp and relax."

Jesse proceeded and turned around to look at Feszj. Even though the suit felt cool, Jesse started to sweat.

"I'm going to close this door, now."

"Wait!" But it was too late. Feszj has shut the door. Alone, Jesse stood in the middle of a completely white sphere wearing a completely white suit ... in complete darkness. He raised his hand in front of his face, but saw nothing. He had to touch his facemask to reassure himself that his hand was still there.

Then he started to panic. He didn't see any air vents inside.

"Let me out!" he screamed. He thought about turning and banging on the door, but he couldn't see the platform. He was going to have to slide his feet slowly backward until he felt the wall at his back. All the while, he kept screaming.

"For God's sake, let me out!"

"You don't have to yell, Jesse. I can hear you just fine."

Jesse momentarily stopped screaming, calmed by Feszj's voice. "Feszj, where are you?"

"I'm outside the chamber at the computer. As you have probably already figured out, we can talk to each other."

"Let me out of here. There's no air. I'm gonna die."

"Relax, Jesse," said Feszj, sounding as reassuring as possible. "There is plenty of cool fresh air circulating through the chamber. The air even contains a higher content of oxygen."

"Why's that?"

"To keep you from getting motion sick."

"What?!"

Jesse tried to control his breathing, but to no avail. And his sweating continued unabated.

"Since this is your first time in the chamber, let me explain what will happen while I continue preparing the computer. First, don't be alarmed at the darkness. It won't be dark for long. But, to avoid some discomfort, keep your eyes closed as the chamber brightens."

Jesse closed his eyes. "But what about this sickness stuff?"

"Second, you will soon feel the weight on your feet disappear." At that moment, Jesse felt his stomach turn over, like how it feels going over hills on a roller coaster. "The chamber is now supporting you in a weightless environment. You may not have realized it, but you are no longer standing on the platform." Jesse felt down with his feet. The surface was gone. "The oxygen will keep you from getting sick to your stomach. But it will help even more if you take deep breaths and try to relax."

Jesse commenced inhaling. He sucked in all the air he could, and it did make him feel better. Actually, as Jesse thought more about it, the experience excited him.

"How are you doing, Jesse?" Feszj's voice resonated in the chamber.

"I feel great. This is fun. Better than anything Disney has." Feszj didn't reply.

The chamber began to lighten, and Jesse remembered to keep his eyes closed. As the light increased, he heard noises — inchoate and faint, at first. However as the volume increased, the sounds soon became recognizable. It was the roar of a crowd, probably at a football stadium. The cheering grew louder and echoed throughout the room. Echoed throughout the room?

"If you haven't already, you may open your eyes now," said Feszj.

Jesse slowly opened his eyes. Unbelievably, he was back on Earth in the middle of a football stadium packed with tens of thousands of cheering fans. He was about fifteen rows up on the fifty yard line, looking out over the field. The crowd was clothed in crimson red and waved red and white paper pom-poms. Jesse turned to the person next to him, and elderly man with a beer in his hands.

"Who's playing?" asked Jesse. The man never turned.

"Yoo-hoo. Hello? Hey, mister?" Jesse tried to shove the old man but when Jesse raised his hand, he saw nothing. He knew he raised it. He felt his arm rise up. But it was no longer there. He looked down at his body, but all he saw was the concrete floor of the bleachers, covered with popcorn and cigarette butts, and two skinny legs covered with red leotards.

"What's going on? Those aren't my legs."

"No, they aren't. Right now, we are borrowing the perspective of one of the spectators. We don't have to, but I thought it might be easier for you to get used to the experience this way."

Jesse looked more closely and noticed two scrawny gloved hands and the lower half of a fur coat. Feszj went on.

"You are probably looking through the eyes of the wife of the gentleman next to you."

Jesse waved his limbs frantically, but nothing but an almost imperceptible shimmer indicated where his body was in space.

"What happened to my body, Feszj? I can feel it moving, but I can't see it."

"That's right, Jesse," said Feszj. "Your image has been masked by the hologram all around you. That's why the white room and the white suit."

"And the plastic mask?"

"It protects your eyes from the lasers."

"Neat."

"Essentially, you are floating around your world as a specter might. You can see them, but they cannot see or hear you."

"Hmm." Jesse couldn't decide whether that was good or bad. But it was interesting.

Jesse looked around the stadium again and noticed the crowd wearing heavy coats and their breath misting. He looked up and saw the sun blazing above in the sky. However, Jesse could feel neither warmth nor cold.

"Feszj, I guess I can't feel anything in the stadium either."

"Well, no. That I can arrange for you. But do you really want to feel things?"

"Yeah, that would be neat."

"It may not be neat all the time," cautioned Feszj.

"Just do it," Jesse demanded. Then, as an afterthought, "Please?"

Jesse began feeling the coldness of the stadium bleacher seat on his backside, and felt the sun heating up his clothes. Through the sensations, he also gained a little better perspective of where his disembodied person existed in space. Yet he was really confused now. It felt like he was sitting down.

"Uh, Feszj ..."

"You've taken over the feelings of the person from whom you are looking at the world. You may feel other things from your actual body, like breathing and such, but primarily you will take on the sensations of the body you are inhabiting."

"This is really neat." Jesse looked around the stadium some more. "You know, this place looks familiar. Where are we?"

"This is Homecoming Day, almost fifteen years ago, at the university where your father played football."

Now Jesse remembered. His dad has a huge wall poster of the stadium hanging in his office at the dealership — along with his jersey, helmet, and a few game balls.

"The stadium," continued Feszj, "is filled to capacity today to watch the home team take on the designated sheep for this year's slaughter, Southwest University — a school world-renown for its scholarship in Mexican-American studies, but not for football."

Jesse looked up at the scoreboard, where the score flashed 44 to 6, in State's favor. At the beginning of the fourth quarter, Southwest was being crushed.

"Why are we here?"

"This is where it all began," said Feszj enigmatically and changed the subject. "Most of the starters for the home team by now are on the bench staying warm, drinking Gatorade, or talking on the phone to their families watching the game on television. All except for one." Feszj paused. "Do you know where your mom and dad met?"

"They met in college. She was a cheerleader, and he was starting outside linebacker. Number 88." Jesse's face burst with excitement. He scanned the field. "There! There he is!" STRICH, 88.

Jesse tried to point, but wasn't sure if he did or not. All of a sudden, the sensations of him sitting in the stands disappeared. Everything began moving around him. It was as if he were being drawn out of this person's body. He looked over his shoulder to see an old woman with makeup caked and cracked on her wrinkled face, highlighted by too much red lipstick. Repulsed, he turned his head back, watching the crowd falling away from him. He could feel his arms and legs again; but he now seemed to be flying over the spectators heading down to the field. Soon, he sailed over State's bench, and into the huddle. He fell into the jersey of one of the players, and looked out into the huddle through the plastic facemask of a helmet. His body began to ache slightly, and his right arm and side grew increasingly sore and stiff.

"Okay, Pete, what now?" a voice said.

Pete? Jesse stared in front of him across the huddle and saw his father. Fifteen years younger, but it was him. Peter looked exactly the way Jesse remembered seeing him when he and his Dad had watched the old scouting films. The bushy mustache and beard, the gleaming smile, and the massive physique — much bigger than he is now, if that were possible. Peter exuded confidence and inspired everyone of his teammates, especially the third and fourth stringers who filled the huddle currently. They idolized him. Jesse was witnessing his father in all his glory, performing at the peak of his physical prowess. And there he was, side by side with him, in the trenches.

Jesse heard nothing of the play that was called. Instead, he thought the entire time, *I love you, Dad.*

Feszj spoke. "NFL scouts from around the country are in the audience watching your Dad. Peter insisted on playing the entire game for the benefit of the scouts, and his coach reluctantly acquiesced. And so far, it has been quite a day. Three interceptions ..."

"Five sacks, a recovered fumble," interrupted Jesse, annoyed. "I know, Feszj. I know all about it. He's my dad, you know."

"I'm sorry. So you know he was providing the scouts with wonderful material to take away with them."

The huddle broke up, and Peter walked straight up to Jesse. "Keep an eye on that tight end, Jesse. Don't let him cut to the middle too soon." And away Peter went.

He talked to me, thought Jesse. "How did he know it was me?"

"Just a coincidence," said Feszj, in a matter-of-fact voice. "There was a Jesse Dandridge playing for State at the time."

Coincidence, eh? Jesse wasn't so sure.

Jesse was guided to position on the line of scrimmage on the right end, his father right behind him. The ball was snapped and Jesse felt his cleats digging into the dirt. His body lunged forward towards the quarterback as he dropped back to pass, but not before getting in the way of the tight end and shoving him into the backfield with a quick stiff arm to the helmet. Jesse was being blocked by two people now — the tackle, sliding over to help, and the hapless tight end who gave up trying to continue the passing route to prevent another sack. Yet even with two blockers, their inexperience allowed Jesse to get underneath their arms, keeping his center of gravity low while keeping theirs high. They gave ground quickly. Soon, he saw the scared eyes of the quarterback as State's defense quickly overwhelmed Southwest's line and surrounded him. Jesse reached out and was able to grab the quarterback's jersey just before he threw the ball. He held on to the jersey

and dragged the guy down, then groaned when the tackle fell on top of him, sending his whole right side into the turf and a shooting pain up his right arm.

As soon as Jesse hit the ground, he again saw the world spin. The pain disappeared, and he floated out of his surrogate body. Everything moved in slow motion as his glided over to his father and fell into his body.

"Aw right!" said Jesse, as he took over his father's sensations and experiences. This was more than he had hoped for.

As soon as he was completely absorbed into his father's body, he saw the football sailing straight for him as he was swinging out to the sideline. It was another interception, courtesy of Jesse Dandridge's partial sack. He felt the ball thud into his gut — an almost too easy reception. He heard through the helmet the spectators roaring their appreciation. With a blocker on his left protecting his flank from tacklers, Peter might have been able to run for a touchdown.

However, just as he was about to sprint upfield, Peter turned his head in the direction of a sound that pierced through the noise. A woman's voice screamed less than ten yards away near the stands, "Hey, Petey! Show me the ball!"

Peter raised his newly acquired football above his head and pointed to that particular frantically jumping cheerleader on the sidelines. Jesse heard his father's voice above the din of the crowd yelling, "This one's for you, Linda!"

Linda? Was that my mother?

"During his little bit of hot-dogging demonstration for you mother," said Feszj over all the ambient noise, "Peter failed to notice his defender tripping and falling, leaving his left side now totally exposed."

Peter had just brought the ball down and cradled it in his arms when he noticed at the last second one of Southwestern's players bearing down on him. Peter had just enough time to brace himself by digging in his shoes. Because of his incredible strength, when he was struck on the side the hit didn't send him to the ground, though it did stand him straight up. Peter fought hard not to be shoved out of bounds, but he didn't dare move his feet. There were securely wedged into the turf.

Then, in front of him, came another Southwestern player. Jesse could see through the player's facemask a devilish smile and bulging eyes. But his eyes weren't looking at him. They were looking at ...

"Oh, my God!"

The player, charging at full speed, flung his entire body weight behind his helmet and shoulder pads and sent them squarely into Peter Strich's knees.

"NO!"

Peter's and Jesse's screams of agony blended together as both felt every ligament snap and the right leg knee joint shatter.

The chamber blacked out leaving Jesse in complete darkness. Fortunately, despite some faint lingering sensations, the excruciating pain in the knee ceased. Jesse was breathing heavily now, recovering from the pain.

"Are you all right, Jesse?" asked Feszj.

"So that's how it happened. Dad never wanted to talk about it."

"There's more."

The chamber glowed again. Soon, Jesse found himself walking down an image of a hospital hallway. He turned into a room. Lying on the hospital bed with his right leg in a cast was Peter Strich.

"Peter," said a woman's voice, "you have someone here to see you."

Peter's head remained motionless as he stared at the ceiling. From behind Jesse, a woman stepped forward and sat in a chair next to the bed. Next, Jesse floated out of what he could now see was a nurse, and into the body of Peter. The only thing Jesse now saw was the ceiling tile.

"Hello, Peter. How are you feeling?"

"How the hell do you think?" Peter tilted his head to the side and faced Linda, Jesse's mother. She looked so young — with blond hair, a smooth face with shiny amber tanned skin, and the crystal blue eyes now shimmering as she held back tears. She reached for Peter's hand, and raised it to her face as Peter did nothing. The hand just remained limp. The two of them said nothing to each other.

"I wish I knew what Dad was thinking," said Jesse. Almost on cue, Peter began speaking.

"You know," Peter said, returning his gaze to the ceiling, "my football career is ruined. The doctor said I should be happy if I can walk again."

"I'm sorry."

"You ought to be!" barked Peter. Linda winced. "I could've played for any team in the NFL. My career was guaranteed. My future was set. And my lifestyle would have been financed by a multi-million dollar contract. I could've had it all, Linda. If only...." Peter's voice trailed off.

"If only what?" asked Linda, knowing exactly what he would say. Perhaps Linda needed the excoriation to purge her guilty conscience.

Peter swallowed. "If only I hadn't turned around to look at you. If only I hadn't been distracted by your call. I could've concentrated on the field and been ready for the hit. I could've walked off the field and sat out the rest of the game. Did you know, that was supposed to be my last series? Funny, isn't it. How a life could be changed in one brief second. To see everything you've ever worked for instantly disappear. All because of you."

"I'm sorry," she said, the tears beginning to fall.

Peter squeezed her hand. When he spoke again, his voice calmed down, changing from bitterness to adoration. "If I didn't love you so much, none of this would have happened."

Again she apologized. "I'm sorry. Is there anything I can do for you?" She was desperate for redemption.

"Laying here doesn't give me much of anything to do but think. I've thought about that asshole gunning for my knees. His team may have lost fifteen yards, but I lost fifteen years of my life becoming the best at a game I can't play any more. But the only thing I've thought about the most these last couple days is you." This surprised Linda, and her face blushed. "The only thing I thought about when I was hit was that I wish it hadn't happened in front of you. I didn't want you to see me go down. Not like that."

"It's okay," said Linda. "Don't worry about that." She stroked Peter's hair.

"The only thing I thought about when the stretcher wheeled me to the ambulance was if I would see you again. When they put me under for the operation, the last thing I remembered thinking was the hope you would be there waiting for me when I woke up."

Peter brought his other hand over his body to stroke Linda's fingers and arm. "No matter what happened," he continued, "no matter how bad I felt about what happened, I couldn't stop loving you. I can't stop loving you."

Peter tried to sit up, but a sharp pain in his leg convinced him otherwise.

"There was one more thing that convinced me," said Peter, easing himself back down to the bed. "After I caught that interception, the eighty thousand plus fans must have gone wild. The roar of cheering must have been deafening. But cutting through it all, for some unexplained reason, I heard your voice as clear as a bell. I don't know how it happened, but it did. As for why it happened, there is only one explanation. It had to have been a sign. I was meant to hear your voice and only your voice ... forever."

"What are you saying, Peter?" Linda squeezed Peter's hand harder, and through the tears, Jesse could see her eyes filling with hope. Peter forced himself to sit up, The pain stabbed at his knee again, but Peter ignored it this time, staying upright. Jesse, on the

other hand, couldn't ignore it. He groaned, then bit his lip to silence himself so he could hear the rest of the conversation. His father spoke again.

"I wish I didn't look so bad, but ..." Peter took a deep breath and then wiped the tears off her face. "Marry me," he said. "I need you with me — now more than ever. I need those beautiful eyes to watch me as I go through rehab. I need those arms to hold me as I stumble around learning to walk again. Say you'll marry me. Please."

Linda remained silent. Peter went on, nervous at her silence. "I already have a job lined up after graduation. One of car dealers in town called and said I could work there whenever I'm ready. They say I still have plenty of fans in town, and everyone knows what happened to me. I should be able to sell cars easily."

"I don't care about that," said Linda. "I just care about you."

"So, what do you say then? Will you marry me? Will you be my wife, Linda?"

Linda smiled broadly and giggled like a little girl. "Yes. Yes a thousand times. I would be honored to be called your wife."

Peter collapsed back on the bed in relief. Jesse exhaled in relief as well, and mumbled, "God, that hurt." Linda, in the meantime, bent over Peter and hugged him. "I love you too, Peter," she whispered into his ear.

Once again, the chamber dimmed to complete blackness. It was all so corny, he thought. But then again, he remembered how he acted trying to impress Catiana. *I was so dumb! I guess love makes people do dumb things. It certainly makes people say silly things.*

"Is there more?" asked Jesse of Feszj.

"Just a little more."

The room slowly flickered with light once again.

"After a year of marriage," narrated Feszj, "Peter and Linda had a healthy son, and they named him Jesse. Over time, Peter became very successful as a salesman, eventually becoming sales manager. He and Linda purchased a home and the three of them looked like the ideal family. But not really.

"When people are young and foolish and in the throes of infatuation, they do not realize that passionate love — a love so strong it overlooks all the sins either partner may have — is fleeting and short-lived and fades with time. Yet the pain and bitterness masked by that kind of love remains, festering under the surface and growing more putrid as the years go on. Thus, as Peter's affections disappeared over time, his limp would never go away. He would always be reminded of what happened and who made his life the way it is."

The chamber brightened into a bedroom. Jesse's persona laid in bed, snuggled up next to Peter, and stoking his chest.

"I'm going to be Mom?" said Jesse. "I don't know if I can take this."

Jesse noticed an odd feeling — a dull, burning sensation in his crotch.

"How do you feel, darling?" said the voice.

Peter remained silent. He was staring at the ceiling of the room. Jesse noticed that the room looked nothing like his parents room in his house, but they may have redecorated since this scene. Yet it did seem smaller, almost like a room in an apartment.

"I'm just thinking," said Peter.

The voice sighed heavily. "Not again."

"I can't help it."

"Can't you just think about us when we're together?"

"You don't understand. You can't possibly understand the misery I have to face every day."

"No, I can't. All I know is that if it hurts you, it hurts me. And that it's hurting our relationship."

"I'm sorry."

There was a brief lull.

"So, what have you decided?" asked the voice.

"I don't know," replied Peter.

"What do you mean you don't know?" She quickly withdrew her hand from his chest, folded them over her naked breasts and also began staring at the ceiling. "We've been talking about this for months."

"I know. I know. It's not that easy."

"Yes, it is that easy. Just go to a lawyer and ..."

"I don't want to lose Jesse. If I get a divorce at this time, Linda will probably gain custody."

What? What's going on here?

"You don't know that for a fact. Have you talked to a lawyer yet?"

That's not Mom's voice. Dad's in bed with someone else? Then it hit home for Jesse, and inadvertently spoke to his father's image. "You're having an affair, Dad?"

"Yes I have, as a matter of fact." Peter's voice reflected his growing anger. "He said as long as Linda is working, the courts will almost assuredly assign custody to her, and I'll be the one paying alimony and child support."

Jesse felt Peter's hand stroking his — her? — hair. Jesse was having trouble separating himself from the woman in the scene. Jesse tried futilely to swat away his Dad's hands. He didn't want to be touched by him right now. His stomach began churning.

"I can't lose Jesse," Peter went on. "He's everything to me. He's my arms, my legs. Every time he pitches a ball, I'm in there throwing with him. Every time he runs with the football, my legs ache in memory of the glory I could have had, but my son will have. He is going to be everything I never was.

"Linda won't do this for him." Peter's voice turned harsh. "Linda will just turn him off to football, and baseball, and sports in general. She'll turn him into a queer. She doesn't like seeing him play sports. She tries very hard not to come to the games. She's always worried he'll get hurt, and she doesn't want to be there when he does. Some mom. Of course he might get hurt. That's part of the game. Hell, I got hurt, and I'm doing all right."

Peter got out of bed and walked ungracefully around the room, his hairy body exposed. Jesse closed his eyes. But he couldn't shut his ears.

"Hell, if you're going to be great," continued Peter, "you gotta dance that fine edge between pushing too hard and not pushing hard enough. I've been there. I know what it's like. She has no clue. She can't possibly help him reach his full potential. She'll always be holding him back, keeping him from extending his abilities. Jesse will turn into a mama's boy — a uninspired mediocre faggot — with all her love and help. No. She can't have him."

Jesse felt the woman sitting up in bed, and he opened his eyes involuntarily. He forcibly kept them open this time.

"Maybe she doesn't want to see him hurt like you."

"Who's side are you on?" Peter, his face turning red, glared at Jesse.

"I'm just saying ..."

"You can't live your life fearing you might get hurt at any moment," interrupted Peter, shouting down the voice. "In that case, you might as well just plop down in a comfortable recliner, pop open a can of beer, and waste your life sitting away in front of the TV."

Peter limped around the room taking deep breaths to calm down. The voice remained silent for several moments and then spoke again. "Are you sure your procrastination isn't because you still have feelings for her?"

"Who? For Linda? That bitch. I don't know how I ever loved her. I don't know why I ever kept loving her. And God knows why I f— married her. For Christ's sake, look at

what she did to me." Peter pointed to a massive scar that encircled his deformed right knee. "I tried. I really did try to love her. But it was no use. A person can only stand it so long, living with the person who crippled you."

Peter took a deep breath. "You know, there isn't a day that goes by when I don't wake up in pain. I'm barely thirty year old, and I can feel the arthritis slowing welding my knee joint together." Peter laughed cynically. "I may not be able to run anymore, but I'm a damn good hobbler, as if there's any future in that."

Jesse listened dumbfounded, and sniffed. This was his mother he was talking about. 'That bitch' he called her. "Dad," Jesse beseeched the image, "you loved her. I saw it."

"Jesse," said Feszj, "you must know they can't hear you."

"Why is he blaming her for that accident?" Jesse asked Feszj. "It wasn't her fault. If anyone, it was that guy who went for his knees."

"Perhaps, but that player isn't around anymore," replied Feszj. "Only Linda remains to remind him."

"Why doesn't he just let go? It's all in the past."

"Some people," replied Feszj, "have nothing else to grab on to if they let the past go."

"He has Mom." Jesse was pleading now.

"Not any more, Jesse. Your society has taught Peter that someone or something must always take the blame for misfortunes. After the love was gone, which happens almost invariably in all relationships, the blame consumed him."

"It's destroying him. Look how miserable he is."

"It's not that he can't avoid it, Jesse. He actively seeks it out."

"I don't understand."

"Peter is more comfortable living with hatred than with forgiveness. And why not? In your society, misery is all-pervasive. It's easy to see just by examining the amount of effort your society expends on trying to be happy. But just being happy isn't satisfying any more for many. Nowadays, a person isn't truly happy, unless they are happier than someone else — and that's where your society derives its misery. For as consumerism convinces a growing number of people that happiness is a purchasable commodity, those who cannot purchase more happiness than another will strive to be happier by making others more miserable."

"Are you saying that Peter is going to be happier if he make's my mother's life miserable?"

Feszj continued without answering the question. "The win-lose mentality has so dominated your culture that even the pursuit of happiness has now been subsumed under the rubric of competition."

"I can't believe it."

"In the end," said Feszj, "a society saturated with hedonistic pleasures is at root a sick, vindictive, unhappy society."

"I feel sick."

"Well," said the voice, attracting Jesse's attention back to the scene and distracting him from his nausea, "I'm just thinking out loud, but if her having a job is all that is keeping you from divorcing her, then tell her not to work anymore. Convince her that ... oh, I don't know ... that volunteer work would be more appropriate and better for the family. Tell her it would help your career more if your wife were more involved in the community. Then more people would come to your dealership for cars. If your wife is nice, they'll think you'll be nice as well, thus improving sales. Your extra income will offset her loss of income. You might try that line."

So that's why Mom stopped working.

"Yeah," said Peter, a wicked grin widening on his face. "That would be perfect. It would look like I'm letting her be altruistic. She always complains that she doesn't have enough free time to be socially conscious." Peter turned and walked back across the room. "Then, after a while, I'll put the divorce into motion. She'll have to get a job, but it won't pay very well. I'll make sure of that. Who knows. She may never even get an interview if I can help it. Then the courts will have to give Jesse to me." He looked right at Jesse. "It may take a while to convince her, though."

"I've got time."

Jesse watched, in a combination of both abhorrence and wonder, his father's face glow with happiness — one of the few times he had ever seen his dad openly express such pleasure.

"I love you, Louise. You know that, I hope?"

"Yes, I do."

Louise? I've heard that name. Jesse delved deep into his memory and discovered what he was searching for. *My God. His dealership's loan financing manager is named Louise.*

"We're going to win this one together," said Peter, as he crawled over the bed up to Louise and began kissing her breasts. Jesse felt his dad's tongue circling his nipples.

"Stop!" Jesse yelled, as he tried to rub away the sensations with his hands. Jesse then felt his father grabbing his crotch. "That's enough!"

The room returned to its familiar transitional darkness. Still, Jesse brushed off his chest, as if he had spiders crawling on him. *Is that what it feels like to be sexually molested?* Before Jesse could control his breathing, however, images in the chamber began flickering on once again.

"No more. Please?" pleaded Jesse. But the images continued to come together. It was another bedroom, but this one was definitely his parent's room. This time he found his persona sitting up in bed where he could see pictures of himself on the dresser in front of him. Jesse heard the attached bathroom door open, and out came his mother in a bra and panties. It was hard to tell how much time passed since she went to college — she kept her age hidden well — but judging by his pictures on the dresser, it was probably about ten years. Linda walked to the closet and flipped through several outfits.

"What's your hurry," said this voice. "Jesse won't be home for another hour."

It didn't sound like his father. Jesse looked into the mirror above the dresser. It wasn't his father. It was Arnie, one of his father's sale's associates at the dealership.

God. Is no one faithful any more? Jesse moaned to himself. Jesse could feel his energy exiting his body. He just floated in air, feeling totally beaten by reality, and just let things happen. He didn't feel like he had any emotions left with which to react.

"It 's going to take me a while to get dressed for the ceremony," said Linda. "I have to be ready before Jesse arrives, otherwise I won't have time."

"Another charity affair? Aren't you getting a little burned out with all these events?"

"A little. But as far as my family goes, I'm amazing. They think I go everywhere. In fact, last Sunday, when we were prancing around naked in your bedroom, they thought I was out erecting a new house for someone."

"Well," said Arnie, "you were erecting something all right." Linda looked back and gave him a wink. "But if you're tired of all this charity stuff, why don't you get a job?"

"I've tried. For the last couple of years. But no one has even given me an interview. I don't understand it. I have a college degree, and I have work experience, but nothing comes of it. It's as if something or someone is trying to keep me from getting a job." Linda paused and thought of something. "But I'm just being paranoid," she continued, forcing a laugh.

"Do you think your husband has anything to do with that?"

"Peter? No. I'm sure he'd want me to get a job. He's been bugging me about separating for the past year or so, and God knows I want to. But without a job, I can't support myself. And if I can't support myself, I can't keep Jesse. And I have to keep

Jesse. He can't be left alone with his father for any length of time. Otherwise he ends up bruised and battered."

"You know, you could just call the police on him," offered Arnie.

"Of all people, you should know that'd be useless. All the policemen in town get their cruisers and their family cars from him. He gives them the best deals. Face it, Arnie. He's doing a damn good job looking out for himself."

"Not everyone's a policeman."

"Who will believe me, Arnie? If the police aren't on my side, who will believe my opinion that Peter spans Jesse a bit too hard and a bit too often? Who will believe me that Peter has hit Jesse in the face more times than I can count? I just can't win. I go to court, without a job, without prospects, and I lose Jesse."

"Damn it! Why doesn't anyone ask me what I want?" said Jesse. But then he thought about how his parents have placed Jesse in the middle of their battles — as if he were the prize for a successful divorce.

"Peter doesn't know this," Linda continued, "but I've had a half a dozen abortions and eventually got a tubal ligation just so I wouldn't have to suffer watching another child of mine being abused because he wasn't somehow perfect. Because he wasn't somehow just like what his did wanted to be. But you know what the worst thing is?"

"What?" asked Arnie.

"Jesse loves every minute of it. He loves sports. He's a natural athlete, and he's a success at everything he does. Football, baseball, basketball, you name it. We've got his trophies all over the living room."

"I've noticed," said Arnie. Linda went on.

"Jesse loves the attention, and he listens to everything Peter tells him because it was his coaching, cruel and relentless as it may be, which gave Jesse the accolades and attention he desperately wants and needs but can't get from Peter, because Peter can never be satisfied."

"What about you? Why can't he get it from you?"

Linda was about to speak, but her voice choked up. Her eyes swelled with tears. She took a deep breath and tried to compose herself. "Jesse stays away from me," she said, her voice wavering and her breathing again shallow. "Peter has poisoned him against me. I'm sure Peter has convinced him that I don't love him because I don't go to his games."

"Why don't you go?"

"I can't. I saw his father lose everything in one second, and for a moment I felt my life ending along with his. I can't take it. I can't stand it when Peter beats him up. How can I stand it when complete strangers do the same damn thing? How can I stand it when Peter

defends both violations of my son as supposedly something which builds character. I can't figure it out."

Linda stood looking blankly into the closet, her body supported by her hands grabbing on to some dresses, as Jesse watched transfixed. Shortly, Linda stood erect, picked out a blue and white striped dress and laid it on the bed, smoothing it out so the pleats looked crisper. He couldn't take his eyes off her, in spite of the fact that his vision was now blurred. Jesse's eyes and face were wet with tears, though he never realized he had been crying.

"So you see," said Linda, continuing to fuss with the dress, "I'm stuck. I have to stay around Jesse to protect him, even though Peter doesn't want me around him. And Jesse couldn't care less where I am. As long as I make a few lunches and dinner, he'll be happy."

"Marry me, then," said Arnie. "I can support you. That should solve most of your problems."

She turned to Arnie and smiled — she always had beautiful teeth, thought Jesse — and for a moment seemed to ponder the possibility. Then she started shaking her head. "No. Once Peter finds out I'll be marrying you, you won't have much of a job left."

"I'll get another one."

"In this town?" She coughed up a laugh. "Not without Peter's recommendation."

"I don't need it."

Linda smiled, as if she found the young man's naïve view of the world cute and attractively innocent.

"That's kind of you, Arnie. But still, he'll be working and we'll be unemployed. Besides, I'm sure it'll look just great to his divorce lawyer to have me hopping from one shack into another overnight. I'll be the out-of-the-closet adulteress, and Jesse will stay with Peter for sure. And I can't lose Jesse."

"I don't know how to tell you this, but ..." Jesse felt Arnie swallowing and, perhaps unsure of how Linda will react, spit out his comment as fast as he could. "Peter is having an affair with Louise from our office."

Linda's head whipped around to stare at Arnie. Her face hardened and her neck muscles bulged. Jesse worried she might take a swing at him.

"That son of a bitch," said Linda, forcing it slowly through clenched teeth. "And all this time I thought I was screwing him." She let out a huge sigh, but her body failed to relax. Her face grew redder as she continued. "I guess I should have expected it."

"But don't you see," said Arnie, sounding more animated and more nervous, "that makes your infidelity cancel out."

"Still, he has the job, she said. "My good deeds won't support me, and I won't have my good name after this affair gets out."

"His name won't be worth much either."

"It's different with men." Linda sounded increasingly bitter as her gaze pierced into Arnie. "Men forgive another man's infidelity and accuse the woman of not being supportive, or not being good at cooking or oral sex or something. Because of these excuses, men forgive themselves but don't forgive women, because a man's indiscretions were our fault. And because men dominate the businesses in this town, his reputation will remain fairly intact, while mine ..."

"I'm a man," said a solemn Arnie. "I don't think like that."

Linda paused and walked over to Arnie and stroked his hair.

"That's why I love you," said Linda. But for some reason, Jesse found no conviction in her voice anymore. She sounded preoccupied. "But I don't want anything to happen to you either. You're doing well at Peter's dealership. Coming out would ruin everything. You'll easily lose your job."

"But I can ..."

"No." Linda put her finger to his lips. "No. I have something else in mind for Peter now."

"What's that?"

But Linda had turned around and went back to the closet looking for shoes, ignoring Arnie completely. Linda started talking to herself.

"So, he's f— some bimbo on the side. That's fine. That's the trump card I need. He wants a divorce, eh? I almost considered it. But not now."

"Linda?" Jesse felt Arnie's anxiety as he tried to get in a word before Linda slips completely away — to no avail. Because even though Linda responded to his prompt and turned to look back at Arnie, she wasn't really talking to him.

"I'll drag out this marriage so long and be such a shrew, he'll plead for mercy. He'll beg for forgiveness. When he suggests separation again, I'll suggest marriage counselling and humiliate him in front of the counselor. If he suggests divorce, I'll suggest psychological therapy, even if only for myself. That will take months, if not years, to resolve itself. And finally, when he gets sick of it all, and tries to divorce me anyway, I'll mention his little affair. Then he'll collapse. He'll shrink down sheepishly, roll over, and play dead. Then, I can get my divorce on my terms. All the while, I'll keep doing my

charity work, so he'll have to pay for me and my new wardrobe. Perhaps I'll get a new car — at another dealership, of course ..."

Arnie and Jesse watched Linda's rage consuming her. Arnie interrupted.

"What about us, Linda?"

Linda paused, as if shaken from a dream. She walked over to the side of the bed. "I'm sorry, Arnie." She kissed him mechanically on the forehead. "But I have to do this. He deserves it. It's a battle of attrition now, and it's a battle I'm going to win. The future of my son is at stake." She walked back to the end of the bed and started putting on the dress.

"I'm sorry, too, for your son," said Arnie under his breath, though Jesse heard it. Arnie looked down at the bed sheets, then rolled out of bed, reached at a ball of clothes on the floor, and started pulling on his pants in silence.

* * *

Linda's room faded from view, and soon Jesse was floating in complete darkness. He didn't care. He didn't care about anything anymore. His brain had turned into mush after a flood of emotions overwhelmed him during his time in the chamber. Anger, disappointment, elation, rejection. In the end, seeing his parents go from loving each other to despising each other, willing to destroy each other's lives for Jesse's sake, was too much for him to handle. So he just hung in the air, feeling nothing, except the mucus from his nose running down over his upper lip into his mouth.

"Jesse?" Feszj's voice filled the sphere. "Jesse, if you'd like to exit the chamber, you need to place your feet on the ramp before I add gravity back into the room."

"I don't care," was Jesse's morose reply. Still, his feet extended down and found the ramp. The weight returned to his body, thoroughly weakened by the experience, and he almost collapsed and fell off. The chamber door opened and Feszj's silhouette filled the doorway. He reached for Jesse and helped him out of the blackness. Once out of the sphere, Jesse's body sagged into Feszj. Feszj guided him softly to the floor, removed the hood, and unfastened the back of the suit. Suddenly, Jesse heaved forward, head between his knees, and vomited half on the floor and half in the helmet.

"Shit," groaned Jesse.

"Don't worry about it. It happens often to first timers." Feszj dragged Jesse away from the splatter of half-digested pies and cakes. He pulled off his tunic and offered it to Jesse to clean his face and mouth.

"Are you okay, Jesse?" Feszj pulled Jesse's arms and legs out from the jumpsuit. Jesse was too exhausted to help. Feszj placed the soiled clothes on top of the putrid mess.

"Is that what really happened?" said Jesse, haltingly. He hoped it wasn't.

"Yes," said Feszj. "I'm sorry."

"Why, Feszj? Why did I need to see that?"

"To understand why so many people avoid their past and refuse to examine their lives. Memories are full of disillusionment and pain. But without this re-examination, people fail to see how competition and selfishness and malice have influenced their existences and the lives of others. By failing to scrutinize their histories, they overlook the cumulative affects that ill will has on themselves and their community. They ignore the disasters that competition has wreaked upon society because they have been raised and indoctrinated with the idea that competition is good and beneficial, and that any problem is simply an aberration and an isolated incident on the individual level.

"Yet, put all the individual transgressions together, and the picture is much different, looking much more like a systemic poison. It is a shame that your society is so blind to the epidemic amount of indiscretions caused by the philosophy of competition — the notion that one's success is based upon the forced failure of another. Yet, it is something they would see, if they'd only look."

Jesse and Feszj sat on the floor together, leaning their backs against the black walls of the chamber. They said nothing further to each other for a long time. Then, through the silence, Jesse could faintly hear the low thud of a bass drum's rhythmic beat coming from outside the dome. The celebration was still continuing, and he stirred.

"I'm your guest, eh?" said Jesse, with a sneer. "Look at me. On the floor with a face full of snot, sitting next to a pile of puke. Some guest I turned out to be."

"How you look," said Feszj, "is not as important as who you are. Why do you think we all wear pretty much the same functional outfit? Because respect for a person isn't determined by clothing; giving and garnering respect is a natural part of being human. We don't need to wear ties, or three-piece suits, or uniforms to create an artificial level of status which coerces respect from others. Your society seems to have more respect for the clothes people wear than for the people themselves. Clothes, therefore, determine who has to be respected and who doesn't. Clothing is just another method of social segregation."

Another lecture. And this one on clothing of all things. Jesse cringed to himself. It was not what he wanted to hear right now. Yet, since it distracted his thoughts, he thought up an appropriate question.

"But there are schools where every student wears the same clothes. What about them?"

"First of all," began Feszj, "not everyone wears the same clothes. Boys and girls have different outfits. It is not necessary to give men and women different attire, however, except to simply tell them apart. Your society still must overcome its exclusionary interpretation of a person's sex.

"Yet, even if that weren't the case, your students would still object to wearing the same clothes, as they do now, claiming that uniform dress codes stifle a person's individuality. But what they actually fear, and what they have been taught to fear in a competition-based society, is the lack of any indications of a person's status and the level of respect to be given or received. No longer is their position in the hierarchy of the school community determined beforehand, and their status and respect safely assured. No longer are their class distinctions identifiable. No longer are peer group identifications available. Instead, the students must fumble around, yanked from their preconceived notions of themselves and floating amongst a mass of lost and alienated fellow students, each re-determining status and respect on their own. What these students fear most, Jesse, is not losing individuality, but having to fabricate a new one without easy, clear-cut visual cues — which is what clothing is all about.

"Think about it," Feszj continued. "Would it be so much to ask of these students to simply treat everyone with respect? It would be so much easier and — Dare I say? — efficient if students didn't have to fight each other to garner respect. Unfortunately, this is one thing your competitive society refuses to permit. Respect has become a commodity as well, a scarce resource. So in the end, the uniform dress code is a great idea that is doomed to fail, because it contradicts what your society is all about."

Feszj placed his arm around Jesse, who was nodding in thought. "Anyway, I think it's time to go home, Jesse."

"I don't want to go home." Now, it was Feszj's turn to nod his head in understanding. "There's nothing there to go back to," continued Jesse. "My future is ruined because my past is so miserable."

"No, no, Jesse. Don't ever think that. Your future, and the future of all you come in contact with, is so much brighter and vibrant now that you have learned about your past. As I said before, knowledge isn't the end product for which we strive; it is only the beginning from which we start to design our environments and create our worlds.

"You, Jesse, are a part of that new beginning in your world. You will take the knowledge we provide and start to redesign the structures, institutions, and mores of your society and slowly commence the creation of a new world. Daunting? Of course. Impossible? Maybe. But it is the right thing to do."

Jesse turned his head and looked at Feszj.

"Do you believe in me?"

"Yes, Jesse. You have an entire community who believes in you and will support you in your endeavors. We are all here to help you help your world."

Spontaneously, and not knowing why, Jesse hugged Feszj, who lovingly hugged Jesse back.

"Well then," said Jesse, ending the embrace after a few moments. He tried to smile, but the thoughts of his mother and father interfered. "I guess I'm ready to go home."

"I think you are," agreed Feszj. "Just lie down on the floor, close your eyes, and you will soon wake up in your bedroom."

Jesse laid flat on the cool floor, trying to relax. Feszj saw the tension in Jesse, and spoke.

"Relax, Jesse. Remember what you have seen of our world. And think of what you might have missed if you had left too soon."

Jesse smiled. His breathing deepened.

"Would you like to come back?" asked Feszj.

"Yes."

"We'll be waiting."

Jesse's spirits lifted knowing he could return. He closed his eyes, and shortly he felt a dull ache radiate from his nose to cover the front of his face. He opened his eyes and saw his shadowy room in the dim pre-dawn light. He rubbed his eyes, to clear out the granules of sand, and cringed at touching his swollen tissues. The metal splint covering his nose also got in his way. He also realized he had to go pee. Jesse walked into the bathroom and turned on the light. He squinted from the sudden glare, which sent a stinging pain through his nostrils.

After relieving himself, he stood in front of the mirror. He saw his eye sockets turning blue. He saw his hair all tousled and unkempt. His clothes were disheveled. The combination of sweat and the brown of leftover iodine created what looked like age spots on his face. Jesse looked and felt old and beaten.

"How the hell does he expect me to do anything looking like this?" muttered Jesse.

Remember, Jesse ...

Jesse spun around the room looking for where the voice originated. "Feszj?"

... In the end, it's not what you look like that counts, but who you are.

"Feszj? Is that you? Where are you?" He looked around the house stealthily, not wanting to wake up his parents, but found no one. Puzzled, he went back to his room,

passing all his now meaningless trophies along the way. He decided tomorrow, he would throw them away. No, that would be wasteful. Perhaps he could give them away to anybody who wanted them.

He considered his options as he took off his clothes and slid himself under the covers of his bed. Yet despite his uncertainty, and realizing these trophies held no significance for him anymore, he smiled.

* * *

"Jesse, wake up."

Dr. Macy nudged Jesse from his trance. Jesse felt a bit more groggy this time than previously. He pryed his eyes open and saw the doctor standing over him, glasses resting atop her forehead and pen in hand. On her chair were dozens of pages of notes flipped over on her pad and cascading off the front of the seat.

"We've had a very good session, Jesse. We covered a lot of ground."

Jesse groaned as he struggled to urge his sleepy body to stand up. Dr. Macy grabbed him under the armpits and helped him to his feet. Once on his feet, he recovered his senses. Standing eye to eye with the doctor, he noticed her eyes were a little more wet than usual, and her nose a bit redder. She quickly avoided his gaze and moved to the door to call the attendant. Her unusual appearance didn't register with him until he happened to glance at the wastebasket at the side of her desk. In it was a bunch of used tissues. A slight grin appeared on his face. Dr. Macy returned with the attendant and again asked Jesse how he was doing.

"Thank you, Doctor," said Jesse.

"For what?" she replied, somewhat surprised.

"For helping me remember my past so vividly once again." He drew himself up to his full height. "I realized in those brief eight hours at Vilmar, I was happy and fulfilled. People loved me just for me, despite all my faults and foibles, and despite a soul being cluttered with past sins and pent up anger. For the first time in my life, all the pain, all the suffering, all the anguish of being forced to live as selfishly and as miserably as our wretched little world itself ... disappeared.

He and the orderly proceeded to the door of her office. "You don't believe me, do you?" he said, his back to her.

"I'll see you next time," was her non-committal reply. Jesse spun around. Caught off guard, the orderly's hand sprung out and grabbed Jesse by the shoulder.

"Don't you understand?" pleaded Jesse. "It was real. As real as your couch, or your office ... or your tears." Doctor Macy looked away and down at her note pad on the chair. "I saw utopia. I felt its earth in my fingers and tasted its food on my tongue. I experienced the kiss of its love. The warmth of its friendship."

The orderly started pulling Jesse out the door, but Jesse held on to the door frame.

"Doctor!" Doctor Macy looked up from her notes as he continued.

"I'll never forget that first visit, and I don't ever want to forget it. In that brief span of time, everything changed for me. I realized then how lucky I was and how fortunate I was ... because I had been to paradise and back."

Nine

The gymnasium was hot, steamy, humid. Thousands of frantic fans breathed moisture and exuded perspiration and heat into the air and were comforted little by the overworked air conditioning. The noise inside the arena could have drowned out a jet engine. The pep band, wearing thin white cotton gloves which protected their instruments from the corrosive sweat, galloped through the school fight song one more time.

The referee sliced the thick air and the eardrums of the spectators on court side whistling the end of the time out. The teams broke from their huddles. The radio announcer called the final moments of the game.

"This amazing game is down to its last ten seconds with the home team, Denison University, its number one ranking in jeopardy, only up by one — plenty of time for Central to get one last shot off and win it. Central will be taking the ball out at mid-court. Becker in bounds the ball to Johnson who quickly dribbles up the floor to avoid the double team. Seven seconds now. She passes to Miller who desperately searches of an opening. Three seconds. Whoa! She zips the ball back to Johnson who was wide open under the basket and puts in an embarrassingly easy lay-up which puts Central up by one. That's the game unless a miracle happens. Guess who botched that assignment, fans. Denison, with no time outs left, in bounds the ball...."

Only a second and a half remained on the clock when the ball was sent up for a 'Hail Mary' shot from half court which missed by a couple of feet to the left. No miracle today. The game ended with an upset win by Central State over the heavy favorite Denison University.

The Central Bench, along with the few fans in the upper rows waving their simple "Go Central" banner, exploded in an unexpected victory celebration. The rest of the crowd sat stunned. The number one team in the division upset by a nobody. Central State, though up-and-coming, was still a second-rate basketball program with a second-rate team. Slowly, as they recovered from the shock and the reality set in, the despondent fans shuffled out the exits, gasping for the fresher, cooler air outside. All the while, they

mumbled curses under their breaths. Except for one elderly gentleman, who worked his way down to court side against the flow of the spectators. His curses were disturbingly audible.

"Hey, C-C."

One of Denison's players — number 6 — frowned and wearily followed the voice over to the bench.

"I'm really sorry, Coach. My feet got tangled up. I guess my legs were more tired than I thought."

"Don't take it so hard," said the Denison Coach Bob Daniels. "Flukes happen."

"But I let the whole team down," said the young woman, almost breaking down into tears. Some of her teammates tried to comfort her. The rest of the Denison team converged on their coach.

"Hey, it's just a game," said Coach Daniels. "We'll get over it and move on. If we had to lose a game, it might as well have been against a team we won't play again."

The team had a mild laugh. Spirits, though low, were not unbearable. Everyone started gathering up their belongings.

"And now," said the coach to the group, "the pressure of being undefeated is gone. We can relax and play even better basketball. Starting tomorrow at the usual time."

The young number six wasn't listening now. She was walking over to the Central bench, which was still tipsy from their surprising victory.

"Hello, Trina," she said. Trina Johnson, the game winner for Central, turned around, saw who was in front of her, and flung herself on the girl.

"C-C! Wasn't that a great game?" Trina realized what she said, and backed off. "Oops, sorry."

"Hey, no problem, Trina." C-C's attitude changed completely from her depression only moments before to a much more conciliatory tone now. The two began walking out to center court away from the benches. "If we had to lose, I'm glad we lost to you and your team."

Trina appreciated her understanding. "Congrats on your success. Number seven in the country? That's pretty good."

"We won't be number seven much longer, I'm afraid."

The two athletes stood more and more uncomfortable in the growing silence, both not wanting to say something, yet both thinking the same thing — even though for different reasons. C-C spoke again.

"It's been a long time since last summer."

"Yes, it has," replied Trina.

Last summer. Neither Trina nor C-C could forget last summer.

Both had just finished their Junior year at college and has come home for the summer break when they hooked up. They had been great friends since they played basketball together on their high school team.

The two were inseparable during their high school years. They had arranged their class schedules so they would be in the same classes. They studied at each other's houses, went to movies together, babysat together, even became sick on the same days. Their class yearbook had them listed under the caption 'Most Likely To Be Seen Together.' The only time the two were ever seen apart was during basketball games. C-C was the all-star; Trina made the starting five only occasionally. However, the disparity of talent between the two girls never intruded upon their friendship.

What was also never seen was the two of them playing basketball against each other. They would play pick-up games all the time in the gym and outside on the asphalt, but never did anyone see them playing on different teams. It was an unusual situation, a situation their high school basketball coach went to great pains and little success to disrupt. During practice scrimmages, whenever Trina and C-C were on different teams, neither would challenge the other, nor charge the net past or shoot over the other. Neither would do anything to make the other look bad in any way. And no amount of yelling or persuasion or punitive bouts of plyometrics and push-ups from Coach would deter these two girls from their unwritten rules not to ever compete against each other. It seemed to be their own private rebellion.

They would have even gone to the same college, and had called several admissions departments to see if it were possible to room together on campus. Those arrangements might have come to pass if C-C hadn't received offers of full scholarships from almost every university in the county. Or the fact that C-C would have had to live in special dorms with fellow basketball players and not with Trina. At one time, C-C decided to forego the universities and their scholarships just to go to the local state school with Trina. C-C's father quickly squelched that idea. "If you're going to play basketball," he said. "you might as well get a free education for it."

C-C couldn't resist, and wouldn't fight, the powerful pressure placed on her by Carl. She loved him. It was he who made her the all-star she was. He had guided her life and training, all the while each one knowing her college education expenses would be covered by her athletic abilities. Going to college was expensive, and C-C didn't have it in her heart to place such a burden on her dad. He had enough trouble paying his own bills,

much less student loans. In the end, after plenty of soul searching, and much unselfish encouragement from Trina, and comforted by the knowledge that they will both be around during summer breaks, C-C opted for the full ride at Denison University.

So, for the next few years, the two girls went their separate ways, if only physically. They remained in constant contact through letters and phone calls — conscientiously squeezed between class assignments, practices, and visits to the library, tutoring center, and strength training center. The free phone card she received courtesy of the Denison Athletic Department certainly helped out.

And finally, after years of haranguing his coach, C-C was able to swing a game against Trina and Central State. She didn't know what was going to happen on the court between them, since they had never played against each other before, but she didn't really give it much thought, elated as she was simply for the opportunity. And Trina became giddy with excitement when she first found out about the game at Denison University, a place she had never seen but had heard so much about from C-C — especially the home-cooked waffles, the best she's ever had, where the eggs are pressed and cooked directly on top of the waffle.

So much exhilaration was in the air only a few months ago in August when they last met before C-C had to leave for Denison the following morning. Trina's Mom and Dad left that morning with her younger brother for the beginning of the week-long orientation at Central State. Gary was already quite familiar with the school from his many visits to his sister, but the orientation was required of all in-coming freshman, and worth an easy one credit, so the three left. Trina stayed behind to spend one more day with C-C.

C-C arrived at Trina's house just after Trina's family departed. The two sat in the kitchen for a while, talking continuously, but not saying much of anything. Then, out of the blue, Trina rose up from her seat and grabbed C-C's hand.

"Follow me."

She pulled C-C up the stairs into her brother's small room, made even smaller by the platform bed, a desk, a dusty drum set in the corner, and various book shelves. C-C stood by and watched as Trina rummaged through her brother's closet and emerged with a box filled with paperback science fiction books.

"What are you doing?" asked C-C.

"Guess what I found the other day looking for some of my old sci-fi books."

Trina lifted out of the box hand fulls of books and laid them on the carpet. Then, after nearly emptying the box, brought out several crumpled and badly folded magazines. Trina handed them to C-C as she read the titles.

"Hustler. Gallery. Erika Vixen Shows Her Oral Techniques ..."

As Trina watched, C-C flipped tentatively through the pages — shocked and fascinated at the same time. She giggled out of embarrassment at some of the models's comical poses and the observation that despite being stark naked a pair of stiletto shoes always remained on their feet.

"You know, I've heard a lot of talk about these, but never I've never actually seen one," admitted C-C. She wanted to be repulsed by the pictures. Publicly, she probably would have been the first to cast pornography into the flames of censorship. It would have been the enlightened feminist thing to do. Yet, egged on by her best friend's tacit approval, she found herself irresistibly turning the pages, exploring the flat abdomens, the round breasts, the pristine skin, and the other marks of seeming perfection in their bodies — rationalizing all the while that she really ought to have first hand experience about what she is condemning. "Where did he get these?" asked C-C.

"Who knows? Maybe from one of his friends." Trina reached in for another magazine. "Ah. Here's the one." Trina handed C-C another magazine.

"Cheerleaders in Heat? What's this all about?"

"Look."

C-C opened the magazine and began reading the captions along side the color photographs.

"Tanya and Jessica practiced their cheers for the big game tomorrow. But they were too hot in the sweat suits they wore. So they took off their clothes and kept practicing in their underwear..."

While she read and viewed the pictures, she often glanced at Trina, who wore an odd, almost leering and expectant smile on her face. C-C's heart crept up her throat. She looked at Trina more carefully not wishing to misread her intentions. The glint in Trina's eyes confirmed C-C's hunch, and her mouth went dry.

"Ever since I saw these magazines, especially that one, I wondered," said Trina.

"Wondered what?" C-C licked moisture back on to her lips. She knew what Trina wondered and C-C's first reaction was to say no to what it was. But, this was her best friend — the woman she turned down dates just to be with — suggesting this. C-C thought that if Trina felt that comfortable suggesting such a liaison with her, was she being prudish in rejecting her attention? Should she not feel flattered that Trina would want to make love with her?

C-C remembered in rapid succession their experiences together growing up and dealing with their budding sexuality. They shared the embarrassment of buying their first training

bras and their first tampons. They shared their sexual fantasies and dream, and the ways they would relieve their tension. But C-C could never explain why she examined her best friend's muscular legs and slender arms as Trina strode along the beach in her bikini. It didn't seem right to mention how her breathing would increase and her heart would pound as she watched Trina spread white streaks of soap across her tanned body in the shower after every practice. Secretively, she would look at Trina, whose body easily rivaled any C-C saw in the magazine, in much the same way Trina was now looking at her.

"Want to give it a try?" asked Trina, standing up.

What is most surprising, C-C thought, was that this encounter hasn't happened sooner. So without realizing, C-C dropped the magazine to the floor and replied, "I would like to."

And that's how it began. On the last day they were together before college split them apart once more, the two friends explored their deepest feelings for each other by exploring each others deepest pleasures. For only a few all-too-brief hours, in a blur of ecstasy and emotion, the two young women intertwined within a lifetime of pent-up love and loving.

This is what C-C remembered as she stood on the court in front of Trina. She also remembered the letters she wrote to Trina explaining why she didn't date men for more than a few weeks at a time in high school, and why she primarily only double dated. It was all an unconscious ploy just so she could be near Trina. She wrote Trina how she finally understood why her college relationships with men were disasters. She had tried to first ignore, then deny her true orientation. She wrote Trina how it was this past summer's love-making, along with the years of trust and devotion, which had helped her come to terms with the fact that she was a lesbian.

"You're more beautiful than ever," whispered C-C, not wanting Trina's teammates to overhear that comment in case Trina hasn't come out yet.

"Thank you," said Trina, staring at the scuff marks on the floor. Without raising her head, she continued, "I have a boyfriend..."

C-C almost laughed. It was Trina's kind of humor, but it didn't have her comic inflection.

"... and I'm engaged to be married next summer."

"What?" She couldn't believe it. She didn't want to believe it. *Was this the same woman who wrapped her body so eagerly around mine?* she thought.

"I'm sorry. I would have told you sooner but Timmy only asked me last night."

C-C was still stunned by the revelation. *This is impossible. No straight woman could have loved another woman so thoroughly and so freely.* "I don't understand."

"C-C," said Trina, "like I said then, I was just wondering what it was like. It was supposed to be just a one time thing. It wasn't meant to be a mutual discovery of our inner selves, though I am overjoyed that it did help you find your calling. But I'm not gay."

C-C's heart disintegrated. For over a decade, C-C thought they had been building up a relationship just so they could be lovers. And now, once committed to a new lifestyle, she was losing the very person she most desired. She stood speechless and unbelieving. Trina noticed the disappointment in C-C's face and tried to say something that would help ease the shock.

"We can still be good friends."

Good friends. Of all the brutalities — to be simply good friends. The words sounded so cliché and lifeless, dropping to the floor, worthless, like a sack of manure. C-C hopelessly scrambled for the argument that would convince Trina otherwise.

"But it was so wonderful, and it felt so right ..."

"It was okay. I mean, to be honest, it wasn't as earth shattering as I thought it would be."

No insult could have stabbed deeper into C-C's heart. *We were young and inexperienced*, she rationalized to herself. *It'll get better.*

"I love you," blurted C-C. "I thought you loved me."

"I don't love you that way." Trina grew more irritated by C-C's stubborn reluctance. "It was just a fling. Get over it."

C-C pleaded with her eyes. Trina felt sorry for her friend but had nothing to offer except solace, which didn't seem to help. A quick parting might be the best solution.

"Look," said Trina, "I have to get back to my team. I'll write. See ya."

That's it? Without as much as a peck on the cheek — something Trina always had done — she was going to just walk away? Not knowing what else to do, C-C grabbed Trina by the arms and attempted to pull her into an embrace. Trina, momentarily surprised, fought her off.

"Get away from me!"

Members of both teams turned their heads to the sound of raised voices. Some started walking towards the couple, thinking a scuffle was about to begin.

At this point, on to the court marched a middle-aged behemoth of a man. Sweat dripped down his nose onto a perspiration-discolored shirt. His head and eyes fixed on target, he went straight for the two friends in the middle of the court, ignoring the two teams and passing the other players converging on Trina and C-C. The two girls turned their heads and saw the man approaching.

"Hi, Dad," said C-C, forcing a smile.

"Hello, Mister ..." But that was all Trina could utter before Carl's fat hand slammed into C-C's face, cracking the heavy Gym air, buckling her knees, and sending her to the wood floor. Within moments, both teams scrambled around C-C, while the two coaches surrounded the irate giant, who was standing over C-C and glaring at her like a boxer taunting his fallen opponent.

"Get away from me!" ordered Carl, scuffling with the coaches. "I'm her father!"

"That's no reason to hit her," replied Coach Daniels.

"Bullshit! The way she threw that game, I'm surprised you're still talking to her."

The two groups of players were instantly silent. Only C-C's whimpering could be heard. "That's not true." she said, muffled by the hands covering her face.

"Isn't it?" he yell back at his daughter. "Those missed picks. Playing a zone instead of a man-on-man, and a man-on-man instead of a zone. Hands up in the air blocking a shot when you knew full well a pass was coming up, and then throwing yourself out of position trying to pick off passes. Those missed shots from the left side. Hell, you could hit those blindfolded."

"Daddy, I didn't." She protested more vigorously now. She noticed the players on both sides listening to Carl with increasing interest, and it frightened her.

"Oh, but you tried to be sneaky," Carl continued, waving a finger at her. "Making your mistakes look like miscalculations or overly aggressive defense. Playing just good enough to keep yourself from being pulled out of the game. Making a few steals, then tripping over your own feet and watching helplessly as the ball bounces out of bounds. Aww, too bad. How unfortunate. The fans were even sorry for you, thinking luck wasn't on your side tonight, with your normally brilliant technique eluding you, always just inches away from a spectacular play."

Carl spoke to her team. "Surely, you must have seen all that?" Then to the coaches. "Didn't you two?"

The coaches's grips weakened, as they furrowed their brows, allowing Carl to shrug their hands off.

"Oh, so you didn't know?" There was almost contempt in his voice at these coaches's ignorance. "Well, I knew. Hell, I should. I taught her the game. Taught her how to dribble and how to pass. Then, when her coaches took over, I watched her play and saw every single game of her basketball career, and scrutinized her every single move. If anyone in the world knows what she can and can't do, it's me. And I tell you, she threw

this game big time. Remember on the last play, when she supposedly tripped? Nonsense. She couldn't trip over a four foot high curb. She's much too good to be that slow."

At that point, Carl pretended he was C-C defending an imaginary opponent, but because of his age, he was clumsy and looked ridiculous. Yet his words were impassioned and full of imagery and the inconceivable.

"She can read an opponent's direction in their hips. She can see the changing tension in their leg muscles, and know which leg is pushing off. She can sense the move, beat her opponent to it, and force them to adjust and move where she wanted them to go. I've seen too many of her opponents stumble into a travelling violation, and then shake their heads wondering how she knew. She's that good."

"Daddy, I was just tired tonight." However, she became terrified when she saw doubt creeping into her coach's eyes.

Yes, Daniels, too, had seen her amazing abilities. *Maybe she can read minds*, he once considered in private. But more impressive than her quickness was her indefatigable endurance. She could play an entire game without even the hint of slowing down. She never got tired, and if she did, she would never use that as an excuse.

Trina pricked up her ears. She, as well, never ever heard C-C make excuses for being tired. As Coach Daniels ruminated on what he heard, Trina leaned down next to her friend.

"You believe me, don't you?" whispered C-C.

But Trina wasn't listening. She couldn't trust what C-C was saying. But she desperately wanted to believe, wanted to dispel the doubt. So, instead, Trina searched for the truth in C-C's statements first by examining the open sincerity of an honest face — a face she had seen C-C wear many times during their many intimate conversations growing up together. She then looked into her eyes and looked deeper into her mind to find the honest and fearless passion for sport and competition which made her so invincible on the court.

Instead, she saw anxiety on her face, a product of deceit. But her eyes were more revealing. Trina saw a fear in C-C's eyes she had not seen since her mother passed away a decade ago. It was not the fear of losing a game. That's only superficial and disappears until the next game. What Trina detected was something much more pervasive, something that penetrated into the darkest recesses of her nightmares. C-C wasn't worried about losing something; she feared losing everything.

"But why?" asked Coach Daniels, coming out of his thoughts. "Why would she throw a game? Was she doing it for money? Something like that could get her suspended from the conference."

"It was because of her." Snarling, Carl pointed an accusing finger at Trina. "My daughter is in love with her."

All eyes turned towards Trina. Mortified, she fired back to the group, "But I am not in love with her! At least, not any more."

"What do you mean?" asked C-C, her body beginning to shake.

"You know what I mean. You're lying like a rug." She turned to the group around her. "Everything she has told us is a lie. She threw the game, and she knows she did it."

"Who the hell are you, and how do you know?" demanded Daniels.

"I *was* her best friend in the whole world. We shared everything — thoughts, dreams, aspirations. If anyone can tell about that part of her personality and what goes on inside her brain, I can. And she's lying. I know."

"Oh, shit!" said the coaches in unison. Both sent their assistant coaches racing off to see if they could track down the game officials before they left the parking lot. The few spectators who wandered down to the court out of curiosity and overheard Trina's comments went away with mixed feelings. Denison fans, gleefully hoping for a re-match, trotted off to find someone else to tell, rehearsing and embellishing the story in their heads as they searched. State fans cursed their rotten luck under their breath, and how it was just too good to last. But both groups, however, publicly decried C-C's behavior — one group for throwing the game, the other for cracking under the pressure. Even though she hasn't yet admitted anything, the fans could sense the tide of player sentiment shifting away from C-C. Her feeble protests convinced the on-lookers of her guilt; and as the protestation grew more impotent, the more her conduct was condemned. It was only a matter of time.

C-C, however, still hung on the word 'was'. From that point on, the world sped by in slow motion. Her life froze as events rushed past. Her memories were viscous at this point, thick and murky and almost impenetrable. All she could recall was an indecipherable mass of accusations, counter-accusations, demands for everything from a simple censure to her expulsion from school. C-C can't remember if she protested or defended herself from any of the comments made or actions taken against her; and if she did, they must have sounded confused or incoherent, further sealing her fate. It made little difference now, however. It was her father who took over the situation. His size and dynamism commanded respect. And despite all the things she forgot, her father's voice still rings clear in her memories.

"Do you realize how arrogant and selfish you were doing what you did?" C-C looked at her father, her eyes pleading: *Don't do this to me, Dad. Not in public. Please.* But she couldn't say anything. It would have made no difference anyway. All eyes were on him

now. He owned the floor and the air and all the ears around him; and he would never give it up until he spoke his mind. "Look what you did to your own team."

C-C vaguely recalled the humiliation of being forced — partly out of embarrassment and partly because she lacked the ability to resist her father's will when it dominated the moment — to look at her teammates. Each face she saw expressed disappointment and anger. Most had their arms folded in front of their bodies. Others couldn't even look back, and turned their heads away, so ashamed they were of her. C-C let her head sink to her chest.

"By running around the court with her own agenda," said Carl to her team, "she decided all by herself what the best interests of your team were. Her rules for victory were different than your yours, and she was going to make sure you abided by them. Hell, she wasn't even playing the same game as everyone else. She was off in her own personal world, guided by some twisted holier-than-thou sense of moral righteousness, and damn anyone and everyone who got in her way."

"But, Dad..." C-C tried to interrupt.

"That was what she did to you" he continued. Carl wasn't listening to her — not while he made his speech. "She had no respect for you. She had no care for your desires or ambitions this evening. It was her game tonight, and you were all gracious enough to join her and do your part — which you did magnificently."

Even while Carl spoke, her teammates had heard enough and left the court in disbelief, mumbling things like how could she do that, how could she so easily sell us out. If looks could kill, no cat could have survived her team's departure. C-C even remembered several ominous suggestions about finding another place to live. The athlete's dorm might no longer be the 'healthiest' place to reside.

Carl then shifted his attention to the State players. "But even more than changing the rules and the game itself without informing anyone," he said, "she toyed with you and manipulated your behavior to fit her agenda. She had no respect for you as players or competitors. She treated you like little pieces on her own life-sized checkers board, moved around at her command, jumped around at her whim. And you all performed brilliantly. Sure, you may have won, but your victory is empty knowing she could have just as easily beaten you as she let you win."

The State players and coaches shuffled off the court in silence, their short-lived ecstasy crushed as they witnessed their dramatic upset victory snatched away by the most miserable of fates. Some tried to salvage a semblance of dignity by claiming that one person could only do so much to dictate the flow of the game in a team sport. Yet its appeal was

superficial; they also knew that the performance of certain players can either inspire or discourage the performance of entire teams. There was no doubt of C-C's basketball virtuosity; there was, therefore, no doubt her play could be influential.

As the State player's left, only Trina stayed behind. C-C smiled when she saw her remaining — but not for long.

"You son of a bitch," Trina spit out. C-C reeled from the invective. Trina stormed off, saying in a blur of words something to the effect that C-C and she are no longer friends, not to write her any more, and that she'll find another maid-of-honor for the wedding.

Coach Daniels was the last of her team to leave. His face looked worn out, his hair a bit grayer, and his body beaten. He stared at her, his greatest player and perhaps the best player in women's college basketball, now snivelling on the floor. He felt sorry for her, to have to fall so far after rising so high. He looked apologetically at Carl and was about to speak, but Carl — who was bristling at the thought of anyone feeling sorry for him — spoke first.

"Go away."

Deflated, Daniels said nothing. He simply nodded in understanding, and returned his gaze to C-C, who absentmindedly nursed the bulging welt on the side of her face and silently begged for some sign of kindness.

"See me in my office tomorrow," he said. "We'll talk about your future with the team then."

It was a visit she would never make.

Having nothing more to say, off he went, mumbling about the end of the season, losing the national championship, and the silly reason that would make an All-American go bad.

C-C suddenly, but all too late, came to her senses when she realized everyone had left her to deal with her father alone. She glanced up at him, and there he was, towering over her and glaring at her, his face as crimson as a setting sun.

"My daughter — the dyke."

"How did you know, Dad?"

"Hell, don't you think a dad can tell if his own daughter's a queer? I'm the laughing stock of the community and a leper at the construction site. They all think that since I raised you, I didn't do my job as a parent properly. I raised a faggot, and it's all my fault. They talk behind my back, too embarrassed to tell me to my face, but I can tell. I can read their eyes. Some of them even think that I haven't remarried because I found myself, and this whole tough guy act is somehow either denial or a show. Once you're branded a

queer, you can't win. No matter what you say, no matter what you do, they'll make you one whether you are or not."

"I'm sorry."

"I don't f— care any more, you know. You've been sorry too many times. You disappointment me, then you apologize, and then you go right back and disappointment me again. I'm getting tired of it."

"I'm sorry." C-C knew she shouldn't say it, but she didn't know what else to say.

"Do you have any idea how hard it was up there in the stands to watch you f— up on purpose. Do you realize how difficult it was to control myself, to keep from storming down to the court and dragging you off. But I stayed up there, biting my tongue, and waited. I thought maybe you wanted to give Trina's team a close match, give them the good feeling of a close match, but in the end, put them away.

"But when you just let her get around you as if you had nailed your feet to the floor, and then she made the winning basket, I felt sick. I literally felt sick. That was, by far, the most repulsive thing you had ever done. I couldn't believe, and still can't believe you could do that to me. You humiliated me. I never imagined that you would so completely ignore everything I have taught you about competition. Didn't anything I taught you sink in?"

"But she's my friend," was C-C's weak response.

"I've spent ten years of my life raising and training one of the best basketball players in the US, and here you go and throw it all away for the most vile of reasons."

"But I thought it was the right thing to do."

"Who told you it was the right thing to do?"

"But I thought ..."

"And who told you to think?" interrupted Carl, trying to shout his daughter into submission.

"Coach did!" yelled back C-C. "He said 'Always think about moving, and move about thinking'."

"Oh, Christ. You are dumber than I ever imagined. Did you forget how to think once you got to college?" C-C cringed in humiliation on the floor. "Think about you plays, think about your position on the court, think about your teammates. That's what it's all about. But most of all, you are to think what your coach has told you to think and do. There is no place for independent thought out there on the court. That's why you practice over and over again, so the moves and plays and shots and everything become second

nature. In the end, you are taught to react, not think, because thinking takes too much time; and the best coaches are the ones who have taught you to react in the right way.

"At no time did he ever say think about your friends on the other team, and do what's right for them. His comments had nothing to do with friendship. Friendships, in fact, have nothing to do with the game — any game!"

Carl paced back and forth on the court, considering his next comments.

"Think back," he began, "to other games you've played against people. No matter who they are — whether friends, acquaintances, strangers, or enemies — your off the court relationships mean nothing in the middle of that competitive moment.

"Football players may chat with each other going on and off the field or pick each other up off the turf when the play ends, but during the moment of contest all conversation ends and business starts. Or on a baseball diamond. Players will talk to each other on the bases but to this day, no one has been saved from being tagged out as a favor.

"It is one of those unwritten rules of sport. Friendships cannot intrude upon competition — they get in the way of each other. You must always treat every opponent the same way, with no special favors and no special hatreds. Each side knows it. Each side expects it. They don't care about your GPA, or the trouble with your menstruation, or your lack of sleep last night. You and they are all their with a job to do — to play a game, and to win. They care only that you have come to play to win.

"Sure, people have feelings for friends; but these feelings, if not suppressed, prevent opponents from playing their hardest. Otherwise, you choke. All of a sudden, you unconsciously feel sorry for your opponent. You view that person as yourself — someone who gets hurt when they lose — and not as an opponent. So you ease up, not wanting to hurt anyone, and eventually they win. Now, who feels worse? You feel even more miserable that you choked. Because of this feeling, there is obviously something inherently wrong with not trying to win, yet we're constantly socialized into thinking that winning is somehow evil. But it's not. That's why sports psychologists spend thousands of hours convincing athletes it's okay to win and beat someone else, because the opponent expects it. It is necessary for the game to function.

"So, face it! Competition may not be a pretty spectacle — with everyone smiling throughout and, in the end, no one is the worse for wear — but it is a fact of life, where players win and players lose. And the only way to play is to win. If you don't want to win, don't compete. Your half-hearted, uninspired play takes away from all the other competitors. It's not selfish or immoral to try to win. It is expected. It is the only way to compete."

Carl tried to slow his breathing to prevent himself from hyperventilating. He took a deep breath, held it, and then slowly released it, producing a breathy whistle in the process. C-C, however, couldn't calm down. Her father's face never changed color. In fact, the more he thought, the redder it became.

"But by trying to win unfairly or trying not to win at all cheats both you and your teammates and the other team of the optimum experience of competition. You forced them all to play a game they did not wish to play and thus deprived them of that maximal experience of playing in a game where everyone is questing for the highest level of excellence. That can't be achieved unless everyone, winners and losers, tries their hardest to win."

"Wait a minute. I thought you just said the goal of competition is winning."

"Listen to what I am saying, and think for a change!" Carl again shouted down his daughter. "Yes. The goal of every competitive encounter is to try your damndest to win. But if each opponent does that, all will be engaged in a quest for excellence. Sure, it's great to win, and it's miserable to lose. It should be that way. How else will you be encouraged to fight and struggle all the way to victory. But win or lose, you always come back because it's the competition itself — this mutual quest for excellence — that makes you a better person. But in order for this to happen, everyone has to try to win in order to maximize their experience."

For a moment, Cal stopped talking. He stood unopposed, or so he thought. For after he made his last comment, an idea sprung into C-C's head. A devilishly logical idea that she had to bring up.

"But if we all played our best to win, we would have crushed them. They did not have the talent of the stamina to keep up."

"Sure, that's going to happen. So what?"

A smile appeared on C-C's face and broadened the more she thought of how she had trapped her father into a logical error.

"But don't you see, Dad. By not playing my best, each team was able to maximize their efforts. My team struggled harder to compensate for my ineptness. And their team struggled harder because being in the game encouraged them to keep trying to stay in the game. After all, there is no heart to struggle when one is losing by a landslide."

Carl's face grimaced as his brow furrowed. His position of dominance slipped as he considered the challenge posed against him.

"A lost cause is the only one worth fighting for."

"You may think so," said C-C, "but not everyone. Their maximum quest for excellence occurs when they are in the thick of a fight."

Carl's anger increased. He felt his dominance slipping as C-C countered his arguments. He tried a different tact, one which ought to work.

"You didn't maximize your experience."

"I chose not to."

"Then you don't belong in the game. Your presence soils the integrity of the game."

"Maximizing another's quest for excellence may require me not to," she replied. And then, with a smirk, "Like a father teaching his daughter how to play basketball."

"Don't give me any of your college-educated back talk," said Carl, a shroud of hatred transforming his face. "So, you want to play the goodie-two-shoes athlete, picking and choosing when to try hard, and how hard to try just to help everyone else out? Go ahead. See how far that attitude gets you in the world. See how many times you can be stepped on and walked over. See how many times people repay you for your courtesy on the battlefield. See how far you get by not competing, and you'll realize how stupid that idea is. A dead person is never repaid."

"Think, before your education clouds your mind for good. You wouldn't have reached this level of play by losing. You wouldn't have made it to the top of your class if it weren't by winning the grade game. You won't make it in society unless you win the job search contest. Unless you want to be a peasant the rest of your life — struggling to keep the vermin vying for your food at bay, begging for some sleep as the box you sleep in leaks, hoping the homeless shelter is not only open but has removed the lice from the bedding — you're going to have to compete, and you're going to have to compete to win."

C-C cringed at her dad's brutal honesty. He has a point, as disgusting as it may be.

"Your problem is that you're sorry for losers. Well, don't feel sorry for them. They knew what it took to win. They accepted the challenge. And they'll despise you if you let them win. People don't want unearned victories. They are meaningless and humiliating events, and these athletes will hate you and never compete with you again. And those that do will use you like a bully uses his victim — as an ego boost for those who think winning is the ultimate justification for competition. Your sickening attitude perpetually sustains the nourishment for these parasites, and does nothing to help them overcome their problem. You — with your anti-competitive nonsense — and they — with their winning for the sake of winning mind set — will never amount to anything, and together tarnishes forever the glory of sport."

"In the end, the only person you should feel sorry for is yourself, because you are the ultimate loser. You will never improve your lot or anyone else's lot unless you compete, unless you try to win, unless you take your proper place in the mutual quest for excellence."

C-C felt overwhelmed by what her dad said. She was always amazed at how much thought he put into his understanding of competition and sport. His understanding of their subtleties and his tremendous grasp of reality constantly surprised her. He's done his homework, as her teachers might say. Every time he spoke, in spite of what her emotional state is at that time and in spite of the humiliation she suffered this time, she couldn't help but love him.

Carl, however, was not done talking to C-C.

"If you remember anything from this conversation — and God know, you'd better — remember this. Friends? Shit. Friendships are for off the court, when you're not competing. On the court, you have only one objective — to win. You can't be both a friend and a competitor at the same time. One must give, and today you made the wrong choice. Look at everyone you let down — your teammates, your coach, your fans, even the friend you loved. You lost them and their respect because you failed to treat them with respect. You failed to provide them a challenge with which they could develop and excel. The excellence everyone on the court searched and strove for was thwarted by you.

"You have to try to win. With that goal in mind, a shared quest for excellence exists, spurred on by mutual struggle and conflict. Competition tests and forces individuals to the maximum in effort and exertion. But by being friends on the court, you give up both the possibility of winning and thus the quest for excellence — not only for yourself, but for everyone else in the contest. Friendship while competing just gets in the way. In fact, as you've just shown, it's downright selfish."

Granted, she awed his ability to weave a compelling argument for competition, but that last statement — that friendship is somehow selfish — threw her. "That doesn't make any sense. I don't understand."

Suddenly, Carl's shoulders sagged. In one swift moment, something changed in him. "I'm tired of having to explain everything to you. After all these years, you should know by now what I mean. If you don't understand now, you never will."

"But I'm not like you."

"No. You could have been so much better than me. But look at you now. Broken, grovelling on the floor, smelling of stink and sweat, with a face smeared with tears and

grime. Thinking of yourself, you've lost everything. No team, no school, no friends ... no family."

Horrified, C-C stared at her father.

"Maybe I've been protecting you too much," he thought out loud. "Maybe it's about time for me to rest and let you found out things for yourself." Carl turned and started walking away.

"No! Wait, Dad."

He stopped, and without facing her, said, "Ten years ago, I lost forever the only two things I ever really wanted."

"Daddy, wait!"

He continued walking off the court.

"No! Don't go!"

He kept walking up the stairs and out the exit.

"Please, Daddy! Look at me!"

Her hollow screams echoed in the empty arena. Soon, there was no one there to see her writhing on the floor in her own spittle — convulsing and retching — except for the janitors, who avoided her.

Carl never looked back.

Ten

Doctor Macy stood in front of her office window and looked out over the hospital grounds as she waited for Jesse to arrive for his session. The sky was overcast and rain had been forecast, but the ground was still dry. It was a warm muggy day with a hazy humid fog floating in the air and obscuring the more distant buildings, but the doctor remained quite comfortable inside the air-conditioned building. Her building itself was relatively new, having been built little more than a decade ago. The brick exterior still maintained its reddish hue and had not faded much. The interior was clean for the most part, and the walls were painted in bold solid colors of blue, orange, and green to signify the different medical wings and patient wards.

Yet just as the outside weather was oppressive in its heaviness, she felt there was something oppressive about the antiseptic atmosphere inside as well. It could be from the disinfectant the janitors use to clean the floors and bathrooms. Doctor Macy always felt they used too much. The Ladies Room reeked of either that stinging lemon smell or that sickly pine scent which made her stomach feel like she just swallowed formaldehyde. Not that she ever had, but she guessed the sensation would be pretty close. She certainly could always taste it.

She had walked down to Jesse's room unannounced one day this past week and, while walking through the building, considered maybe the sterility had something to do with the architecture. In many cases, for example, she could see underneath the plain, undecorated wall paint the outline of cinder-blocks. These areas were mostly reserved for the patient wards where drywall would be too easily damaged. A person can't often put a fist through concrete.

She arrived at the visitor's waiting area. She knocked on the double thick pane of glass at the nurse's station. One of the orderlies put down the bagel he was eating and came out of the office, keys jingling at his side, to meet the doctor and unlock the door leading into the patient's ward. She entered a small hallway, padded on all sides, with no exits except for the two doors at either end of the hall. They call this place the mantrap, because you

can't open either door unless both doors are closed, preventing patients from escaping from the ward when the inside door is opened.

But the oppressive ennui, she thought, probably derived from more than just the concrete or the simple primary colors. Perhaps it was the geometry. Everything seemed to revolve around the ninety-degree angle. Naturally, it was probably a very cost-effective design and inexpensive to construct — rectangular buildings with its rectangular windows and rectangular offices, and hallways lined with musty-smelling rectangular sofas upholstered with the leftover burnt orange canvas-like fabric that no one who had a choice would ever purchase, with cushions so lacking in support that patients and visitors would sink into them to the point where their shoulders are at the same height as their knees. The only difference in geometry was the patients' rooms, which were almost squarish, like little boxes.

She walked down to the other end and knocked on the door. The orderly on the other side probably looked through the peephole in the door, and then let the doctor into the ward. She signed in at the interior nurse's station where Jesse's and all the other patients's medications were secured, and continued on her way to Jesse's room.

Maybe I should resume Jesse's medication, the doctor pondered.

At the end of the hallway, she could see the cafeteria/rec room, with ping-pong tables and pool tables. She always felt the ping-pong tables useless except for the entertainment of the orderlies and visitors. The patients, being doped up most of the time, had little muscle coordination to get anything more than a serve and a lucky return out of the game.

However, she concluded, the building malaise was more than likely due to all these things being put together in the same place. It seemed as though the architects and interior designers did nothing to make the place anything but a mental hospital, with nothing to engage the minds and spirits of those living inside.

She arrived at Jesse's room, but he wasn't there. While she waited, she looked around his glorified cubicle. She noticed nothing unusual on his dresser: toothpaste and brush, deodorant, the usual toiletries. At that moment, a voice spoke up.

"Waiting for Jesse?" Doctor Macy turned to see a slightly pudgy orderly leaning against the door jamb. He wore a huge, perhaps even a bit salacious, grin.

"Not really. It was just a surprise visit. Do you know where he is?"

"He's out in the yard for some recreation. Is there anything I can do for you?"

She ignored his leering and instead noticed his name tag. Jim Sogen. *Was this the same Jim Jesse talked about in our first session,* she wondered. She ventured a question.

"How is you wife?"

His smiling face subtly changed from lechery to embarrassment. "Very well, Doctor. Thank you." His voice lost all character.

What a creep, she thought. She became convinced of that opinion when she saw he wasn't wearing a wedding ring. Unfortunately, that was as much conversation about his wife as she could muster without sounding suspicious. She had no idea how to approach the subject of his suspected marital abuse. If he was an abuser, he would become defensive and deny it all; if he weren't abusive, he would be insulted and again deny it all. So instead of continuing that line of conversation, she was prompted by the Spartan nature of his room to ask, "What does Jesse do all day, aside from rec?"

"He reads."

"Reads?" She saw no books anywhere in the room. "From the little collection you have in the day room?"

"No. He gets his own books from one of his teachers."

Reacting to her puzzlement, Jim walked over to Jesse's dresser and opened up the bottom drawer. Inside were dozens of books, mostly used, mostly paperbacks, all neatly stuffed away. Curious, she pulled several out to examine them: *Island* by Aldous Huxley, *Walden Two* by B.F. Skinner, *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy, *Ecotopia* by Ernest Callenbach. They were all utopian novels.

"So this is where he gets all his fantastic notions," she muttered to herself.

Her memories dissipated as she was shaken from her reverie when the door opened and into her office shuffled Jesse. He gently closed the door behind him.

"Hello, Jesse," said Doctor Macy, moving away from the window to greet him.

"Hello, Doctor Macy," he replied without much emotion, though he wore a courteous smile.

"How are you feeling today?"

"I feel pretty good today." He paused, wondering if he should say anything more, then decided to continue. "Last night, I dreamed that Lasho and I biked to Dunlo to pick up some extra children's clothing and patching material. Those kids wear them out so fast."

"Dunlo?"

"A beautiful community, most of which was built into the side of a hill and looks south out over the river. I can just imagine how wonderful it would be to wake up with the sun reflecting diamond sparkles off its rippling surface. And boy, after that ride, it felt refreshing to jump into that cool water, so clean and pure. No slime on the skin when we got out."

"But you *dreamed* this?" the doctor reiterated.

"Of course. I can't possibly be traveling to other worlds. That's nonsense. It's amazing, Doctor. Over this past week, I had an epiphany and realized that none of my experiences in this faraway land could have possibly been real. They were only dreams. Wonderful dreams, but dreams nonetheless. I think I'm cured. Can I go home now?"

Doctor Macy sat in the edge of her desk and scrutinized the young man. She felt a tinge of disappointment. If true, then the months of preparation and the weeks of therapy had come to a close with such an anti-climactic ending. Slowly, her disappointment turned into anger. *Damn*, she thought. *He wasn't a challenge at all. He just gave up.*

Jesse, standing expectantly as Doctor Macy mulled over his comments, burst out laughing.

"I'm sorry," he said through the laughter, "I just couldn't hold a straight face any more."

The doctor didn't know how to react. At first, she was cross and a bit insulted. Could he really think so little of her abilities to actually succeed in faking her out? Yet, she was happy that he felt comfortable enough with her to admit his trickery, and even to joke around with her.

"I can't lie to you," he continued. "I can't lie to anyone any more."

"So you still claim that everything that happened in this other world is real?"

"Yes. It is real. I know it's real."

Deep down, however, she rejoiced. The challenge was back.

"For a moment though, I had you going," he continued.

"Yes," she admitted. "For a moment, I thought a miracle occurred."

Jesse's face hardened. "The miracle has already occurred. You and the rest of this world are just too stubborn to realize it."

Doctor Macy let the criticism go and gestured for Jesse to sit down on the couch. She retrieved the note pad from the desk and sat in her chair in front of Jesse.

"Have you considered the possibility that these images you experience may all just be hallucinations?"

"Yes, I have. All the time."

"And that doesn't bother you? That none of it may be real?"

"Of course it does. But I can't live my life debating whether or not I am actually experiencing these wonderful adventures. As far as I'm concerned, Vilmar and Dunlo and every other place on Terah exists and I am experiencing them. And because these places are real, convincing me otherwise is doomed to failure, just as much as convincing me that

the chair I'm sitting in is an hallucination. The real purpose of my visits to this office, therefore, is to persuade you to the reality of Vilmar."

"You have to admit, Jesse, it is an unbelievable story."

Jesse smirked. "Is that any more unbelievable than matter appearing and disappearing without a trace in vacuums? It happens, yet science has no explanation."

"But we've seen that occur ..."

"Many people have never seen God, but they truly believe He, or She, exists. Are you willing to lock them away and convince them that their beliefs are mistaken?"

"Jesse," began Doctor Macy, trying to redirect to discussion, "I don't think it is productive to compare your situation with religious faith." He ignored her and went on.

"Do you want to be the individual who will create the great wave of despair that will sweep the world of hope? Do you want to be the person who tells the world that this misery we call life has no meaning, that the concept we call humanity has no significance? That God, the sole unifying entity, is a myth?"

Doctor Macy, staring down at her pad waiting for the tirade to end, looked up when Jesse paused.

"Well, I'm going to do that," implored Jesse. The doctor's eyes went back to her notes. He continued. "I'm going to stand up on the mount and sermonize about the disaster which God's interpreters have cast down upon the men, women, and children of our planet. These spokespersons of religion spent so much of their efforts trying to assure our blessings in the afterlife, maintaining that happiness only existed after one died, they allowed the present life fall into disarray. A person's present misery was of little concern as long as his or her eternal happiness was secure. In fact, the more people hoped for the heavenly afterlife, the more wretched the real world became.

"But then science blossomed and answered the questions which plagued the mystics of the past. Soon, science dominated the minds of men, and technology became the happiness of the future. But alas, happiness remained in the future. Just like in Western theology, human happiness still existed elsewhere than here. Because in its passion to be amoral and its great potential for escapism, science left behind guiding ethical and moral principles to structure its development and help bring with it the world's hungry, and tired, and huddled masses. After all, what can an expansion in the Internet do for the 95% of the world's population without a computer? Instead, technology gave us the opportunity to hide away the physical, social, and psychological excrement of society. What little happiness technology provides today comes from its ability to remove from the sight of those who can afford it the refuse of the world.

"It is time, therefore," Jesse went on, unfazed by the doctor's disinterested manner, "for a new secular theology to arise. Only until mankind combines the moral guidance of theology and the scientific power of technology will humanity finally achieve the heaven on earth that it endlessly desired — and achieve it now."

Jesse waited for a response from Doctor Macy and was disappointed, though not surprised, with her comment.

"Are you through, Jesse?"

"Aren't you at all interested in what I believe?"

"Of course. But how can I believe any of your hallucinations. There is no proof."

"Doctor Macy," said Jesse, leaning forward in his chair, "which is more real? What we hold in our hands, or what we hold in our heads?"

Doctor Macy remained silent. She had no answer, though she had considered the question once before in her life. In the sophomore survey of philosophy class, they talked about the radical empiricism of Berkeley, who argued that since everything that exists is known to us only through our mind's accumulation of sense perceptions, we can't be certain matter exists outside our own mind. Matter might be the source of the sense perceptions, but how do we know? These sense perceptions may also be creations of our own minds or, as Bishop Berkeley insisted, the mind of God. Unfortunately, she can't remember how her professor extricated himself from this philosophical conundrum. The best she could recollect was that the class simply went on, insisting that Berkeley was in error and that matter had to be the cause of sense perceptions — probably because it was simpler for us to think of reality that way. They didn't really answer Berkeley; they got over him.

Jesse sat patiently in the couch. Seeing, however, that she was not going to address his question, he made different small talk.

"I hear you visited my room earlier this week."

"That's true." She thought she told Jim not to mention her visit to Jesse, but she couldn't remember for sure.

"Did you find anything interesting?" He paused. "Read any good book lately?" he prompted with a twinkle in his eye.

"You do have a lot of books. Why?"

"Well, pragmatically speaking, books are the safest item to own in the ward. The other patients have no interest in them — they have no interest in reading, period — and the orderlies see no market value in them, so they don't steal them."

"But why do you read utopian novels?"

"Why not?"

"Well, one might construe that your imagination may be constructing a utopian world of its own with the materials you glean from these books."

"Is that what you think? Does that possibility seem real to you?" Jesse sighed in frustration. "If you had any understanding of me, you would have realized that my visits to Terah began long before I started reading utopian literature."

"Maybe so, but the literature can only reinforce your visions and machinations, making your illusions much more difficult to control."

"Do you know what utopian novels do?" said Jesse, seemingly changing the subject once again. He didn't wait for a response from Doctor Macy this time. "They show people how individuals, like myself, have depicted better communities, societies, and whole worlds. With them, these individuals can demonstrate and contextualize what people have unflinchingly ignored."

"Excuse me for interrupting, Jesse, but aren't you being a bit harsh on the rest of us. After all, an author's interpretation of ideal worlds is one thing. Reality is something else."

"So you're saying that utopias are impossibilities?"

"That's the definition."

"Not exactly. That is how we have come to think of them, but it is not how we should think of them. Actually, the word 'utopia' is a combination of two Greek words: *eutopia* — meaning the good place, and *outopia* — meaning no place. So utopia means the good place that's no where ... yet. And that's the distinction. The nature of utopias is such that they always leave open the possibility of coming into existence.

"Too many stop at, or convince themselves of, the impossibility of utopia. In turn, the dreaming stops as well. Too bad, because everyone wants to live in Utopia. But the more they are told they can't ever achieve utopia, the more they will keep telling themselves they don't want a utopia. They deal with their intense passion for paradise by rationalizing it into oblivion.

"But once the dream of a better future disappears, what then?" Doctor Macy remained quiet, rightly guessing it was a rhetorical question. "We must turn to those who still have dreams — the children — before they lose their visions of the future ... and become adults. Haven't you noticed for instance, Doctor Macy, how children have become more mature younger, the general feeling of the community is slowly being sapped of hope? Could this not explain, even a little bit, the increase in suicides, violence, and mental illness among adolescents? Or maybe the increase in sexual experimentation, materialism, drug and

alcohol abuse among adolescents, because, after all, if the future no longer offers any solace to children, then the present must."

"Jesse, this is nothing new. Lack of hope has been a constant refrain among social critics for decades."

"True, but where our political and educational pundits fail society is in their lack of understanding that only in the last half of the twentieth century has the lack of hope been a conduit for social turmoil."

"What do you mean?" Doctor Macy laid down the note pad on her lap. Her sudden interest in Jesse's comments surprised even herself. Still, she sat back and carefully considered his commentary.

"In the past," said Jesse, "entire epoches convulsed because the vision of one future was replaced by hope for a better future. Marxism, Capitalism, Socialism — each had a vision of the future different from and supposedly better than that which they replaced. On a smaller scale, the American society also suffered through upheavals based on changing hopes for the future: the American Revolution, Manifest Destiny, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the age of Imperialism, the Roaring Twenties, the Depression, the Beat Generation, the Hippie Generation. But recently, most of that has stopped. At this point in our society, there is a tangible lack of vision, a palpable absence of hope for a better future — an atmosphere perhaps not seen or felt since the decline of the Roman Empire.

"Don't get me wrong. Social upheaval is occurring, but not because there is hope for something better and people need to prepare themselves for the new age, but because people are scrambling to hoard what they can to protect themselves **from** the future. And the fact that politicians and educators and industrialists cannot give their constituency a non-materialist vision of the future — a view that doesn't push newer, better, more technologically advanced things — people are unconsciously, if not consciously, fearing the worst ... a future no better than today. And you wonder why there is an overwhelming cultural resurgence in nostalgia nowadays?"

"But Jesse," argued Doctor Macy, "many people see hope in the future."

"Like born-again Christians, or Hare Krishnas, or even on a secular level those individuals who formed the present day utopian communities I spoke of previously?"

"Yes, Jesse. They see hope in their futures."

"Hah!" Jesse's spiked reply startled the doctor and shook the room. She thought she heard the window rattle. "Think about it. The very fact that the vast majority of people in this society do not opt for these alternatives means that the bulk of the population prefers to use standard methods to protect themselves from the future, such as savings, weapons,

isolation. The religious faithful see salvation only after death, so their future exists outside of this world — another method of escape. The dangerous rise in cultism is explained by this post-Vietnam War quest for protection from the future of mainstream society.

"Utopian communities, a much more sane alternative to cults, promote alternative lifestyles which try to avoid, with varying success, the psychological jungle of mainstream society. However, all are forms of escape and offer little hope for the future beyond the hope for day-to-day survival. Except for a rare few, the precarious existences of many of these communities instills almost as much stress in their inhabitants as living on Main Street, U.S.A. On the other hand, the more stable communities, albeit less stressful, seem to have grown domesticated and institutionalized. More concerned about their own survival now than the initial philosophical impetus which gave birth to the community, with waiting lists and intricate selection processes, they have also made protection from their surroundings the crux of their futures.

"Face it. Hope in human betterment is gone. The only thing people hope for now is that nothing changes — so things don't get any worse. So people deceive themselves by behaving as though conditions will remain the same. Conservation, for example, fades from social conscience and consciousness, relegated to the realm of non-profit organizations and for-profit companies. Let them deal with it. People believe that world has survived and will continue to survive without them recycling. Just like ostriches, we hide our heads in our homes, in our TV screens, in our sports and entertainment tabloids, confident that if we don't see it, it's not there and can't hurt us."

Doctor Macy sat back in her chair all the while, taking no notes, thoroughly entertained by Jesse's commentary. She couldn't help being impressed by this fourteen-year-old's sophisticated interpretation of the ailments of society. She was far from convinced, however, even though she couldn't quite put her finger on why she wasn't. Not knowing a quick reply unnerved her; so as a distraction, she generously providing Jesse the appropriate cue to continue.

"And utopias?" asked the doctor. "Where do they fit in?"

"Utopias formalized the hope, coalesced it from the mass of inchoate hopes floating around society. Utopias provide a goal, a vision, a tangible statement to the society that things not only could be better, but can be better — if only. By perceiving utopias as fantasies, however, they are cast aside; its interpretation of society, its theories, and its solutions are all deemed unworthy of our attention. On the other hand, by treating utopias as unsophisticated writing, as many contemporary writers do, then all we are left with are dystopia which describe the future horrors of mankind if we don't heed certain warnings.

Dystopias may be more marketable and publishable — people enjoy reading about strife more than beauty and will pay for the pleasure — but these works provide no course of action. Not doing something wrong is not the same as doing something right. Without a blueprint for change, little gets done; people do not know what to do and, therefore, do nothing.

"Consider your literary history. Literary utopias have by far done more to change the world than literary dystopias. *Oceana*, by Harrington, helped the American founding fathers set up the Constitution; *Looking Backward*, by Bellamy, provided the groundwork for many of the New Deal politicians. *Walden Two* offered a blueprint on how to set up utopian communities now, today, right this minute. And communities do exist using this book as a guide. What have the dystopians done? Think of probably the most famous dystopia, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the concept of Big Brother. People worry about certain activities being reminiscent of Big Brother — wiretapping phone conversations, bugging homes, listening through the walls of homes, video surveillance — but no one really knows how to stop it. We complain, yet it continues because the general population is willing to give up its freedoms for a little extra safety. After all, freedom is a malleable ideology that can be altered and adapted to the prevalent conditions of society. Security from violent crime or starvation or from the cold are tangible and very unchanging. Therefore, it is expedient, if not desirable, to change the meaning of something intangible like freedom to warrant an increase in its restrictions for the pursuit of the comfort of security."

Jesse took a deep breath and went on. "Dystopias may provide a warning of things to come, but it provides no clue how to stop them. That's why utopias and utopists are necessary. If anything, they tell people how to change the world. It may not be the best way. It may not even be the right way. But it is a way — which is more than what the vast proportion of leaders in this country have offered recently."

Slowly feeling overmatched, the doctor tried to reply sagely. "I recall someone once saying that security is the product of freedom. That security is necessary to protect our freedoms."

Jesse responded without much hesitation. "You are using freedom and security in their political senses. That state security forces are necessary to protect the political rights and freedoms of its population. Even though nowadays, forces for security are used more and more to coerce behavior because political authorities and their laws are failing to adequately legitimate themselves. In other words, whenever force is used, authority once accepted as legitimate by the population ceases to exist."

"However, I'm referring to the existential sense, a place where freedom and comfort cannot co-exist. Pure freedom is a dangerous and tenuous condition. The ability to choose anything we wish places the individual in an almost inhuman position of responsibility. Freedom leads to anarchy, both politically and spiritually, and everything one does, no matter how insignificant, has moral ramifications. Rather, people want the image of freedom — or at least they are told they want the image of freedom — but none of the responsibilities. Consequently, institutions come along and offer the security of having a roof over one's head and hot soup on the table in exchange for their freedoms to do and to think; and for the most part, people line up to willingly give these attributes away. But again, these are intangibles they are relinquishing; people can live with or without them."

"Well, it seems to me," she said, "that these people you talk about in Vilmar are not free, having long given them away to be surrounded by comforts. That world is hardly utopian, then."

The doctor smiled in triumph, thinking she discerned a flaw in Jesse's utopian imagination. Maybe through this niche in his armor, she could unravel his world and bring him out of his illusions and back to reality.

Jesse paused, sat back in the sofa, and thought for a moment. Doctor Macy grinned even more broadly. She could just imagine Jesse's mind scrambling to prop up the now crumbling and evaporating edifice of Vilmar. She was already composing the letter she would send to her egotistical colleagues and rub into their faces the fact that she was able to succeed where they had all failed. However, when Jesse began talking, it would be her letter, not Vilmar, which would disintegrate.

"You're right, in a sense, that we are not free. However, conforming to the norms of cooperation within these communities assures the best possible lives for every one in the community, so the communities have willingly given up their moral freedoms to assure their mutual benefit. We have given up our choice between competing and cooperating to simply cooperate. We have willingly refused the opportunities to create the more banal entertainments your world has in order to maximize enriching experiences for everyone.

"Furthermore, the fact that we accept the legitimacy of the cooperativist philosophy also means that political coercion does not exist on Terah. Essentially, we are free to do what we like as long as our actions and thoughts are dictated by the ethical and moral constraints of a cooperative lifestyle. We have chosen this path. But more importantly, since the population on Terah believes that living cooperatively and compassionately is the right way to co-exist, what we have agreed to do is what we want to do anyway."

Doctor Macy was intrigued by the sudden switch from the third person treatment of Vilmar to the first person. Perhaps it was a self-defense mechanism kicking in, she pondered. Realizing his illusion was under assault, he withdrew further into his fantasy and imagined himself as part of this community.

"But if you recall," continued Jesse, "we are all products of our experiences, and all our actions are thus determined accordingly. We have no free will. Existential freedom is a myth. The fact that your culture still believes this is merely a political expediency, for it permits your society to absolve itself from any responsibility for individual behavior. But considering the moral quagmire you live in, expediency is the only unifying principle your society has to regulate behavior.

"In the end, therefore, the only questions remaining to be answered are: To what kind of society do you wish to conform? What are you willing to give up to conform? And: What are you willing to do to create such a society?

"Now you may argue," said Jesse, adding emphasis with his pointed finger in anticipation of the open mouth of Doctor Macy, "as to how one can choose to not compete when one has no free choice. Simply put, though not simple in execution, one must be exposed to a set of experiences which will ingrain in the person the ability to choose cooperation as always the right course of action."

"But how am *I* going to change, much less our society, having been ingrained into the competitive ethos for decades?" Doctor Macy still tried to pry open any possible chink.

"Through experiences just like this. I am telling you and you are assimilating that which is good about cooperation and bad about competition. These experiences will add to your collection and, given enough profound experiences, will make it easier at some point in the future, whether soon or distant, for you to eventually come to the conclusion that cooperation is the better of the two options — in all aspects of life."

Doctor Macy shook her head slightly, but noticeably, as she dropped it to re-examine her notes. Jesse reached out and grazed her knee. She jerked her knee away and her head up, transformed with a how-dare-you-touch-me glower to her face. Her agitation eased, however, when she saw the disarming sympathy in his eyes — the way young children comfort their parents who are upset or angry or demoralized. "Don't worry," these eyes say to their mothers and fathers. "Everything will be okay as long as we love each other and stick together."

"Yes," said Jesse, in a serene voice, "it all seems impossible. But change is in the air. As you must know there is a growing discontentment and disenchantment in your society with competition. For example, once the undisputed venue to change a child's initial set of

values — cooperation, sharing, and equalitarianism — into the mainstream social values of competition and political powerlessness, the institution of education has come to the realization that a child's learning is enhanced if students work together to solve problems. Children also feel a greater sense of empowerment and discipline is less of an issue or disruption if students are involved in the rule-making process, rather than having rules autocratically thrust upon them from above.

"Extending such childhood values into adulthood threatens the traditional bulwarks of American society, like competition as the road to success and that social status is determined by the hoarding of material wealth. To counteract this institutional betrayal, opposition is intensifying elsewhere. This is no more obvious than in the increasing amounts and displays of violence in another major institution — the media. After all, children must be brought more vigorously into the competitive value system somehow and taught that violence — which is part and partial of competition — ..."

"So you've argued before," interjected Doctor Macy blandly.

"... is morally acceptable viewing, which a child may intuit as being morally acceptable behavior. But lovemaking — behavior which gives pleasure to another, and ironically banned from television — is not."

"But violence on television," remarked Doctor Macy, "is under immense scrutiny. Highly vocal special interest groups are calling for a reduction of violence. Have you forgotten the new ratings system?"

"No. But the rating system will lead to more violence, because now the broadcasters can hide behind their ratings and effectively blame parents for letting their children watch these shows. Exposure to violence is no longer their fault. Also, the special interest groups demanding less violence are not so much concerned with reducing violence but with replacing it with another, more religious-based, morality — a morality almost equally laced with a legacy of violence and competition. Do you know your Old Testament? Do you recall the plunder and slavery of the Midianites, or the complete 'ethnic cleansing' of the people of Heshbon and Bashan?"

"But this is not religion today," objected Doctor Macy.

"No. Today's religion uses the more socially acceptable competitive aspects of politics to promote and fund particular candidates and causes in the hopes theirs will win while the moral degenerates fade into obscurity, leading to government sanctioned religious morality enforced by the power of the state. Yet why certain groups spend so much effort in encouraging homophobic violence by attacking personal behaviors like homosexuality, while not saving hundreds of thousands of lives every year by seeking a ban on the use of

tobacco products, clearly places their moral agenda in question and is a problem these groups need to address.

"But no matter, I grant there is a call for decreased violence on television. That is why, at the same time, there is a steady increase in a more acceptable form of violent programming on television — sports — which further legitimizes competition."

Jesse stopped. Doctor Macy had begun shaking her head again.

"You see, Doctor," resumed Jesse, in a softer tone of voice this time and lounged comfortably in the sofa, "the battle for the minds and choices of the populace goes on; it is just hidden by different disguises. After all, the inevitability of competition is necessary to spur people to waste their lives working mindless jobs filled with empty tasks for degrading pay, and constantly under the threat that someone else could perform these jobs in their place. People, therefore, must repeatedly be exposed to experiences of competition in order to perpetuate the opinion in everyone's mind that competition is not only one choice but is the only choice, and that society cannot function in any other way."

Humbled by Jesse's rhetorical ability, Doctor Macy quietly mulled over his comments. She resisted, but was finding it more difficult to develop logically cogent justifications to why she should continue to resist. Confused, she retraced her steps backwards through the digression to recover her dialectical bearings. Then, trying to regain her lost initiative, she changed direction. "I don't know, Jesse. Your preceding statements sound a bit apocalyptic."

"Hmm?" Taken by surprise, Jesse sat up in the couch.

"Well," said the doctor, "with all this talk about our society not being able to stop the impending disaster predicted in dystopias, or that we have no freedom." She virtually chuckled at the sound of that. "You're making our situation seem hopeless, when surely it isn't all that bad."

"Think about your situation," said Jesse, with resonant emphasis. "What do you do? You get up in the morning, have a cup of coffee, stop by McDonald's or Burger King on the way to work for a quickie breakfast, you do your job here, go out for a quickie lunch — perhaps a salad and a bagel, arrive back here for work, and then go back home for some dinner and then into bed. This is pretty much your daily routine, five days a week, fifty weeks a year, for much of your adult life.

"And where are your hopes in all this? Sure, you may hope to move to a bigger home, eat better food now and then, take a vacation or conference trip somewhere, but all you gain are bigger things. The routine is the same, seventy percent of your life for the next thirty to forty years. After all those years, you may hope for retirement — if you live that

long. Yet your body will be old and enfeebled, unable to take advantage of the very pleasures you so yearned for when young.

"This is what your world has created. You work endless hours for things that have been made artificially scarce so you would be encouraged to work even harder to acquire them. It is this artificially imposed scarcity which drives people to expend energy doing things they don't want to do and living lives they don't want to live. Consider the irony of all this. You reside in one of the most affluent societies in the world, yet the sense of imminent poverty and deprivation fills your life. This wonderful society functions by creating and then harnessing the monumental human energy used to stave off impending doom your culture convinced itself exists."

"And you, Jesse," said Doctor Macy, seeing a way out of this, "what of your hopes?"

"I have only one hope: to get out of here and start presenting my case against competition and for cooperation to the world. However, to my father, I am part of the social refuse to be cast aside and hidden under the carpet like the dust and dead insects. I am an embarrassment to him, an embarrassment he would rather not have around dragging down his image of himself and his image in the community. Out of sight, out of mind. The longer I am away from the community, they will forget. They have many more important things to remember than the lunatic son of a car salesman."

"And your mother?"

"Oh, she wants the best for me, but is also convinced the best lies in medical treatment. Unfortunately, it is an approach destined to fail, since I am not mentally ill. So the catch-22 traps me within these walls. Mom wants to see improvement in my condition, but she never will because I'm not sick to begin with. Consequently, and as I said before, any hope to continue my endeavors rests with you. Only you can let me do what I need to do for this world."

Jesse became silent, and she just looked at him. However, she was inwardly unsettled. Deep inside, a small part of her psyche wiggled anxiously to be convinced and accept Jesse's story. It was an annoying sensation — one that made disconcerting movements between her gut and her brain. At times, she almost wished what he was telling her was real — that somewhere out there in the vast empyrean of space, there was a world where friendship, community, and compassion were the laws of the land — just so these gnawing doubts growing inside, doubts which now appear more and more often, would shrivel up and disappear. *Please persuade me*, she thought. *It would be so much easier.*

Yet the whole proposition is ludicrous, she constantly reminded herself — made even more ludicrous by the fact that Jesse can prove none of his story. Only he ever traveled to

these places; and only he ever heard Feszj's voice. What else could she do but treat him as mentally unstable? It was her job to bring him back into reality. Besides, if word got out that she released someone who continued to weave this fantastic tale, continued to hear voices, and continued to hallucinate, without making a dent in controlling any of these symptoms, she's be flipping hamburgers within a week. No. A psychiatrist can never be uncertain about the mental state of the patient. Any doubt, and treatment becomes half-hearted and ineffectual. Any doubt, and whatever science psychiatry rests on is thrown into question.

And yet, the worm of uncertainty still wiggled, which was not a good sign. She realized Jesse's ideas were taking up much of her free time, but she couldn't stop. She found herself considering Jesse's possibilities at home eating dinner, reading in bed, driving to work, or watching television. She examined the world around her, think about she saw, and wonder if things could be changed for the better.

Is it even possible for cooperation to be the sole rule of order, and competition non-existent? That in itself seemed totally fanciful and farcical. And yet again, might not this kind of cooperative world be more like the world we always wanted it to be? Is it truly as simple as Jesse says? Have we wasted our precious centuries trying to find some magical confluence of contingent events which would lead down this path to utopia, when all that was necessary — all we needed to do — was to will ourselves out of competition and into cooperation? Was it all this time simply a choice — a choice indoctrinated out of our minds?

There were too many what ifs, maybes, and yets. Her brain spun. She needed more time.

"I am not persuaded, Jesse."

"I know. Not yet at least. We have more to talk about."

"And you have more to tell."

He nodded in agreement, settled back into the cool sofa, and began to tell the rest of his story ... one last time.

Eleven

The incident in the bathroom occurred on a Friday, which gave Jesse a weekend to begin recuperating from his injuries while resting at home; but it was hardly a restful weekend. He learned too much about his parents and their vindictive agendas and did everything he could to avoid looking at them, making himself scarce in their presence. Except for meals, which he would rapidly gulp down without conversation, he spent most of his time hibernating in his room away from his mom and dad and trying to dream himself back to Vilmar. But it never happened this weekend. He dreamed about many things, but not about Feszj or Catiana or anyone else. By Monday morning, he was exhausted from sleeping too much and hoping too hard.

"They said they'd be there for me," Jesse muttered to himself at Monday breakfast. He had come to the conclusion that it was all a dream, a cruel fantasy. It wasn't real; probably some hallucination brought on by that computer spray. Why did he even think it was real? He chastised himself for his naivety, letting some phantom image created by some misfiring synapses tell him anything about the world. Sure, it sounded convincing, but as Feszj himself said, everything sounds convincing in dreams. None of it was real, not even the time in the chamber. All his images of his parents screwing around, their conversations, their malicious planning, were fictions invented by his mind. Probably some Freudian thing, he concluded. Yet he now better understood the power of dreams, and how it was possible for people in the past to have experienced religious transformations and conversions and epiphanies literally overnight.

Jesse, on the other hand, put Vilmar out of his mind. He had more things to worry about now. Even though the swelling had subsided some and his face and his cheeks no longer looked so bulbous, the bruising had darkened. His eye sockets were almost black from the blood clotting under his skin. He cursed himself for not following the doctor's orders. If he sat upright more rather than lying down all weekend, it might not have been so bad. Now he has to go to school with this ridiculous mask on, like some sort of cyborg raccoon.

Jesse tried to persuade his father into letting him stay at home, but he had no chance. His father argued in his usual simple fashion that if you can sit at home watching TV, you can sit at school watching the teacher. Jesse never mentioned the inevitable possibility that his friends (and enemies) will tease him incessantly about this injuries and getting beaten up by that little fairy. His father would have just smirked at him. "Humiliation builds backbones," he would have uttered, or something to that effect. His dad was always making up this curt little sayings; half of them made no sense at all.

When Jesse arrived at school, his fears were realized. Everyone stared at him. Most of the students knew nothing about the incident, nor did they care. They saw his face, and turned away repulsed. Yet they continued to look at him again and again, constantly sneaking peeks to remind themselves of his ugliness. They couldn't get enough of his face. Deformity is fascinating.

His friends had heard about the scuffle in the bathroom, but had no idea how severe his injuries were until Jesse arrived at school. They were shocked. How could such a wimp do such embarrassingly extensive damage? Then they sensed his vulnerability and taunted him without mercy.

"So, did you break every bone in his fist with your nose?"

"All stuffed up? That's what the five-fingered flu does to you."

"You'd better hide, Jesse! I hear the chess club's after you."

Every joke at his expense stung worse than the one before, and stabbed deeper and deeper into his ego, draining it of any self-respect he may have had. But worst of all, after his friends tired of their fun with Jesse during the next several days, they drifted away from him, no longer impressed with him enough to stick around. They could not be friends with someone they did not respect. Any group loyalty they claimed to have had was all hot air. That "all for one, one for all" crap was just empty bravado. Associating with a loser like Jesse was now unacceptable to their image. Unless your presence complimented their egos, there was no place for you. And perhaps more pitiable is that he would have done the same thing to someone else.

But the end of the week, Jesse's enemies quickly discovered that his friends had thoroughly ostracized him. It was a position of weakness they fully exploited. Without the protection of numbers, Jesse found himself powerless to retaliate against the insults and jokes assailing him. He was shoved and poked going from class to class. Reaching in for a notebook, his locker door was slammed against his fingers. He turned and raged at a group of girls and their boyfriends giggling at his hideousness. Paralyzed by personal doubt, he could do nothing but rub his injury and fume in silence.

Another couple of kids cornered him and held him down as they scraped shavings of, what they called, "fart-rock" into his hair. Now, until he could wash out the sulfur, he smelled as if he were expelling gas wherever he went. When the hallways jammed with students between classes, there was nothing he could do but wade into the mass and get to class himself. The kids behind him would groan from the smell and comment on his lack of personal hygiene and pooping in his pants. He wanted to tell them — he wanted to tell them all — that it was just fart-rock, and that it was mugged on him, and he doesn't poop in his pants, and haven't you ever been embarrassed before, and how did you feel, and on and on and on. But if he did, they would just laugh at him. There was no sympathy with any of these kids. No one cared.

Unable to shield himself with his ex-friends, he walked the hallways in school paranoid, terrified, and exposed. And because of his face, it was impossible to blend in with the crowds. For the time being, he was the class freak. For the time being, his anger boiled inside him. While counting the seconds until his face would be back to normal, he plotted. He made a promise to himself that, once he could again walk anonymously among them, they would all be sorry.

By the end of the school day on Friday, as he sat in Mr. Monroe's social studies class waiting for the pop quiz to begin. He pondered the history of the past week — a week through which he had suffered miserably and how it started: his early morning visit with Vice Principle Horace "Horse" Peters, a large, barrel-chested African-American, former college football player, and now the assistant football coach for the high school team. He had to climb up that spiral staircase to his office to answer questions about the bathroom incident. In his office, though "Horse" had a football background and was the school disciplinarian, Jesse was surprised to learn how intelligent and how eloquent a speaker Mr. Peters was, which made him all the more imposing and frightening. Mr. Peters chose his words carefully, and with his powerful voice, made a tremendous impact on Jesse, as well as the other students in school.

Talking to Jesse privately in his office, Mr. Peters made it very clear that despite the extent of Jesse's injuries, he had no doubt Jesse was somehow the cause of the problem — that he had brought it upon himself, and that he was doped up when it happened, despite the inconclusive results of the drug test at the hospital. Mr. Black said he wanted no trouble in his school, and that he would be keeping an extra special eye on him.

"Watch your behavior, Mr. Strich," said Mr. Peters — he never used a student's first name, "for I will be watching it as well."

Sure, his body survived and his nose slowly mended, but his psyche withered. The only thing that kept him going were the plans of revenge he made. Some juvenile, like spraying shaving cream in someone's locker. Others frightening, like arson. *If my dad only had a gun*, he thought.

The girl sitting in front of him handed back test papers over her head. He grabbed them automatically, took one for himself, and passed the rest behind.

Could I kill someone? Why not? After what they've done to me, they don't deserve to live. And if not to me, they would have done it to someone else. They have no humanity in them, no compassion. They treat people exactly the way they would hate to be treated themselves. Hypocrites, all of them. As if they're better than everyone else.

Mr. Monroe, a tall man with reddish hair, stood at the front of the class.

"You have fifteen minutes. Begin."

But I'll show 'em. I'll show 'em how their blood is red like everyone else. How they can bleed like everyone else. How they can feel pain and die like everyone else. Human waste products, that's all they are. The world will never miss 'em.

"Perhaps you should be more concerned about your test than revenge, Jesse."

A voice shuddered Jesse out of his thoughts. He snapped his head up and looked around for the source of the comments, but everyone was diligently scribbling answers on their papers. Mr. Monroe was seated at his desk, which gratefully hid his stocky but flabby body, including his wide rear end. Seeing his teacher distracted Jesse's thoughts once again. Jesse didn't like Mr. Monroe, but he didn't really dislike him either. He just didn't care for him one way or the other; though his butt did provide inspiration for a steady supply of jokes.

It was his second year teaching, yet he was still taking out all his beginner's mistakes on the class. His lectures were boring and uninspired, as if trying to do everything perfectly and by the book. The class learned a lot of dates and a lot of facts, but they were forgotten as soon as the tests came and went. Jesse felt the volume of tests Mr. Monroe gave — a pop quiz every week and a major class test every month — was useful only in keeping the class under control. Students fear tests; and with enough of them, fear infects the atmosphere of the class.

"Brad Monroe, if you're wondering Jesse, received a four-point-zero GPA from the University of Indiana, and double majored in history and education," said the voice again. Jesse's now recognized it as Feszj's voice. Jesse jerked his head from side to side looking for the source — looking for Feszj, but saw nothing but bowed heads. Feszj continued. "Brad could have been a brilliant scholar and historian, but he wanted to teach. He wanted

to give other students a taste of what it was that inspired him to love history. It is a shame that he himself doesn't know exactly what it is about history that inspires him, and so he teaches poorly, teaching the way he was taught to teach, at least until he understands what it is that will inspire his pupils."

"Where are you?" said Jesse out loud. Several of the students turned and gave Jesse irritated stares. Mr. Monroe looked up from his desk. Jesse shrunk even lower into himself.

"Jesse," said Feszj, "I'm not here in body. I'm only in your mind, talking to you. No one else can hear me, though it sounds like everyone else should."

Where were you last weekend? Jesse thought to himself. He was indignant and his tone of thought was dark.

"I'm sorry, Jesse, but running away from your parents wasn't the answer. Remember, we're here to help you change *your* world. Whatever you need to that end, we'll be there. On the other hand, you almost gave up on us — thinking we were a chemically-induced misfiring synapse."

Jesse groaned. *You heard that?* He then retaliated. *You still could be.*

"But we aren't. You must not lose faith in us."

I'm sorry.

"It's okay. We admit that it is hard to imagine that we truly exist. In any case, we have noticed that it has been difficult for you to do what you need to do to start changing your world. Perhaps you need some focus."

Focus?

"To your right, there is a woman who is having trouble with question five."

Question five? Jesse read his test sheet, still unmarked. *List three Acts of the British Government which incensed the colonists. Um ...* Jesse started writing. *Let's see. The Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, the ... hmm?*

"There were five primary Acts, Jesse. Actually, there were three sets of Acts and two individual Acts. The Navigation Acts, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, the Tea Act, and the Coercive or Intolerable Acts."

Hold it. Let me get this down. How about number one?

"But Jesse," interrupted Feszj, "I was saying that Rebecca, the girl next to you, is having problems. Why don't you help her out?"

Jesse turned towards the young woman with shoulder-length wavy brunette hair tinged with violet coloring. Rebecca said very little in class, and smiled not at all, embarrassed by her braces.

Not Rebecca Ramey. I used to tease her a lot in eighth grade about her braces.

"You still do."

Feszj's knowledge chilled and humbled Jesse. *You know all about the name-calling — like metal-mouth, lead-lips?*

"Yes."

Then you know she hates me.

"People can change if the environment changes. Help her, and it will go a long way in improving your checkered past with her."

Jesse glanced at Rebecca, and noticed a new stud earring glinting through the strands of her hair. He opened his mouth to speak, then clamped it shut and shook his head.

This is crazy. I can't help her. That'd be cheating.

"Why? Why is educating a fellow student cheating?"

I'm giving her the answers.

"And giving her information is somehow bad?"

Not while we're taking a test!

"You mean there are only particular times when one can teach another in this school? Has your society so compartmentalized education that even in a classroom, there are times when learning is forced to end?"

You don't understand.

"Believe me Jesse, I understand all too well the role testing plays. The way it forcibly splits people apart from each other, unable now to use each others knowledge for everyone's benefit. The way it makes enemies of friends in the same class. However, we don't have time right now to explain the ramifications of testing. You must trust me. Just tap her on the shoulder and explain the answers."

No.

"Please, Jesse. It would be so much easier."

For you maybe.

"For both of us."

Go away.

Jesse picked up his pen and started filling out the answers to his exam. Jesse heard no more voices, which concerned him. Then, without warning, he was seized by the screw of anxiety — the kind one gets watching a friend walk away after a bitter argument — twisting into his heart. Feeling more and more miserable, he dropped his pen as the lose of Vilmar penetrated deeper into him. The one place in the universe where everybody treated him the way he wanted to be treated — with respect, with kindness, with love. No

slammed fingers in lockers. No fart-rock in the hair. No freakish stares just because of an accident. Where no one hates you because you're different. Instead, it is a place where everyone loves you because you're all the same. Did he just throw it all away?

Jesse then heard Feszj again — this time in a very mournful voice.

"Forgive me, Jesse." Within instants, Jesse calmed down.

Don't worry, Feszj. It was m—

Suddenly, Jesse's hands twitched and his stomach churned. Sweat bubbled up on his forehead. Jesse started to panic.

"What's going on?" he said aloud. The class and Mr. Monroe again looked over with scowls on their faces.

"Relax, Jesse," said Feszj. "Soon, you will not feel a thing. In a few moments, your mind will be floating free of sensations as I place my mind in charge of your body. Substituting my mind over yours, in other words."

Jesse's whole body started tingling — just like when a person's foot falls asleep — which was an eerie and irritating sensation. Then, certain isolated spots in his body, beginning with his toes started going numb. But it was more than numbness. When a body part is numb, at least one still have the perception that it is still attached. Jesse no longer even had that satisfaction. The parts of his body going numb were just no longer there. They disappeared from his mind.

Jesse felt the eeriest of sensations — what could only be described as "perception holes" in his body, places where nothing existed. These holes grew larger and terrified him. Crazy with fear, he imagined himself being painlessly devoured by some unseen worm, squirming through his body. He became frantic and clutched his skull, wriggling violently. He yelled, "No! Stop! Get out of my head!"

The entire class jerked their heads around once more to see Jesse this time jump out of his chair. However, since his brain registered no feet any more, he couldn't balance himself and collapsed back into his seat, his hands flopping at his side — a stunt that sent ripples of amusement and laughter through the class. Some of his classmates agreed, wishing they too could get these facts out of their heads, either on to the paper or permanently.

Annoyed, Mr. Monroe stood up from his chair and quickly walked over to Jesse and stood over him. He scrutinized Jesse — a student he considered unremarkable, with average talent corroborated by his C+ average. Mr. Monroe had no special interest for Jesse, unlike other kids in the class who demonstrated greater promise. But when Mr. Monroe saw a glassy, unfocused look in Jesse's eyes, his lack of concern changed. His

mind immediately ran through a whole list of possible causes, including drug overdose, and corrective steps he was going to have to take.

"Jesse, are you okay?" Paralyzed by the possibility of having to do CPR for the first time in his life, Mr. Monroe stalled for time as he tried to remember the proper steps — *ABC. Airway. Breathing. No, no. Bleeding. And circulation. No, that doesn't sound right. God. What the hell was 'C'?* — hoping he wouldn't need them.

Slowly, Jesse's eyes cleared up and returned Mr. Monroe's gaze. "I feel fine, Mr. Monroe," said Jesse. His face, previously drained of color, regained its healthy reddish glow.

Relieved, Mr. Monroe turned his attention to the test sheet, and saw only question five completed. He checked his watch, saw only about two minutes left, then walked away unsurprised.

"Feszj. What's going on?" said Jesse. "I can see and hear everything, but I can't feel anything."

Your mind is floating in limbo. I have placed my mind in your body in hopes of providing some direction for you by demonstrating that one person can make a difference ... and to so many people you may never see. That's the beauty of being an educator and education itself that so many people forget. You never know which one among the thousands of children who enter schools every year will be the one who cures cancer, or ends war, or visits other stars.

Unfortunately, you may never know how many people's lives could have been saved if every child, especially the future scientist who could have saved them all, received the best possible education available. Your society engages in the cruelest self-destructive bit of gambling by not giving every child the opportunity to intellectually prosper. I weep for all the children who grew up to become prisoners instead of becoming scientists, or artists, or philosophers because education wasn't there for them. As your society already knows, but does precious little about, a mind is the most terrible thing to waste.

But we can start here, Feszj went on. *I'm going to help Rebecca before time runs out. She still hasn't completed question number five.*

"But you'll get me in trouble," said Jesse.

A lesson will be taught today, replied Feszj.

Feszj, in Jesse's body, leaned over and tapped Rebecca on the arm,

"What are you doing?" asked Jesse.

"There were five primary Acts," started Feszj, whispering, "three sets and two individual...."

"Will you stop," begged Jesse. "I'm going to get screwed." Feszj didn't miss a syllable.

"... The Navigation Acts, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, the Tea Act, and the Coercive or Intolerable Acts."

"Look, if you want to give answers to someone, give them to me." Jesse was desperate. He had no control over his hands and couldn't put these answers down on his test. "My page is still empty."

Rebecca was horrified at what she heard, and tried to push him away. Others around her, overhearing Feszj's comments, checked their answers. Some started erasing what they had. Undeterred by Rebecca's reluctance, Feszj persisted.

"The Navigation Acts were actually a collection trade regulations enacted by Parliament between the years 1651 and 1750 which ... "

"Jesse!"

Feszj stopped.

"Shit. Now I'm in trouble," said Jesse. If he could have dropped his face into his hands, he would have. "It 's all your fault, Feszj."

Relax Jesse.

"That's easy for you to say. I'm the one getting in trouble."

Feszj smiled. *As I said, there is a lesson to be taught, and it's about to begin.* Jesse wondered about that enigmatic statement, but he remained quiet — Feszj's confidence had a calming effect — and listened as Feszj sat back in Jesse's chair, looked up and saw standing in front of him Mr. Monroe, fuming.

"Perhaps you'd like to explain yourself, Mr. Strich," he said.

"Glad to. Rebecca was having difficulty with question number five, so I was starting to explain to her the five Acts. Actually three sets of Acts and two single Acts ... "

"Do you really think she needed your help?" Mr. Monroe spoke quickly to silence Jesse.

"Probably not other times," said Feszj, "but her mom's in the hospital today having her appendix removed. A simple procedure, but a distracting one nonetheless. It only seemed right to help her out under the circumstances."

Rebecca stared at Jesse, eyes bulging. "How did you know?" she mouthed. Jesse wondered as well, but was not surprised. Feszj, however, didn't have time to respond.

"This is a test, Jesse," said Mr. Monroe, his jaw clenching. "What you were doing wasn't teaching; it was cheating."

"Helping another person is cheating?"

Mr. Monroe was about to answer, but paused, not knowing how to respond. Jesse was impressed with Feszj's response. How does one reply? That there are time when a person can't help someone else? When a person is forbidden to help someone else? That would have opened a can of worms.

Members of the class were also impressed with the comeback, and when they saw Mr. Monroe stumped for a response, began fidgeting and snickering . Feeling his authority slipping away, Mr. Monroe glanced at Jesse's test, grabbed it and shook it in front of Jesse's face.

"If you knew so much, you should have been spending your time finishing your own work."

"Since I know so much," said Feszj, unrattled, "I should be sharing that knowledge with those who don't know as much."

"Arrogant little kid, aren't you?"

"Mr. Monroe, arrogance is indicative of individuals who want others to think they know more than they actually do. I, on the other hand, know only what I know. But I do know a great deal about American history."

"Oh, is that so?" Mr. Monroe stepped back from the desk. "Well, if you know so much about history, perhaps you should be teaching it."

Jesse figured out Feszj's plan. "Oh God, no Feszj," protested Jesse. "Don't do it. You'll embarrass me."

Jesse, said Feszj. You worry too much about what other people think of you, instead of doing what you can to improve the lives of your fellow human beings by giving them what they need. But, such an attitude is understandable in your society, where people are made to feel guilty about helping the poor.

"We're waiting, Jesse." Mr. Monroe had seen other teachers use this method, which often succeeded in stifling egotists like Jesse. Yet he was uncomfortable using it. Humiliating a student did not seem to be the right way to teach. But in this case, what else could he do? He had to re-assert his control over the classroom.

Feszj stood up from his seat and walked to the front to the class, to the surprise of Mr. Monroe. The class began giggling. Mr. Monroe wracked his brain for a solution. If he sent him to his seat now, he would have lost complete control and respect with the class. On the other hand, if he begins, Jesse still will have an opportunity to make a fool of himself. Mr. Monroe opted to do nothing at this time, and sat down at his desk.

Feszj stood at the front of the class, a class unable not to snicker at the ridiculous sight of Jesse and his nose protector playing teacher. Some of the students who also found his snobbery irritating began taunting him.

"C'mon, Mr. Strich. Teach us."

"Yeah, Jesse. We're all waiting for you to say something smart."

Feszj nodded and began.

"AAUUGGH!" Feszj screamed in blood-curdling fashion, startling the entire class, including Mr. Monroe, but waking them up as well. Some began laughing. Having got their attention, Feszj continued with more restraint. "Some of you may laugh, but did you realize that this was probably the last words ever uttered by a large percentage of the world's population — those who died in war being sliced in two by a sword, impaled by a spear, stabbed with a bayonet, pierced by an arrow, disemboweled by gunfire, or had their limbs severed by cannon shot. Those unfortunate enough to be captured would be tortured with any of a thousand horrific methods — broken on the rack, drawn and quartered, crucified, perhaps eaten by dogs, rats, vultures, or ants. Still others could be left to die even slower deaths by being buried alive, or forgotten as they rot out their existence in a pitch black four by four cell at the bottom of a dungeon, sharing the excrement saturated floor with centipedes, slugs, and leeches — soon to be that wretched soul's next meal, for as long as the desire to survive allows.

"This is the history you don't hear about — the legacy of humanity's inhumanity. It is history from the bottom up — the history of the grunts in life, the farmers, the thieves, the foot soldiers, the beggars and the bastards. Instead, we all too often hear history taught from the top down, from the view point of the rich and powerful, the presidents and the generals. For example, we all know about George Washington's famous crossing of the Delaware, but how many of you know that some members of the Continental Army trod through the snow and ice of Valley Forge in their bare feet — later to have them amputated to stem the spread of gangrene.

"We rarely hear history expressed in a way that brings it to life and made vivid for us to appreciate or to vomit. Often, politicians and social pundits cast a cloak of sterility over the realization that humans, throughout history, have always bled, and suffered, and often experienced agonizing deaths, just to glamorize the generals or leaders who sent these men and women to their graves. You and I are lucky that we haven't had to suffer through the misery of warfare or punishment.

"I can only relate just a tiny portion of the history of mankind, but for the next thirty minutes, sit back and permit the opportunity of peeling away at least some of the niceties of

history. Let me take you on a journey into the darker and seamier side of history. From the mosquito-infested trenches of World War I where mud and malaria were constant companions, while a soldier's feet, always wet, was covered with fungus and parasites; to Magellen's men who ran out of food crossing the endless stretch of the Pacific Ocean and had to resort to eating maggots, roaches, leather, rope, even sawdust — and where an enterprising sailor could make some money on board catching and cooking the only delicacy left ... worm-filled rats."

From this dramatic beginning, and after the initial skepticism wore off and changed into amazement, the students in the class found themselves immediately captivated by the tales Feszj, through Jesse, told them. For a half an hour, the class sat motionless through vivid descriptions of the horrors of war as if Jesse had actually been there to see it. What they wore, what they ate, what he said. From the whistling of arrows to the buzz of bullets, to the the warriors slipping and sliding in the blood of their fallen comrades. From the homosexual ranks of Athenians and Spartans, to the bored Civil War soldier passing the time between battles betting on lice races. Jesse described it all. It was thirty minutes of history the class would never forget.

As for Mr. Monroe, he too could not help but be enraptured with Jesse's presentation. He knew most of what Jesse was relating to his class, but it was exciting, invigorating, and inspiring. He watched the class's reaction to Jesse's graphic depiction of battle as well as the timeless and universal complaints of the foot-soldier. The class laughed when they found out that Civil War soldiers would sometimes sneak across the battlefield to play cards with the enemy. They were aghast when Jesse talked of the wounded World War II infantrymen who survived the first day of fighting in Normandy, but were unable to move off the beaches and were swept out to sea with the tide to drown. They cried when they learned of the civilians of Okinawa who were convinced by Japanese propaganda that the American soldiers would rape, torture, and kill them if they were captured. So, as the class, along side the American Marines, watched helplessly, scores of islanders leapt off hundred-foot cliffs to their deaths into the rocks and sea below. Interpreters pleaded over loud-speakers for the carnage to stop as mothers and fathers carried their children in their arms or pulled them along as they fell.

Unfortunately, the tales and stories had to eventually come to an end. Carefully and gradually, Feszj's brought everyone back down from their emotional roller coaster trip through war. The students began breathing easier and deeper, having held their breath most of the time. Even Mr. Monroe was sorry to see it end. He had no idea Jesse had a depth of knowledge and rhetorical talent to pull off such a stunning recitation. Jesse was

able to teach history and bring it alive better than any professor he had in college. Mr. Monroe sat perplexed. Why didn't any of his tests indicate this ability or knowledge?

"For centuries, people have often gone to war without the slightest clue what it is really like, enamored instead with the pomp and circumstance, the neat uniforms, the flashy parades, and promises of easy victories and even easier women. But as you sat here this past minutes, I hope you have come to the conclusion that war is nothing like that, and nothing like what you read in your text books. With all the life extracted from it, and replaced with abstract dates and names and places, there is no reality in text books from which to determine a future.

"But you must realize that governments do not want you to know about the blood and guts of war. If they did, no one would fight. So as information increases, so too does the impersonality of war. We now fight from inside tanks, from ships miles off-shore, from planes miles in the sky — all of which had made the enemy impossible to see except in our imagination. We don't come face to face with our enemies any more, nor do we ever see the gore. War is becoming antiseptic.

"Yet, perhaps, we can choose not to fight. Even at the moment just before conflict, we can still choose not to strike down another human being. Now, you may scoff and think that that could never happen. By then, it is too late. But once, a long time ago, it happened.

"On the lowland fields of Samnium in Ancient Greece, the opposing forces of the generals Marius and Pompaedius marched towards each other resolved to the inevitability of conflict. In the blazing sun, the sweat drooling down their faces underneath the helmets, the armies could see across the field each other's shimmering bronze breastplates reflecting the sunlight. The phalanxes formed; the pikes dropped into position. Death seemed unavoidable. They began walking towards each other. Hundreds of feet shuffled through the grass kicking up gnats and other bugs which worked their way underneath the armor, cruelly pestering these warriors's last moments of life.

But as the soldiers approached each other, and as the faces of the foes changed from blobs of flesh into recognizable eyes, noses, and beards, the armies slowed. Soon, a pikeman recognized an an old farming neighbor he hadn't seen in months.

"Myrecius, is that you?" he yelled across the battle line.

"Jason?" Myrecius replied.

"Another saw one of his wife's cousins, Dodius, standing opposite him. 'Dodius,' he shouted, 'it's me, Femus. Do you still still make that wonderful wine of yours?'

"Eventually, more and more acquaintances and friendships renewed themselves from afar on the battlefield. Question soon arose as to why friends would wish to fight each other, and they pleaded with their own fellow soldiers to give up this lunacy and spend some time with their friends and relatives. Shields and swords fell to the ground, the pikes driven harmlessly into the earth, and ranks dissolved as brethren shook hands with brethren.

"Marius and Pompaedius rode to the front to see why fighting never began. They came upon a veritable feast of joviality, with smiles and hugs abounding. Soldiers sat on their shields sharing bread and stories of their sons and daughters getting married, children and grand-children being born, and the crops scheduled for harvest in the fall and the subsequent festivals.

"The two generals faced each other, not sure what to do. Perhaps, amidst the celebration, they came to realize that maybe there is a better way to solve conflicts. They approached each other, sheathed their swords and shook hands. They sat down on the grass and engaged in a long conversation. From the revelry which surrounded them, they found the strength within to compromise. The battle ended before it began. The generals declared a cessation to the hostilities, and the resulting party lasted well into the following morning.

"So you see?" Feszj said to the breathless class. "Battles can be stopped, and wars ended, and the carnage cast into oblivion if only we choose not to fight and see our foes as no more or less than fellow humans, with families and dreams and pains and sorrows of their own ... just like us."

The class bell rang to end the class, almost on cue. Feszj remained up front as students filed past, complimenting him on a great job. A few comments were more direct. "I wish you were teaching this class." Rebecca hung back, making work by looking over her notes and re-arranging her papers, until she was the last to leave the classroom. Feszj could see by her red eyes and nose that she was one of those who cried. She paused in front of Jesse, not knowing what to say or do.

Standing there, she noticed something different in Jesse. The way he walked, the way he talked, even the way he held his body up, or moved his hands, or made eye contact. His speech sounded assured, and was filled with lyrical inflections which excited her; his gestures, commanding attention, were smooth and bold. It was this vibrant confidence which Jesse suddenly exuded that made her feel different inside as well — despite the torment she endured last year.

She read somewhere that boys who tease girls are doing so to mask their emotional feelings for the woman. The author said it was a sort of mating ritual. She found this little tidbit of pop psychology useful. It helped her tolerate the punishing insults she suffered. She drew comfort from the possibility that — according to the author — Jesse liked her. She had long ago accepted her shyness; but once adolescence began, she dreaded the thought that in the future each passing year would be ever more crushingly lonely without a boyfriend. Now that Jesse has changed, might not there be future possibilities? Granted, it was only one day, but it was a dramatic change in Jesse, and a wellspring of hope in Rebecca.

She just didn't know how to start. Feszj, sensing the uncomfortable stillness, obligingly began the conversation.

"Rebecca, I hope you enjoyed my brief history lesson."

She nodded. Then she asked, "Does your mom work at the hospital?"

"No," said Feszj. "But I do know that your mom is doing fine."

"How do you know?" she asked, crinkling her brow.

"You're very concerned about your mom, aren't you?" Again, she nodded timidly. "Don't worry, Rebecca. I can see that she is okay," said Feszj.

Jesse groaned. *I'm doomed. They'll all think I've lost it.* Unalarmed, Feszj continued.

"You can call it just a hunch if you like, or a feeling, but I know she's doing just fine." Rebecca wasn't sure how to respond. However, just hearing a self-assured Jesse make those comments soothed her anxiety.

"Here," said Feszj, "let me give you something." Feszj gently took one of Rebecca's notebooks out from under her arm and scribbled something on to one of the pages. Jesse saw that it was his phone number. "We have big plans for the weekend," Feszj went on. "If you'd like to join us, call." Feszj continued writing something Jesse didn't understand and returned the notebook to Rebecca. "That last line is a bit of philosophy I live by. I thought you might find it interesting." She looked at it and read it out loud.

"He was a friend to man, and lived in a house by the side of the road." She looked up at Jesse. "Who wrote that? You?"

"No. Homer. But another more recent writer wonderfully philosophized on this line. If you wouldn't mind, I would like to recite the last stanza of that poem for you. It's fairly self-explanatory."

Feszj stepped back away from her, placing himself center stage at the front of the room, with green chalkboards as his backdrop. He inhaled deeply, and with a strong yet breathy voice punctuated by simple gestures, began.

"Let me live in my house by the side of the road
Where the race of men go by—
They are good, they are bad, they are weak, they are strong,
Wise, foolish—so am I.
Then why should I sit in the scorner's seat
Or hurl the cynic's ban?—
Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man."

Rebecca's eyes widened at Jesse's presentation. When he finished, she laughed lightly and smiled. Her face softened and shined. Her eyes reminded Jesse a bit of Catiana's. She scooted up to Jesse.

"You're very unusual, Jesse," she said. "And you've changed a lot. For the better." She awkwardly put her arms around Jesse, gave him a gentle squeeze, lowered her head to hide her face flushing out of embarrassment, and hustled out the door. After she left the classroom, Jesse spoke up.

"Feszj, couldn't you lie at least about seeing her mom?"

Why? thought Feszj in reply.

"You're going to make me out into some sort of freak."

You already are.

"Huh? What's that supposed to mean?"

In your society, if you believe in cooperation over competition, you are a freak, whether you want to be or not.

"Shit."

Don't feel bad. You're in good company.

"And why did you invite her over?"

I didn't. She will invite herself, if she wishes. I simply offered her the environment in which to make that decision.

"You and your environment stuff." Feszj grinned at Jesse's comment. "Besides, it's not me she likes. It's you."

Maybe. Maybe not. She does look a little like Catiana, doesn't she? What are you willing to do to validate her faith in you? She has already demonstrated her commitment by forgetting the indiscretions you committed."

"But I can't be like you?"

Not now, perhaps. But we have time. A little judicious reading wouldn't hurt. But I think just acting cooperatively, doing things together with Rebecca, will be enough to help sustain the relationship and permit it to prosper.

"You want me to live forever with her? What if I don't like her after a while? I mean, what if she picks her nose all the time?"

That's fine. Few intimate relationships last forever. People change; their wants and desires are in constant flux as their experiences accumulate. The coming and going of relationships is part of life. In turn, each relationship adds unique perspectives and experiences to our lives — experiences we would sorely lack if we obsessed over one person so early in life. But remember, you should always love her — like a friend, in your sense — simply because she is a fellow human being.

Jesse considered Feszj's comments. As usual, they make sense, in a confusing sort of way. "Anyway," said Jesse, "let's get out of here."

In a moment. There is one more thing we have to do.

* * *

Feszj started proceeding to Jesse's desk when a voice from behind alerted Jesse to a forgotten presence.

"Jesse?"

"Mr. Monroe," replied Feszj.

For most of Feszj's lecture, Mr. Monroe sat in his chair. When it was over, he was about to get up when he started hearing the student comments. He sat back down with a plop, and hung his head down in acknowledgement of the futility of trying to teach.

Even though he considered himself a historian and a scholar — and a good one at that, Brad Monroe pictured himself primarily as a teacher. He had spent years learning the lessons, writing the papers, doing the research, and sat through dozens of classes. Some were great, some pitiable, but most were mediocre; and through it all vowed never to be mediocre. Children lose too much of their passion to the mediocrity of education.

He dreamed the dreams of a better way and a better future which drive many new teachers into the classroom. Out of school, he did the grunt stuff, struggling several years as a substitute teacher, acting as a disciplinarian — which he despised — rather than an educator. He sent out resumes to job openings in practically every state, and spent a lot of

money travelling to interviews, all of which were unsuccessful. Except last June, when he got the call.

He had paid his dues, and earned the right to be called a teacher. It meant nothing to him now. In a scant thirty minutes, all his years of training was sent up in smoke by a student he couldn't even tell was a history expert, and a genius at teaching. What's the point of trying anymore if a thirteen-year-old can so decisively cast it aside?

"Why?" asked Mr. Monroe, while slumped in his chair.

"Why what?"

"Why did you do that? Why did you humiliate me so? You could have just sat down like I wanted. You could have just finished the test. Everything would have been fine."

"I'm sorry. My objective was not to humiliate you, but to inspire you."

"Inspire me?" Mr. Monroe coughed out a laugh. "It has inspired me to quit."

Again, Feszj asked, "Why?"

"After that amazing display, I can't teach here anymore. No one will respect me. You heard those comments. 'I wish you were our teacher' or 'Thanks for keeping me awake during Social Studies'."

He stopped as his throat tightened. For the first time, Jesse felt sorry for a teacher, and involuntarily started remembering all those pranks and jokes he pulled with former teachers and substitutes. Jesse can only imagine the number of many aspiring teachers with high hopes that have had their dreams quickly dashed by students bent on simply making another life miserable.

"Mr. Monroe," replied Feszj, "it is true that not all history professors have the ability to bring history to life. Moreover, if a teacher cannot inspire their students to learn or love the material being presented, stop teaching, or pretending to teach. Having one teacher able to inspire two dozen students to love a subject does not excuse the ten or twenty colleagues who will only stifle and crush the passion to learn in hundreds of other students. In many ways, it is better not to go to school than become infected with an aversion to learning."

"Why you son-of-a-bitch." Mr. Monroe pinched out the swear, forcing back a more virulent response.

"Wait, Mr. Monroe," said Feszj, in his calm controlled voice, "I never said that you were incapable of inspiring students. Granted, not all can, but I believe you can. I know you can. I know you have it inside."

Mr. Monroe took a deep breath and settled down slightly, returning to his chair to sit. "How do you know I can? How can you possibly know what's inside me?" His question mixed a hope to regain his lost desire with a need to repair his ruptured ego.

Feszj grabbed a desk from the front row and dragged it around Mr. Monroe's desk. Now Feszj sat directly in front of him and was ready to continue when Jesse's voice in the back of his head interrupted.

"Do we really have to go through all this, Feszj?" asked Jesse, who was becoming more and more alarmed at the direction the conversation was going. "I'm not going to be able to keep up this deception. Someone sooner or later is going to ask me something I'll have no clue about, and I'll look like a complete fool."

Relax, Jesse. You will have plenty of time to prepare. For the moment, however, listen and learn. Feszj then returned his attention to Mr. Monroe.

"I can tell that you don't like teaching in the traditional way," said Feszj. "The way you stand up in the front, rigid and uncomfortable, halfheartedly reciting from your notes and curriculum guide, or going over the blandly written pages in the text, so as not to miss anything that the state mandates. You're comatose when teaching in this way, and it hardly masked your discomfort. But unfortunately, no other way may have been made available to you.

"Sure, you may have heard from your professors how to perform tests and measurements, appreciate different learning styles, and all the theory about how to coordinate methods and materials into nice, neat lesson plans. Wonderful stuff, but all too often takes place outside of the necessities of the school environment. You quickly learned that out in the real world educators are under extreme demands to do everything right. Every child must be taught perfectly and expertly. You must educate children ranging from those who have tremendous talent to those who can hardly read. You must guarantee that a large enough percentage of students will score well enough on standardized test and be made accountable to nameless administrators and faceless legislators so your school can maintain its allocation from state and government funds, and you can keep your job for one more year. You work every day under all that pressure, plus more mundane matters like personal safety for yourself and your students, sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll, and all the other distractions against which you must rail and penetrate with your message of wisdom and learning. You, as a teacher, are being asked to do too much, for too long, with too little."

"Well, you're right about all that," said Mr. Monroe, nodding in agreement, increasingly curious yet still cynical, and still trying to find a way to re-establish his status over Jesse. "What do you suggest?" he asked, hoping to humble the precocious young man. Mr. Monroe soon discovered that wasn't going to work.

"First," said Feszj, "you have to make a choice between either designing lessons that take into account the real world or provide a safe haven from it. I would recommend the

latter, despite what other educational, political, and business leaders may say. Students have so many problems assailing them from all sides that perhaps the best way to teach them is to take them away from their troubles, not just physically, but mentally and spiritually. Offer them an opportunity to leave the pressures and strains of their world behind, and come with you to another land, another time, another life. Even if the escape is for a mere forty-five minutes a day, students will flock to your class. Also, while they are traversing the world, they will see their problems as hardly unique or so serious they have no solution, and will learn how other people at other moments in history dealt with and survived their crises. That's part of what you can do for these students."

"There's more?" A smirk formed on Mr. Monroe's face, aware now that Jesse is describing something idyllic.

"Get rid of the standard history text books. The writers and editors have extracted all the emotion and humanity from the pages and filled the gaps with this fact and those facts, many of which have little significance to the pupils in the classroom."

"Wait a second." Mr. Monroe thought he caught an inconsistency. "On one hand, you want me to take them away, and on the other you want me to make history relevant?" He started to gloat. "You really should make up your mind."

"There is no inconsistency," said Feszj, leaning forward in his desk as far as the top would permit as if proximity would give his words more force. "All history should be made relevant. It is your job to make it appealing and compelling without preaching. Making history a narrative of human existence does just that."

Stymied, Mr. Monroe felt his personal space encroached upon and slumped away deeper into his seat cushion, silent and resentful. Feszj, returning to a more relaxed posture in his chair, went on.

"As I was saying, students are made to assimilate facts. But even then, many of the facts printed in these textbooks are wrong — like how the Korean War ended when Truman dropped the A-Bomb. More insidious are the many other facts altered or excluded — as when Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders are touted to have charged up San Juan Hill, instead of mentioning the African-American regiment which actually made the charge. Textbook editors and publishers, due to the demands of the competitive marketplace, write history which is not necessarily correct, but which does sell books. Inevitably, market forces favor a slanting of history towards an ideologically tinged support for a traditional conservative American lifestyle which views the nation's history as a singular celebration of individualism in the form of heroes and inventors, and the market economy in the form of inventions and economic success — both of which have significance in sustaining the

hegemony of corporate moguls and political leaders, the status quo political/industrial complex. In this case, the free market will not lead to free thought."

"Doesn't that seem a bit overstated, Jesse?" Again, Mr. Monroe relaxed and gained confidence as Jesse demonstrated his paranoia.

"Maybe so," replied Feszj, "but because of the competitive market economy, methods which succeed in sustaining profitability within certain companies within an industry soon become standardized throughout. Companies copy what works. And if what works means repeating these mythical histories, then it will be done. Moreover, in a competitive society, where social stability is both desperately desired and tenuously maintained, the invention and perpetuation of histories and traditions help to provide that stability, thereby holding up textbooks publishers as saviors of the nation. But it is accomplished at the expense of legitimizing contemporary power hierarchies and relationships, giving the impression to the public that this is how society always ought to be, thus reigning in social change."

"Look, I'll grant you the fact that some history books do contain some gaffs." Mr. Monroe tried halfheartedly to temper Jesse's radicalism, considering it to his argumentative advantage to remain rational while Jesse rants and raves. "But face it. History is a record of leaders and their actions. Furthermore, you make it sound like there is some sort of conspiracy going on determining the content of history. I can't see how your suspicions can be justified."

"First," said Feszj, eager to respond, "the notion that history is a record of leaders and what they did is a dangerous belief. Students and the general public constantly hear of rulers in the past sending thousands or millions of soldiers off to die at the slightest transgression. Presidents and dictators alike have the power to snuff out the life of a person whom they have never seen or knew without warning. People who have, as you have alluded to, no interest in the leaders' actions or any power to disobey them — individuals who have the least to gain and the most to lose through warfare — are predictably and invariably the first to perish.

"But by writing history this way, the readers slowly convince themselves that this is the way the world works: that leaders make history, while the average peon remains at their mercy, powerless and subject to their dominating will, whims and caprices. With centuries of this type of history, fatalism pervades the general population, and a sense of futility to actually change anything, for better or worse, consumes people's passions. This has been part and parcel throughout Western history. Even at the height of the Enlightenment, the average person had little capacity to change anything. Therefore, as each generation

realizes its impotence, and control of one's life becomes more and more precarious as a person's sphere of influence shrinks, outbursts of violence erupts in retaliation to this disappearing sense of power."

"Some historian you are," criticized Mr. Monroe. "Have you forgotten the mass movements of the twentieth century? Women's movement, civil rights, Vietnam War protests. They all changed society — and from the bottom up, as you say."

"I don't debate that. My assertion is that the average person feels powerless. By the increasing fragmentation of the social fabric, and the over a million and a half non-profit agencies ripping people's loyalties apart, people find themselves withdrawing within themselves despite their yearning to expand outward into a community, any community. Even these mass movements failed, fizzling into disarray due to internal dissension, and sped up the fragmentation of society. Sexists versus male-bashers, uppity niggers versus white racist lynch mobs, right wing government fascists versus left wing commie pinkos.

"Your society fails because your ideology of competition, so pervasive, invades spaces which ought to be reserved for community and cooperation and bringing people together. Martin Luther King hoped that the civil rights movement would benefit all races, colors, and creeds. But his power waned, and the movement splintered after the Civil Rights Act of 1963. Once the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee — the SNCC — became thoroughly disenchanted with the SCLC — Southern Christian Leadership Conference — and once the Black Power movement's violent pursuit of change arose in the North, King and his message became an anachronism.

"As had happened countless times throughout history, the competition between peoples prevailed once again. At the present point in your society's history," Jesse again caught Feszj's slip into an outsider's appraisal of the American way of life, "the quest for ethnicity and ethnic identity perpetuates the autonomy of racial, cultural, and religious communities, leaving the greater whole community increasingly fragmented."

"There you go," scoffed Mr. Monroe, "talking about competition again as if it were the cause of all our troubles."

Feszj stared at Mr. Monroe, and in the most serious and skewing voice he could muster, replied, "It is."

Masking his discomfort, Mr. Monroe swallowed and coughed. Inwardly, though, he found himself recoiling from the grim and terse assertion. It was a unpleasant feeling. In front of him sat a high school freshman, made comical by the stained metal splint and yellowing tape covering a bruised and battered face, and still he cowered and backed down. It was humiliating, but ineluctable.

Mr. Monroe had no background in the pros and cons of competition and thus had no confidence in debating the issue, especially with someone so seemingly confident with the outcome of any such discussion. "Well, be that as it may," he said, fidgeting with his hands, "I still don't agree with this conspiracy-laden interpretation of history textbooks."

Feszj smiled, and Mr. Monroe realized he had fallen into another trap. He sat sullen as Feszj explained. "There doesn't have to be a conspiracy to explain why everyone or everything follows the same pattern of behavior. Permit me to use an analogy to explain that point. Let's say you own a grocery store. You have enough sugar to supply your patrons's average needs adequately. However, a new drink arrived into town which is catching everyone's fancy. But it requires a tremendous amount of sugar to make. There is a subsequent run on sugar. Your stock is rapidly depleting, so you raise prices to slow the purchases. You find out that all the stores in town raised sugar prices for the same reason.

"So, from the buyers prospective, all the stores colluded to raise prices. Yet none of the stores conspired to do anything together, and still all the stores raised their prices. As you can see, conspiracies do not have to exist in order for seemingly coordinated actions to occur. All that is necessary is the right environment — the right set of contingent circumstances and an accepted social structure on which to base behavior, in this case the law of supply and demand. In fact, by proclaiming conspiracy, a person diverts attention away from the very real existence of contingent collusion, to the outlandish nature of paranoia.

Mr. Monroe sat stupefied. He had run out of counters to Jesse's responses, and more and more viewed himself as outmatched.

"Therefore, as a historian," continued Feszj, "your endeavor in the classroom needs to be more than telling the correct facts. Your responsibility is to relate in a compelling way the trials and tribulations of the humans — all humans — who made history, not simply from the top down but from the bottom up, so your students will learn of others like themselves who have made history, and in turn be inspired to read and learn and seek out the facts themselves. This will force the power players of history to legitimize themselves to each particular student rather than resting on the blanket legitimization granted by tainted history."

"And how is this going to happen, Jesse?" said Mr. Monroe, with polite disinterest, becoming more resistant as his self-esteem shrinks. "Perhaps you would like to tell me your idea?" Mr. Monroe hoped Jesse would spout his utopian views once again. *Nothing*

like the sharp tack of realism to deflate even the largest of optimistic balloons, he thought to himself.

"I would love to." Mr. Monroe involuntarily cringed at that line, having been the start of his humiliation. Feszj sat back in the chair and took a deep breath while composing his thoughts. Jesse, still a silent witness to all that was happening, felt growing sense of depression in his powerlessness. Damage was being done to his reputation, his future in school.

Don't worry about your reputation or your future in this school. You have an important part to play in the future of your society. This is just the start — the small steps preceding the leaps and bounds ahead. You will do great things, Jesse.

Feszj's compelling prediction comforted Jesse for the moment. Still, being suspended in limbo unnerved him while his world passed by around him.

In the meantime, Feszj presented his idea to Mr. Monroe. "To explain the ideal education, one must explain the appropriate society that will make such a system possible." With that, Mr. Monroe lounged back in his chair and folded his arms over his chest preparing, reluctantly, for a thorough presentation.

"The community takes complete care of the newborns," said Feszj. "Two parent groups do not exist. Such a system provides too narrow an intellectual foundation for the young. The entire community must share in the raising and teaching of the children. To this end, the babies live initially in a community nursery under the guidance of a variety of community members of different ages. After the children reach an age when they are comfortable moving around the town on their own, they are permitted to live in any of the standard living quarters of the community."

During Feszj's description, Jesse pictured the town of Vilmar, with its community day care facility in the middle of the dome in the center of the town.

"During this early stage, the children learn to read and write and sing songs and play cooperative games. They do all this without coercion because all the adults encourage it and do it themselves; the children, because of innate compulsion, imitate and emulate the adults. A tremendous amount of information is acquired in these early stages of life, and the information stays with the child due to its constant reinforcement and repetition encouraged by the interaction between members of the community. Information is freely and openly discussed and built upon.

"In our community," Jesse noticed the slip by Feszj; he hoped Mr. Monroe, however, did not notice it, "there is no organized setting for school, nor are their officially designated teachers. Every occurrence, every event everywhere is a learning moment, and no child

knows otherwise. There is no distinction between life and learning. They are both one in the same. Thus, whenever a topic interests them, they are free pursue it with gusto. They read voraciously on the subject, ask numerous questions of people who may know the subject, and are allowed to engage hand-on with the materials necessary to answer their questions and satisfy their curiosity.

"For example, let's say a child has an interest in dinosaurs. He goes to the library and reads up on them. A community member may ask what dinosaurs eat, or where did they live, to prompt their curiosity. Each question sends the child, now student, off to find the answer, learning about botany, geography, and any number of other subjects along the way. But what is more important, never are children forced to find the information; nor are children forced to learn specified information in a specified manner according to a specified timetable within a specified amount of time. The students maintain a sense of autonomy over what they are learning. Consequently, the pupils not only find the subject matter intrinsically tantalizing and the answers to the questions intrinsically rewarding, but the fact that they are in intimate control of their learning enhances both the value and the quality of that knowledge."

Mr. Monroe sniffed. Feszj went on.

"As the children get older, they gain an appreciation of sharing information and so begin telling other members of the community, children and adult, of their discoveries. It is suggested that they compile their thoughts and submit a paper to the library for cataloguing, thus making their discovery of information a part of the community record, open to public discussion and public scrutiny. Of course, these first attempts are simple, but they promote effective research habits that will improve with practice. And every member has the option to remove their work at any time for revisions.

"As the children grow older still, their main interests narrow to a small group of subjects. At this point, they may leave the community to continue the pursuit of their interests in other communities which provide the best opportunity for learning. For example, some communities specialize in farming and agricultural technology; other communities deal with housing and shelter development; still others with medical advancements, energy production, logistical requirements between communities, and the list is endless."

"That's all well and good," interrupted a bored Mr. Monroe, seeing the discussion reaching a tangent off of education, "but you don't seem to understand the intricacies and nuances of public education." Mr. Monroe smiled broadly now. "So it is never going to happen. You're ideas are nice, but futile."

"Are you saying I should feel powerless to change education?" Feszj's dry retort snatched Mr. Monroe's smile off his face. Feszj continued without waiting for a reply.

"Have you so soon in your career become disenchanted with teaching? Think back to your college days. Dr. Tanning tried to sway you from public teaching, but you held firm. You told him that researching and writing about history is meaningless without an ever replenished supply of people who know how to read and understand history. Don't you remember Tanning being duly impressed with your persuasiveness, and then told you that if you succeed you may never get any thanks, but historians throughout the world will be sincerely grateful?"

"Who told you about all that?" Mr. Monroe rattled off in anger. His heart pounded in his chest as he dealt with the shock from this amazing revelation of what he assumed was a private conversation between him and his advisor. If he weren't so angry, he might have noticed that Feszj's comments did jog into consciousness a memory long hidden by the wearying struggles with his students for classroom control. He would have remembered how all his high hopes took a back seat when faced with his students's withering apathy; and how all too quickly, he had become that which he never wanted to be — a mediocre teacher doing everything all the other mediocre teachers do.

"You fail," said Feszj, ignoring Mr. Monroe's question, "not because you have written off these plans as fantasies, but because you yourself have ceased to dream of them anymore."

Mr. Monroe's face flattened with a mixture of insult and confusion. "I don't think I like your tone of voice, young man. Or your implication. Or your invasive knowledge of my life."

Jesse also cautioned Feszj. "Don't antagonize him. He's my teacher, and he gives me my grades."

Grades are of no importance to you now, said Feszj to Jesse. Instead, notice how his rebuttal was laced with threats to be silent. What I have said is true, but he is afraid to hear it. We must continue.

Feszj returned his attention to Mr. Monroe, whose face grew more and more tense.

"The only way you are going to revive your lost aspirations is to release yourself from the contemporary educational necessities which have placed you and your students into a coercive environment. For as we all know, coercion is the least effective method for teaching."

"What do you mean, 'coercive' environment?" His curiosity piqued again. This allowed his temper to subside just enough to open his mind up to his earlier passions about education.

"Mr. Monroe, think of all the things that are used to compel students to do their work — work that has no intrinsic satisfaction apparently, otherwise students would be doing the work already. For example, threats of punishments if behavior isn't deemed appropriate."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Mr. Monroe. "I prefer the idea of explaining the consequences of inappropriate behavior."

"And that is somehow less coercive?"

"Well,...um..." Mr. Monroe stumbled for a reply. He intuited where the argument was going, and tried to distance himself from the losing side. "That's what they say."

"A consequence," commenced Feszj's response, "is simply a way of instilling upon the child the possibility of a future punishment. Just like the consequences of getting a speeding ticket every time you are caught speeding. But what has that consequence done to you? Now, every time you see a police car on the road, your head drops almost instinctively to check your speedometer, whether you were speeding or not. The great fear of consequences has caused this abnormal, socially-conditioned tick.

"Initially, consequences may not seem as punitive as outright punishment, but it requires the same amount of fear of punishment to effectively mold and shape appropriate behavior, just like what punishment itself does. Moreover, because the child is forced to contemplate the consequences of his actions, it is therefore deemed the fault of the child — just as it is your fault if you get caught speeding — if punishment is given. After all, these students supposedly understood the consequences of their actions, and by continuing to misbehave, brought punishment upon themselves. So not only is fear involved, but guilt. And what does it really teach? Not so much 'Don't do it,' but 'Don't get caught doing it.' Remember, the underlying motivation for the proscribed behavior hasn't been affected.

"Ironically, with all the talk of consequences with the child, there is little if any discussion of whether or not consequences are necessary for this particular behavior. That aspect is left solely to the discretion of the teacher. There is no question that punishment is required for X behavior as determined by the will of the teacher; and like many teachers, they will continually assert the threatening notion of consequences until they attain the answer they were looking for in the first place. The child remains completely at the mercy of the whims and arbitrariness of the adults. Consequently, no matter how education is achieved, students come to the very quick understanding that the entire ethos of student

behavior — no matter who is teaching or who is learning, no matter where, no matter when — can be broken down into three simple demands: Sit down. Shut up. Do your work."

Mr. Monroe's eyes flared. *How dare he*, he thought, *a lowly ninth grader, speak so flippantly about the profession*. His mouth opened as if to speak, but Feszj spoke sooner. "Think about it. Isn't that what you desire most from your students? That they sit down so time isn't spent on discipline and crowd control? That they shut up so you can give them the information in a quiet, non-distracting atmosphere? That they do their work so you can evaluate their learning?"

Mr. Monroe's mouth dropped again ready to dismiss such a simplistic notion of teaching, but nothing came out. He caught himself as he thought about his own teaching, and how it has become exactly like that. This is exactly what he wants. He and a vast majority of his colleagues, he was sure, feel that an ideal class is a studious one, dutifully and quietly taking notes in their seats. But something troubled him about the description.

"Why does it sound so bad when you say it?" he asked of Jesse.

"Because deep inside you, you know that teaching is more than a one-way conduit of knowledge, where the teacher gives and the student receives. More than a place where students are threatened with sanctions if their behavior doesn't match a teacher's expectations. More than a place where every student is essentially viewed and treated in exactly the same way as everyone else."

"Excuse me, Jesse, but I think you are again overstating the"

"Do you know the learning styles of every student in your classroom," said Feszj, interrupted Mr. Monroe in mid-sentence. Mr. Monroe struck his chin, but said nothing. He had nothing to say because he didn't know. "Do you know any one person's learning style?" Mr. Monroe remained mute. He looked away from Jesse towards the blackboard. Feszj was going to ask 'Why not?' but decided not to be redundant. The question had already been implied.

"Do you feel humiliated that you don't know something that, as an educator, you ought to know?" No answer came. Feszj wasn't expecting one, so he continued. "It is nothing to be upset about. You're not the only one. Educators often provide lip service to the fact that every student has a different learning capacity and a learning style, but that knowledge rarely reaches the level of application in the classroom — a place where differences are ignored and knowledge of one's ability to learn gets in the way — subtle differences that grow very large as students weave their way through school and society. Unfortunately, since that is the mentality in the great majority of classrooms, administrators also treat students as if they have no differences. Lumping gifted students and mainstreamed special

educations students along with everyone else in the middle, in the hopes that the gifted students will not feel frustrated by the slow pace of instruction, and the special needs children are not frustrated by the accelerated pace of instruction.

"Despite the voluminous research on the varied leaning abilities of children, the changes in education the last several decades have been more in response to the financial woes of public schooling rather than to the educational woes. Eliminating art, music, physical education, special education and gifted and talented classrooms — not for the sake of some higher order social and intellectual development but for the sake of homogeneity. Treating everyone the same is cheaper and easier than treating everyone differently."

Exhausted, and perhaps relieved, Mr. Monroe nodded for the first time in a while. "You're right. I have noticed that trend recently."

"That's good," said Feszj.

"But how can this be changed?" Mr. Monroe spoke without any hint of sarcasm or skepticism in his voice. He seemed sincerely interested in what Jesse was saying.

"To start, I want you to remember how it feels."

"How what feels?"

"How it feels to be humiliated — for that is how a student feels most of the time in the classroom. Humiliation plays such a large and critical part of a child's education today. Reading out loud in class, walking up to the blackboard in front of their peers to solve problems. For the vast majority of students, these embarrassments are public displays of their educational failure. If administrators and teachers were forced to display their teaching abilities and expose their incompetence to public scrutiny and ridicule, they wouldn't stand for it. Yet these very same educators insist that students do it all the time.

"Even if a student does perform these requests well, because they are public displays they make their fellow students who can't perform so well feel like failures again. Then, of course, there are star charts to publicly monitor behavior or achievement, and inversely poor behavior and lack of achievement. Again, no teacher would ever have a star chart of their performance hanging in his or her classroom. Humiliation is fine for kids, not for adults. And don't forget the spelling bees and geography bees and all the other bees where the one winner, with the support and the accolades of thousands or millions of spectators, has an opportunity to sting all the losers.

"Too often teachers forget what it was like to be a student, what it was like to be humiliated, what it was like to fail in front of peers. Too many teachers want to be in charge, want to dominate, want to control everything about the classroom, and never look like a failure even if they teach badly. What is ironic, however, is that such repressive

methods of classroom control demonstrates a teacher's incompetence rather than competence. By forcing students to bow to your will, through humiliation tactics, by the coerciveness of grades and the fear of tests, et cetera, you've demonstrated your lack of legitimacy in the classroom. Legitimate authority has no need for coercive controls. People obey legitimate authorities because they want to. You have to give them a reason to come to class, to behave, to study hard.

"The threats teachers thrive on to extract obedience from students gives them an easy way out of teaching. But no one ever said teaching was supposed to be easy — except perhaps other teachers. Teaching properly is a time-consuming and difficult task. It is difficult because the children we teach are so fragile, and every mistake we make threatens their future. But when students come in to class having read the assigned materials and ask probing questions delving into the whys and wherefores in society, teaching is by far the most exciting endeavor in which a person can engage. Remember how toddlers would ask why about everything. Unfortunately, most parents and many teachers find that annoying; these kids quickly learn to shut up. Your job is to bring back this passion to ask why."

"But I can't answer all the whys." Mr. Monroe sounded desperate. Jesse sounded comforting in his reply.

"You aren't supposed to. You are here to help these kids find the answers so you can all learn together. You see, when the students learn that you too are part of this learning process, and are willing to work hard to find the answers, there is a sense that everyone is working together. By admitting you don't know, you have just opened up more room for your mind and their minds to grow."

"So," pondered Mr. Monroe out loud, his brow furrowed from the strain of comprehension, "what you are saying is that I really don't teach students anything unless I teach them how to find the answers to their own questions."

"Exactly."

"Yes," said Mr. Monroe, his eyes wistfully transparent, "it's all coming back to me. I remember what it felt like in school. And I remember that I never wanted any of my students to go through what I did." Then, Mr. Monroe began shaking his head. "But I can't figure out what happened. I had all these high hopes. Where'd they go?"

"Oh, they are still there," said Feszi. "But the passion has been squelched by the the most cruel of forces to have taken over the way your society educates children."

"And that is?"

"Competition."

Mr. Monroe smirked again. "That's easy for you to say, but these students need competition to prod them along ..."

"And that's why it fails," said Feszj, cutting off Mr. Monroe. "The fact that you have to force children to attend school, that you have to force children to do their homework, that you have to force them to learn defeats the point of it."

Feszj stood up from his chair. He walked to the classroom door, and began speaking again.

"At five years old, most children are deliciously eager to learn the moment they enter kindergarten." Feszj motioned imaginary students through the class door. "They want to be shown things, to touch things, and play with things. They want to meet people and exchange ideas and stories. School is the next big step in the adventure of life, and they are desperate to begin.

"By the time these students finish first grade, however, the adventure was a betrayal. In less than two years, these once passionate learners do not want to go back. School is boring, school is tedious. Too many kids in class, not enough equipment. The children are shown only what the teachers will show them, only what the state mandates they learn, and very little more than that. Too many teachers do what little it takes to satisfy their obligations to the administration, not to the student. Teachers have institutionalized themselves, where the point is now to remain a teacher until retirement, instead of developing young minds. The very point of the occupation has now become a necessary evil to help people survive through old age."

"Well," said Mr. Monroe, recovering from Jesse's rhetoric, "hopefully that will change the more and more we are perceived as professionals, and the more and more our salaries rise to attract better candidates."

"That's a myth." Feszj raced back to his chair. "Increasing a teacher's salary will not make better teachers. In fact, it's actually part of the problem — something few educators wish to admit. What increased pay does it attracts people for the love of money, rather than the love of education. Again, educating students has become the necessary evil to gain a high paid position. And as well-paying jobs become scarcer, people will turn to education in larger and larger numbers only because they have to survive.

"If education were truly enjoyable, salaries would be the least important issue discussed. However, since many educators are finding their work increasingly intolerable — unable to break from the bureaucratic demands thrust upon them, and forced to deal with children who have long ago lost their desire to learn — they demand higher pay

simply to make the job more tolerable. Increased pay has little to do with professionalism; it has to do with frustration."

"Well," said a frustrated Mr. Monroe, "what do you suggest? Reduce salaries so only those who really want to teach will apply? That doesn't make sense."

"You're right. Lower salaries will scare off many applicants, eventually leading to a shortage of teachers. Even possibly gifted teachers, because the acquisition of their basic needs is at stake."

Mr. Monroe was thrown for a loop. "I don't get it, then. If higher salaries won't improve teaching, and lower salaries won't attract better teachers, what do you suggest?"

"Let me answer that in the form of an analogy." Feszj adjusted his position on the chair. "Imagine yourself as the head of surgery at a large university hospital. The hospital needs to perform a very delicate operation to remove a tumor tucked away under the frontal lobe of the brain, but none of its surgeons on your staff can perform the operation. So you send out a call. The hospital will pay one million dollars to a surgeon who can perform the operation. One arrives to accept the assignment. You shake the doctor's hand, take the surgeon to the operating room. There, the visiting surgeon sees the patient on the table, wide awake, talking to a nurse, the only other person in the room.

"The visiting surgeon stops and says, 'I can't operate on this patient.'

"You reply, 'Why not? You're being paid well enough.' You hand the doctor a butter knife. 'Here you go. Get to work. Oh, and by the way, the patient's relatives and friends want to see a big improvement in health as well. Good luck.'"

Mr. Monroe sat still, staring at Jesse. He then nodded his head in understanding. Feszj reiterated the point. "You see? No matter how much money a person makes, surgeon or teacher, you can't do what you have to do without the equipment, without the facilities, without the support personnel. This is the story of education. People constantly expect miracles from schools without expending the money to repair schools with holes in the roof and rainwater flowing down the stairs, sewage seeping up through cafeteria floors, classes held in bathrooms, and lessons taught with out-of-date books filled with obsolete facts.

"And how did all this come about?" prompted Feszj, a sinister smile growing on his face. "Competition. Parents and legislators are unwilling to share the wealth, too concerned about their own children to assure all students a proper education. This increases the chances that their own son or daughter will be at an advantage right from the start. Their children are going to win the battle of equal opportunity, and to hell with everyone else. Is it no wonder why many inner city youths see their only possibility for

empowerment in society contained in the use of fear and intimidation through robbery, assault, and violence. Education, by its own construction, perpetuates and rewards the classism that exists in the United States."

"But can all competition be removed from the classroom?"

"Why not?"

Mr. Monroe thought for a moment. "You realize that you will be doing away with tests, and the like?"

"Of course."

"But without tests and some sort of evaluation, how will we be able to grade our students?"

"There are many levels to that question," responded Feszj. "First, you don't need a competitive atmosphere to evaluate a student's work. Competition occurs when these evaluations are ranked against each other. Competition actually makes the evaluation process superficial. For example, placing a grade at the top of an essay or report is a short-hand and meaningless summary method of evaluation for it tells the student nothing specific about which parts were well done, which could be improved — nothing.

"Furthermore, grading isn't useful in describing the intellectual development or ability of a child. Take, for example, the Vietnam Memorial, perhaps the most emotionally filled expression of an American tragedy. The simple and yet profound design was selected from thousands submitted to a distinguished committee of judges. It was also a project from a graduate student to which an art professor gave a grade of B+, a little better than average. Grading is entirely subjective, because the selection of the method used to determine the intellectual capacity of a student is based on a teacher's arbitrary choices. A different test, made up of different questions, in a different order, may produce an entirely different grade. A grade is a wholly random event made up of a unique set of contingent circumstances. Not only does this mean that a grade is not a fair assessment of ability, it also means that no test can ever be designed to assure a completely fair evaluative tool for everyone taking the test. Consequently, test designers choose, whether consciously or not, which sub-set of test takers will succeed or fail when they determine the testing protocol which will appeal to one set of test takers over another.

"In the end, all testing does is celebrate and honor those few who are able to learn more than others. Yet there are others who are not able to learn as much, and will not be honored or celebrated, due to no fault of their own. Their infant and toddler diets may have been poor; their mental stimulation may have been non-existent; their intellectual development may have been stunted by the lack of intellectual experiences — the lack of

opportunities for their brains to fully and freely grow and prosper. At the moment children arrive at school, they are automatically doomed by their past to do either well or poorly based on their experiences. Grades, therefore, do not tell us how well they have learned the material presented in class, but how well their entire realm of experiences in the past have prepared them for this moment in their lives. Consequently, grading isn't as innocuous as educators would have you believe. Fail a test and it demonstrates the level at which your life has failed to prepare you. It is an indictment of your past."

"But without testing, how are we to evaluate students?"

"Evaluate as much as you can. Grading is a cop-out for effective and detailed evaluations."

"But we don't have enough time to do that."

Feszj slammed his hand on the desk top. "Then make the time. You are dealing with the future of children, and their children, and their children's children. What you do in the classroom can change a world. If you can't make the commitment, don't teach."

Mr. Monroe blazed with anger inside. He squinted at Jesse, and then all of a sudden, with just one thought, the anger snuffed itself out. He remembered a former girlfriend of his in college, Donna Friese, who once told him that she went into teaching because the pay was good, and that teachers only worked two hundred days out of the year. "I may not be the best teacher," she said, without disappointment, "but I certainly won't be any worse than the worst already teaching." Her low aspirations and her condescending opinion of the profession and its responsibilities incensed him. He never spoke to her again. He hoped she would never get a job. He found out, however, that she was one of the first to find employment straight out of college. Bitter, he almost sent a letter off to the school district expressing his dismay at their selection, having been entranced by her cuteness.

But he never did. And after just two years of teaching, he is hearing from colleagues and from himself those same thoughts Donna expressed back in undergrad. Jesse was right. He has been right about everything.

"What else can you tell me about grades and competition, Jesse?"

Jesse, hearing this capitulation was stunned. "He's giving up?"

No, exactly the opposite. He wants to fight once more.

Jesse paused to figure out what Feszj meant.

"More insidiously," said Feszj, complying with Mr. Monroe's request and leaving Jesse to ruminate, "grading simply determines the ranking of who can learn and repeat the most expected information — not necessarily correct information — in a set amount of time. After all, if one learns the material in seven days, and another person needs eight

days, the former person succeeds in the task designed by the educational system, and the latter person fails. No accommodation is given to those who may not be intellectually gifted, or better prepared, or need more time to properly develop the appropriate neural pathways to acquire, retain, and repeat factual information according to the specified criteria used for determination.

"In other words," continued Feszj, raising his hand to keep Mr. Monroe from interrupting him for the moment, "institutionalized education is a race or a contest to see who can learn the most appropriate information in a given amount of time. In fact, formalized education *is* a sport, where all the participants are placed in an arena where everyone has the same playing field on which to perform, provided with the same equipment and restricted by the same rules. At age five, despite the inequality of every child's prior training, the flag is up and the race begins — some with head starts, others lagging far behind the pack.

"During the race, instead of educating people and allowing them time to learn, schools place all their charges on a timer, and those who learn the most — No, actually, the ones who can get highest grades on tests — in the allotted time, wins. Not only that, but the one who can learn the most of what the teachers, administrators, business executives, and legislators deem to be the most important things to learn, and regurgitate it in the most desirable form, all with the least amount of challenges, conflicts, objections, resistance, and all the other frictions to the hierarchy that makes students disagreeable to teachers and nervous to governments and institutions. And in the end, the winners receive the awards and rewards that await, while the losers are mechanically churned out, or are dumped out, or voluntarily drop out."

Feszj took a deep breath. "Education is no better than a sport," he concluded. "In the final analysis, there is no meaningful difference between a football game and a ninth grade class room."

"But without grades," asked Mr. Monroe, but without any conviction, "how will universities select students? For that matter, how will businesses know who to hire?"

Feszj raised his finger. "That is one of the nastiest aspects of the competitive educational system. Education ought not to be in the business of determining who should and who shouldn't get what job. That's business's responsibility. Only employers know their exact needs. Let them evaluate their applicants accordingly."

"But then, anyone can get a job, with or without a college education, if they can learn enough on their own just enough to pass the evaluation at the job site."

"Precisely."

Mr. Monroe again opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came out but a sigh of confusion.

"What you were going to say," offered Feszj, "was that without the necessity of college education, colleges would drastically shrink due to lower enrollments."

"Well, that could happen."

"Which also means that only truly motivated students will go on to higher education rather than immediate employment or trade schools."

"I suppose."

"Which means grading would no longer be necessary to prod students because this new breed of student is already motivated to do the work on their own."

"Hmm."

"Perhaps more importantly now, you are further wondering why higher education continues to insist on grading students, despite the research that has demonstrated its ineffectiveness?"

"That is an interesting question."

"Let's put everything we have talked about together." Feszj rose from his seat once again and positioned himself in front of the black board, took a piece of chalk off the ledge, and began schematizing as he spoke.

"We know that if students are intrinsically motivated in a task, they will do it without any necessary prodding. But providing a constant intrinsically exciting environment requires the combined efforts of an entire community and its resources, something your communities in this country are unwilling or unable to do because taxpayers, parents, and politicians are competing amongst themselves for money and resources.

"So, instead, we get a school that is poorly equipped and soon filled with uninspired students, frustrated and bored with the slowness of learning. Organized education is unable to provide intrinsic motivation to learn, and so children want to quit. Up to this point, there is still time to change, by increasing funding and other options. But this is also the point where your educational system fails. Because instead of redesigning the educational environment so intrinsic motivation can be re-instilled within the students, education turns to competition, for it has been shown that competitive environments spur increased productivity in only one, but a very critical, circumstance — when the activity that needs to be performed is dull, repetitive, and offers no intrinsic satisfaction. Grading, testing, spelling bees, college bowls, star charts, Ritalin, et cetera, are all examples that intrinsic motivation to learn is bankrupt in contemporary education.

"Inevitably, teaching in such an environment will become just as dull and uninspiring as teachers become lazy and find comfort in competition — an educational ideology which prevails today more than ever before due to its short-term coercive effects — which prods students to do the work — and its long-term ease of application — which doesn't prod the teachers to do enough work. It makes teaching easier. But, as teachers of all people ironically are wont to say, easier isn't necessarily better.

"Businesses enjoy the competition going on in the educational institutions because then they don't have to spend time or money going through the steps to thoroughly evaluate prospective employees. They leave it to colleges and university to weed out the desirable from the undesirable.

"Furthermore, universities, despite the research against competition originating in their own departments, are in no hurry to eliminate the golden goose of competition. Since employees do not individually evaluate applicants, future employees must go to college to earn suitable employment, which in turn provides a steady stream of money to supply the salaries of administrators, faculty, and staff. By resisting calls to return employee evaluation procedures to the employer, higher education has become a hypocritical cash cow, ignoring its own research and doing a tragic disservice to its students in pursuit of economic expediency. The institutionalization of higher education is complete. Because now, the primary goal of universities is no longer to provide the best possible education for students; the primary goal of a university is now first and foremost to simply stay in business and survive the competition between other profit-driven cash cows."

Exhausted, Mr. Monroe slouched in his chair, his head in his hands, his fingers rubbing the sweat off his forehead. He groaned and strained to assimilate all he heard — all that he knew had to be, if not true, then close to it. In college, he had much the same thoughts — thoughts he forgot once he became indoctrinated as a teacher.

"As a historian, you must realize that history itself is all a product of interpretation. Therefore, as a teacher, the question is: how would you like it to be interpreted? Described in such a way as to place the common person at the short end of the social stick, viewed as buffoons and buffeted about by the whimsical character of leaders? Or as an integral and necessary part of social movements and social changes — a path which resists the hegemony of political and industrial power?"

"But the choice isn't that simple," said Mr. Monroe, speaking into the desk top, having no strength to raise his head.

"You have a choice. You can teach the way it ought to be done, the way it should be done, with grading and testing replaced by tales of adventure and mystery. You can

perpetuate the heroification of leaders, statesmen, and inventors; or you can de-mythologize them, and display them as the humans they were, with the same flaws and desires, the same pimples and the same bad breath as the rest of us — product of their environments and their experiences.

"But teaching this way puts you at tremendous risk. You will probably suffer the consequences of being an ultra-maverick among teachers. You will be overlooked for tenure, or fired outright for not teaching the prescribed way. Your fellow teachers will shun you and spread rumors about you and respond to miniscule transgressions in your behavior with over-reaction and excessive harshness just because you make them look bad.

"You can take that risk, or you can simply do what you have always been doing, going along to get along. Mechanically efficient with your pupils, mildly amusing with your colleagues. You do your work, get your paycheck, and complain to cohorts in the security of the teacher's lounge about how miserable teaching has become because students don't want to learn anymore.

"In your mind, the choice is already made. You have only to acknowledge it. But remember, in the former case you may suffer, but the students will benefit. In the latter case, you may benefit, but the students will suffer. True education or institutionalized education? Choose."

Feszj stood up from his chair. "I'll leave you with that thought," he said. He went over to Jesse's desk, gathered up his books, and started walking toward the door. Before Feszj reached the doorway, however, the curiosity of the scholar and researcher inside Mr. Monroe could not be contained any longer.

"Wait." Feszj stopped and turned towards the still sitting teacher. "For the past several weeks, you've been just an average student. How do you all of a sudden know so much, Jesse?" he said. "How do you come to teach so well?"

Feszj remained silent, perhaps considering how he would respond to the question. Jesse, still floating above the action and still fighting back the panic of being a disembodied entity, wondered why Feszj was waiting. Jesse didn't hear his thoughts, which was unusual.

"What are you waiting for, Feszj?" asked Jesse. "Just tell him that I had done a lot of reading and studying. And that his class doesn't bring out the best in me. You can dress it up."

I can't tell him that.

"What do you mean you can't tell him that? You have to."

I would be lying — and I cannot lie.

Jesse would have felt a sudden heavy sickness invade his stomach if he had a body.
"What are you going to do?" said Jesse, scared and panicky.

Instead of replying to Jesse, Feszj spoke to Mr. Monroe.

"I'm not Jesse."

"No! What are you doing?" screamed Jesse, though only Feszj heard him.

"Excuse me," replied Mr. Monroe.

"My real name is Feszj." Feszj could hardly hear himself think through the piercing screams of Jesse to stop this confession. Though he tried not to, Feszj winced in pain. Mr. Monroe noticed Jesse's jaw tense up from the pain.

"Is everything okay, Jesse? Feszj went on..

"I am only temporarily occupying Jesse's body in order to talk more freely with you and other people on this world."

Mr. Monroe eyed him suspiciously.

"You don't believe me, do you?" Feszj slanted his head, narrowed his eyes, and returned his gaze towards Mr. Monroe.

"Well ...," said Mr. Monroe. He was hesitant. Not being a trained psychologist, he did not quite know how to talk about mental illness without possibly making things worse. So he spoke in a non-committal way. "You must admit, it is hard to believe."

"Well, that is true," agreed Feszj. "However, considering everything you have heard here, do you have a better explanation as to why a thirteen year old knows so much?"

"Well," the teacher replied, acting circumspect and avoiding the term 'schizophrenia', "there are many cases of autistic children and idiot savants ..."

"Jesse and I are hardly autistic," said Feszj. "And idiot savants are not both brilliant and average in the same subject."

Mr. Monroe's sat shaken. His rationalism was slowly losing its foundation. He fumbled for another possibility.

"You could have learned all this material on your own?"

"Mr. Monroe, check Jesse's record. You will not see a steady increase in ability as his knowledge increased which should have been noticeable if your theory were true."

"Well," said Mr. Monroe, remembering something mentioned earlier which gave him renewed confidence, though slight, "if you're correct, then tests don't provide both a fair and accurate measure. Maybe you're just not a good test taker."

"That's quite possible. However, even Jesse's essays and reports, places where you might expect to see some sort of linguistic ability, indicated no overwhelming ability. I'm sorry, Mr. Monroe, you'll have to do better than that."

Mr. Monroe had only one idea left. "Perhaps the broken nose or the bump on the back of your head may be affecting your brain in some strange way."

"How?" quizzed Feszj. "Countless others have had head injuries without ever becoming a genius. How do you explain this case?"

"I don't know," he said, mentally exhausted from the unbelievable possibility which had placed itself in front of him. "But it's the only thing I can think of. It's the only reasonable possibility."

"So that's the problem. It is a matter of belief. First, unable to believe that no one in the educational settings Jesse has attended has been able to discern Jesse's innate talents, you turn to what you think is a much more reasonable assumption — that this event was caused by some routine physical accident."

Mr. Monroe nodded. "But," asked Feszj, "could not a miracle have occurred? Why is that so hard to believe?"

"It's impossible."

"But explain to me then," said Feszj, "how a bump on the head could register true facts about your private life?"

Mr. Monroe thought for a few seconds, and then grinned. "You could have learned that from someone else. Tell me something that no one but my parents would know. Tell me about my first pet."

Feszj resisted. "I'm not here to engage in carnival tricks."

"Just tell him," pleaded Jesse, cutting into the conversation.

"I thought so," remarked Mr. Monroe.

Feszj replied to both of his listeners out loud. "I am here to help Jesse spread the values of cooperation and non-competition at least in situations where competition is flagrantly inappropriate, like education — where everyone should win, not just the ones lucky enough to have the right genes and right environment."

"If you say so," replied Mr. Monroe, now totally unimpressed with Jesse. Mr. Monroe recovered his lost pride instantly and, feeling a new surge of strength, stood up and looked down at Jesse. "That was a wonderful story, Jesse. I was almost convinced that what you said was true. You really should write a book and not waste your talents." Mr. Monroe's face turned grim. "But don't think this ridiculous babble of yours is going to convince me to take it easy on your classroom performance. As for your test, you failed. And I'll have you expelled from this class, if not the school, if you try to cheat once again."

"How is it that helping someone else succeed is deemed cheating?" said Feszj, disappointed.

"Jesse," said Mr. Monroe, annoyed by still another challenge to his classroom authority, "I am in no mood any longer to debate anything with you. You need psychological counselling, young man, and I will be notifying Vice-Principle Black of your condition. Until then, I suggest you talk to your parents and begin seeking medical treatment on your own as soon as you can — if you are as looney as you say you are."

Feszj said nothing. He remained seated and listened patiently. Jesse was still desperately trying to persuade Feszj to prove the Mr. Monroe that this was all true.

Jesse, people need to convince themselves that the arguments merit attention, not the person, nor the parlor tricks. I could have started describing his pet hamster — named Spot because of the little circular area of white fur on its back; and how it died because eight-year-old Brad kept forgetting to feed it. Starving, the poor animal began eating the wood shavings lining the bottom of the cage, eventually becoming so constipated that its intestines exploded. No one ever knew why the animal died, but Brad continually lied about feeding little Spot.

I could have mentioned all that, but then you and I would have become known for our paranormal abilities, not for our discussions opposing competition. The entire issue would have been deflected.

"Well," said Jesse, "the entire issue has been deflected by not telling him."

Yes, that is unfortunate.

"Unfortunate? Hell, we both failed. I failed my test, and you failed to change anything."

Not entirely. Remember, change can be rapid or slow. For now, we wait. Let's hope some of what I have mentioned will stay with him. Let's hope my demonstration of teaching will inspire him to be a better teacher.

"Hope," said Jesse, scoffing. "That's little comfort."

In your world, hope is one of the only comforts you have.

"Good-bye, Mr. Monroe," said Feszj. "I'm glad we had a chance to talk."

Mr. Monroe, having returned to his desk to grade the class quiz, hardly moved his head in acknowledgement. A forced "Good-bye, Jesse," was his only response. He didn't raise his head from his papers until he heard the desk Jesse sat in clattering. Mr. Monroe turned away from his work and witnessed Jesse's body twitching, as if experiencing a seizure.

"You can stop that ridiculous acting right now and leave this classroom immediately," said Mr. Monroe and resumed his grading.

Gradually, the convulsions ceased, and Jesse's mind regained full possession of his limbs, and started moving his fingers in front of his face in a new appreciation of the marvel of touch and physical sensations.

"Jesse, are you quite through?" Jesse raised his eyes and met a scowling Mr. Monroe.

Jesse wanted to speak, but he was both too shaken by the experience and worried he might regret what he would say. Instead, he cautiously rose from his chair, grabbed his books, and slowly walked towards the exit.

Jesse stopped at the door, staying there for almost a minute, and wanted to turn around and respond to Mr. Monroe, hoping to say something that might convince his teacher that he wasn't insane or a troublemaker. But nothing came to mind — impromptu rhetoric was not Jesse's specialty. But he couldn't leave either, desperate for a more satisfactory ending to the conversation.

Go home, and don't worry, Jesse, said Feszj.

"I can't leave after all that," objected Jesse. "He thinks I'm nuts."

The environment is not right for him to convince himself otherwise. Let him think what he will for now. As for us, another time will come.

Jesse, though hardly satisfied, acquiesced to Feszj's suggestion and walked down the hallway away from the classroom, releasing the door to slowly close behind him.

* * *

That Friday night, while sleeping, Jesse returned to Vilmar. A light snow had fallen on the community the previous night and covered the countryside with a dry white powder. The sky remained overcast with a light gray pudding of clouds floating above. Today, so far, Feszj and Jesse spoke little about utopia and competition and cooperation. Instead, as it began to gently snow again, they strode out from under the dome along with Catiana and the rest of the helpcrew, each carrying a backpack filled with food, cooking utensils, tents, and sleeping gear. The group wore similar wool caps under the tunic hoods, and each wore thin gloves surprisingly toasty for their slim thickness. The palm was reinforced with a tightly woven mesh of plastic fibers. Dressed for the weather, they were to hike out to the Mt. Tever windmills today for their seasonal inspection.

"How far away are the windmills?" asked Jesse.

"About 25 kilometers," replied Catiana.

"Why don't we take one of those hovercrafts? It'll be a lot easier."

"Easier, maybe," she replied, "but nothing like an experience. This inspection will take almost a week: two days to hike there, several days of thorough inspection, and then another two days to hike back. During the evening, we'll be busy in the training center up there, building functional models of windmills together, and ..."

"Training center? You mean there are people already up there?"

"Probably. Only a few of the technicians are walking with us."

"Why are they walking with us? Why don't they just stay at the center?"

"Because if they did that, they wouldn't be able to teach us about the windmill and its apparatus along the way so when we arrive at the site, we will know how to inspect them."

Although still confused, Jesse remained silent until they had hiked down the path into the farmland where they met up with a dozen other adults, some of the windmill technicians, and rest just along for the hike. Over half arrived from other communities last night just to make the trip. Each of the adults carried a backpack as well. The introductions quickly went by Jesse's ear, so he caught only a few names once again this first time.

"What are they doing here," asked Jesse of Feszj concerning the additional adults.

"In your world, one might say they are going on vacation. But in our world, they are simply taking part in another experience. In a few weeks, you may notice our community population shrink. Since we are a farming community, there are fewer responsibilities in the winter. This gives many of our residents time to visit other communities, and take part in other unique experiences. And no one is turned away from an experience. That's why some of the technicians accompany the hikers. They will act as teachers so everyone can be involved in the inspection process."

"Still, why aren't we just dropped off at the center? It would be quicker, at least."

Feszj smiled. "Are you in a hurry?"

"Well ...?"

"Remember, Jesse. It is not only the servicing of the windmills that people want to do. They want to also service them *with* other people. An experience is that much greater when it is shared, when other people can join in the accomplishments and successes. We will hike and rest and study together, and share ideas and adventures from other places. Our visitors will learn about us, we will learn about them. And in the end, after we have together faced the journey, we will know more about them and ourselves, and become closer because of it."

Jesse thought he understood.

The group gathered together for some last minute instructions by the technicians, and off they went. Immediately, conversations started up. "Where are you from?" "Where have you been?" "Know any good stories?" The pace was slow, but the discussion animated and fascinating. Jesse didn't know what to say, since this was only his third time at Vilmar. Feszj introduced Jesse to the group as a special guest, which everyone seemed to understand. They asked Jesse how long he has been at Vilmar, and has he been anywhere else yet. They then asked what it was like where Jesse lives, and other questions about his family and society. They appeared to have a special interest in finding out whatever they could from Jesse's perspective.

It was frustrating at first, because the listeners would not be content with yes or no answers, or simple responses. They would not let him answer a question in a broad non-committal manner. They would not be satisfied until they drew out his feelings and opinions. Jesse sometimes felt uncomfortable and offended by the rudeness of some of the inquiries.

"Why?" Jesse asked Feszj later. "Why are they so concerned about what I feel and think about everything?"

"They want to know what makes you tick. They wish to see the world from your viewpoint so they can better comprehend the meanings behind what you are saying. By understanding your preferences, which preferences you deem important to mention, and the vocabulary you use, they come to understand and appreciate the real history of Jesse. They want you to tell them your story, if you will."

"But, sometimes, I would like a little privacy."

"I'm sorry, Jesse, but on this world, the private is public. Cooperation requires an implicit faith in our companions. Any lack of faith, and we fragment. By opening up our lives for all to see and know, we know what each person's strengths and weaknesses and the group and community responds accordingly to utilize the strengths and supports the weaknesses. But unless you give yourself completely over to the community, you can neither help the community fully, nor can the community fully help you."

After the explanation, Jesse gave it a try and held nothing back from his listeners. The joys and agonies of his life brought laughter and tears from his new companions. His difficulties trying to adjust to the new world brought him comforting hugs and words of encouragement. Invitations to visit their communities were extended by every one of the visitors, not only to Jesse, but to everyone in the group. By the end of the week, some of Vilmar's residents, including Taleg from the helpcrew, will be travelling with these new friends to experience new communities and absorb new lives.

Jesse himself was tantalized by the offer to join a middle-aged woman named Ratalla to see her community of Kornu, a town of over five hundred people. Kornu, along with their sibling town Wernu, assembles the hovercrafts, develop propulsion systems, and work on other transport technologies. Feszj, unwilling to prohibit such a trip, suggested that it might be better at the moment, due to the unpredictability of Jesse's visits, to stay in Vilmar — at least until he has learned more about the world.

The group talked almost the entire time to their first campsite 13 kilometers into the route. When they weren't talking, they were listening to the technician/guides Fogran, a young man, and Sadal, a young woman — both in their twenties — describe the parts and the inspection procedures for each of the components of the windmill.

When they reached their first stop, a small clearing surrounded by pines, Jesse could barely see the mountain — though he knew it loomed higher and closer — shrouded behind low clouds, light snow, and dimming light. The group pulled out the tents, or what Jesse thought were tents. Actually, they all carried various parts to build two large bubble-shaped tents, each about thirty feet round and rising to about 8 feet in the middle of each half — supported by thin, flexible rods which ran the circumference of the tent. The two bubbles were connected with a short passageway where the entrance to the exterior was located. The tents had a shiny silver color to them.

By the time the tents were erected, the sun had just set, leaving just the weak ambient glow from the clouds. Some people turned on battery-powered lamps for extra light. Fogran, with some help from everyone in the group, collected rocks and wood from outside before all natural light was lost. Once enough material was gathered, he opened a flap on the tent floor at the center of each half, and soon constructed two blazing campfires.

It very soon became quite warm and comfortable inside, and people began assembling themselves inside the tent. Taleg, Amora and Lasho went with Sadal and six of the visitors to the north side bubble. Inside the south side was Feszj and Jesse, Catiana, Ymo, and Sunas, four other guests, including the curly red-haired Ratalla and Fogran. They set down their backpacks, pulled out their sleeping bags and spread them on the tent floor. Once their equipment was settled into their places, some opened up food containers and began offering their treats around the room. Others roamed between the two bubbles looking for stimulating conversation.

Responding to the rising heat, the group began shedding their tunics, revealing a silvery lining underneath.

"An insulating layer," remarked Feszj.

Jesse lifted off his tunic and saw that he, too, was wearing the layer. The layer was surprisingly warm, yet extremely lightweight and flexible. To Jesse's shock, however, many in the group didn't stop undressing at the tunic. Most of the group ended up bare-chested, including Sunas and Catiana, the upper part of their leotards hanging down from the waist. Jesse started talking to Feszj to avoid rudely staring at the women.

"I thought the two rooms were for men and women."

"Not necessarily. We need the room for all these people, but there is no requirement for the separation of sexes. Everything is communal, including sleeping."

"Showers, too?" Jesse did not really want to discover the answer to that question.

"Yes."

"Oh," he replied with distinct concern, not knowing how that experience would pan out. Trying to look nonchalant, Jesse turned his head around. However, his eyes widening, he fixated on those two pairs of breasts. He tried to be subtle about his leering, but soon he became distraught by the growing embarrassment he couldn't control. It made the possibility of having to undress in front of this group even more distressing.

"It would also be wise of you to undress before you slip into the sleeping bag," said Feszj, mercifully distracting Jesse. "You'll be chilled tomorrow morning if too much of your sweat is absorbed by your clothes."

"That's not the problem I'm facing right now," Jesse said, hinting at his difficulties, and adjusting his body position to lessen the discomfort. He also realized for the first time that he wore no underwear.

"I know," said Feszj. "I apologize. I will talk to Sunas and Catiana. But you need to get accustomed to it. Our clothing is merely functional. We are not trying to hide our bodies because of some sort of misplaced shame or sexual prudishness. Think about it. Clothing in your society is often designed to perform exactly the opposite function. Bikinis, mini-skirts, lingerie, and even stiletto shoes are all used to stimulate sexual arousal. For that matter, why is sexual arousal so bad? You mass media display the wanton murder, torture, and rape of other humans for, of all things, entertainment purposes. But it is impossible to display two humans sharing the pleasures of mutual ecstasy, people engaged in a purely cooperative activity.

"Yet, it makes complete sense in a competitive society. Stimulating sexual arousal without providing fruition to the act builds frustration within the individual which can be released in one of two ways, both productive to competition. One way is violently, in forms of rape, or marital abuse, or any number of other physical assaults. Violence is necessary in a competitive social structure because it helps maintain war-like attributes like

physical prowess and physical domination, as well as the basic competitive mentality. The second way, and the preferred way in modern societies, is through vicarious release of pent-up arousal through those things associated with the sexual stimuli displayed on the media, like cars, and boats, and chocolates, and clothing, and vacations, and innumerable other products that must be sold to sustain the economy. The subliminal connection is clear. By purchasing all these items associated with sex, the buyer confers upon him- or herself sexual status. This is necessary because freely accessible sexual gratification is perceived to be a scarce commodity by the majority of citizens in your society, due in large part to the wonderfully enticing advertising and media propaganda. Therefore, the only way to get *free* sex is to buy the accessories necessary to achieve it — including cars, boats, chocolates, clothing, vacations, et cetera."

"So, how do you do it here?"

"Unlike in your society," said Feszj, "we aren't inundated with tantalizing symbols, fleeting glimpses of nudity, overt sexual suggestions without intending to consummate the act. We don't treat humans as sexual puppets to be pulled around by the strings of their desires. Toying with emotions is just another principle of domination in a competitive society. No unwarranted stimulation is ever encouraged by either sexes."

"But what about me?" Jesse raised his voice to interrupt Feszj, but remembering where he was, quickly lowered it to a whisper. "Bouncing boobs turn me on. Why not anyone else?"

"Our children grow up together in situations where they often see each other naked. Communal showers and baths, undressing for bed in the living quarters. Nudity is a standard part of our life. So much so that we have become desensitized to the appearance of a naked body — very similar to the experiences of those living in your nudist colonies."

Only now did Jesse notice that, during his conversation with Feszj, his erection subsided. He turned to look back at Catiana, now sitting with some of the other visitors. Her laughing made her breasts bounce, and again, Jesse felt himself become swollen. He looked away from her.

"I'm sorry, Jesse," said Feszj, rising from his seat on his sleeping bag. "Adjusting to our attitudes concerning nudity will probably be the hardest aspect of assimilating to our way of life."

"Well," said Jesse, this time looking towards Sunas with hopeful confidence, trying to will his erection away, "we'll see."

Feszj smiled. "In the meantime," said Feszj, gesturing with his hand to the group, "socialize. I think we may be playing Charades soon. There might be some other games around that someone else brought. Mingle and find out."

For the remainder of the night, Jesse circulated with the other members of the group. Despite the comraderie he experienced during the hike, he still thought he would feel isolated, being the odd other-world visitor. But no one left him out. No conversation excluded him. Rather, they were very careful not to ignore him, always elicited information from Jesse, encouraging him to probe deep into his knowledge of his world.

Moving into the other bubble, he noticed Amora and others sitting around some sort of board game. She also was topless, but since her breasts were still undeveloped, that sight did not seem to invoke the same response as before, which reassured him. He peered over the top of the seated players's shoulders, and saw what looked like a Scrabble board but with all the letters — those unusual Unifon letters — on each of the two sides playing exposed.

"That's not how you play Scrabble," he unconsciously said to himself. However, he was overheard by Amora, who got up and clutched Jesse's hand.

"Come here, Jesse. You can be on our side."

"Are we playing a competitive game?" he asked though a playful grin.

"No. no," said Amora, knocking him gently with the back of her hand. As he sat next to her watching with curiosity, she explained the game — a game similar to Scrabble, but with a twist. Each side is allowed to see the letters of the other, and tries to make words based on their own letters and the other group's letters. Amora remarked that hiding letters— as if anticipating Jesse thoughts — would almost assuredly make the game competitive by preventing either group from figuring out which letters a side should put down which will help the other group make a word.

"But you seem to be set up in teams," observed Jesse.

What looked like teams, she went on, were simply different playing abilities. Amora, Jesse, and several others were beginners to the game, and whose knowledge of words was limited. The other group consisted of mostly older and experienced players.

"But doesn't that guarantee your side losing?"

"Jesse, we aren't playing against each other," said Lasho, also on their side, "We're playing with each other."

"Huh?"

This time, Lasho went on to explain that each side discussed possibilities with each other trying to find the best word to place on the board which will help all the other players.

"But being beginners," he said, "we don't usually see the best words they see. Thus, the experienced players are more challenged but also have more talent to deal with those challenges. They, in turn, compensate for our inexperience. It requires an understanding of everyone's role in the game from which a delicate and wonderful give and take arises so everyone, no matter what level of talent, can play together."

If Feszj were here, Jesse thought to himself, he would have continued by explaining that competitive games prohibit different levels of abilities to play at the same time — one side would be overmatched, the other under-challenged. But Jesse could see for himself that each side appeared just as challenged, just as inspired to play hard, despite playing without the prospect of winning or losing, even though no points were being earned.

So he stuck it out to the end, and learned the complete 40 letter Unifon alphabet in the process. Yet he wasn't able to think clearly enough to provide much help in figuring out words that may also be helpful to the experienced group. Still, he sat patiently between Amora and Lasho as he absorbed the unusual game dynamics. Neither side spoke to the other, unless they were really stumped; then they would ask for help. But most of the time, the two sides struggled with the various exposed chits within their own group. It also surprised him when the beginners placed a word on the board, the experienced players would comment on it, offering suggestions on how one might have played differently. They would coach the beginners, but always with the utmost respect and courtesy, and never were poor choices removed from the board out of frustration. It was part of the challenge the experienced players enjoyed.

Jesse asked what a game would be like if two experienced groups played.

"Well," said Ratalla, who had wandered into the this tent, "as the play proceeded, each choice of words would be seriously discussed by both teams, each expressing their views on how the play would have proceeded differently if a different choice were made. Sometimes, the discussion would go on for fifteen minutes or more as different theories, assumptions, and strategies are examined, offered, and discarded. Sometimes, if there is no clear consensus on how to proceed, the position is marked, and each alternative is examined and played out. Games like these could last for hours, sometimes days."

"I can't sit here for hours. Feszj told me to mingle."

"Then go ahead," said Ratalla. "I'll step in."

"Are you a beginner?"

"Not really. I'm pretty good at the game."

Jesse paused. "The experts are on that side."

"Jesse," said Ratalla, "there are really no 'sides.' Everyone is playing together. I'll be just as helpful on any side."

Jesse stood up, helped Ratalla into his former spot, then walked back into the tent where he placed his equipment. The light had dimmed considerably in this side of the tent — mostly just fire light now — as people had already slipped into their sleeping bags and bedded down for the night. Stepping carefully into and around the room, he reached his back. He looked around and saw some people still awake and reading, including Feszj. Jesse walked over to him, tapped him on the shoulder, and asked if he could talk a little more with him. Feszj sat up and slid his legs back to make room for Jesse on the sleeping bag.

"Yes, Jesse. What do you wish to talk about?"

Jesse remained standing. Feszj's voice sounded different, more serene and more tired. Jesse noticed that Feszj's eyelids sank lower over his eyes than usual. He immediately felt guilty for interrupting Feszj.

"I'm fine Jesse," said Feszj, intuiting Jesse's hesitation. "I'm never too tired to talk to you. Please, have a seat."

Jesse sat on one end of Feszj's bag.

"Feszj," said Jesse, whispering so as not to disturb the others in the tent, "you know that game they were playing in the other side?"

"Yes, I do. Did you enjoy playing the game?"

"It was okay," replied Jesse, wanting to quickly skirt the question and move on to his question. "I kept wondering about something the entire time, but seeing how they were all so enthralled by the game, it didn't seem like the right time to ask."

"What is your question?"

"The object of the game is to use up all the letters, right?"

"Correct."

"What happens when they can't? Does everyone lose? But, supposedly, that can't be possible here on Terah, is it?"

Feszj beamed like a proud father. "Excellent question, Jesse. It does appear that way. However, winning and losing are terms reserved solely for use when describing the outcome of competitive actions. One can only win or lose when competing against someone or something. Since this is not a competitive game, however, when all of the letters are not used the players have merely failed to achieve their goal."

"What's the difference?"

"Winning and losing are competition specific. Success and failure are part of life and learning. In your competitive world, however, the distinction is often eliminated, and competition is often justified by the notion that winning and losing are part of life. Cooperativists like us understand that one can succeed and fail many times in life without ever having won or lost anything. One can fail performing an experiment and lose nothing in the process. Climb a mountain, and you succeed without winning anything."

Jesse sat with a puzzled look on his face.

"I know it's hard for you to make the separation between losing and failure. When you lose, you do fail, but you needn't have to lose anything to still fail. And vice versa. You needn't have to win anything to succeed. In a competitive society, these distinctions are often meaningless. But not in ours.

"It's okay to fail?"

"Of course. Success and failure are how we find the limits of our abilities. Success and failure provide us the tools to learn about ourselves. With the knowledge of what we can and can't yet do, we can position ourselves in the proper place to make the best contribution to our neighbors, our community, our society, and our world."

Feszj yawned.

"I'm sorry," said Feszj. "In any case, the important point is that one's success is never at the expense of someone else's failure. That's winning and losing, and that organizational structure assures that at least half of those trying will fail. In our society, people all succeed and all fail together in cooperation with others. However, because we are pooling our resources and abilities, we don't often fail. Besides, it's always less lonely when you cooperate."

Feszj yawned again.

Jesse rose, satisfied with the answers he received, said his thanks and tip-toed to his spot on the floor. He sat down, removed his boots, and slipped inside the sleeping bag. Then, remembering Feszj's suggestion, removed his leotard, which was surprisingly elastic. He was now naked, but pleasantly warm. Not knowing what to do with the clothing, he kept it inside his bag, hoping to keep it warm for tomorrow morning.

He pulled his pack up under his head for a pillow, shut his eyes, and exhaled away all his body's tension. He squirmed on the hard, partially frozen ground under his body, though it wasn't cold as he expected it to be. He might have grumbled a complaint if he were annoyed by it. But after the hike, and considering the company he was sharing, he felt more secure and more comfortable here than he ever felt in his own bed.

Moments later, someone stroked his forehead. It seemed like moments, but in the daze of sleep he saw that the fire was now a pile of glowing red and black embers. He looked up and saw through his foggy eyes the gray-blue grainy image of Sunas standing over him, completely naked. He vaguely remembered her asking him if she could sleep with him. He couldn't recall if he nodded his head or said anything. The last thing he remembered was her sliding into his bag, then turning and lying next to him, partially covering his body with hers. She rested her head on his shoulder, and they both fell asleep.

For the rest of the night, Jesse half-dozed through the odd experience of floating around in the syrup of two worlds blended together. For that brief moment in his life, Jesse existed within the weak points between the permeable layers of different fabrics of time and space — where one world becomes the dreams of the other.

His bodies breathed in unison. The two lives of Jesse fused into one. The smells of his dry and dusty room intermingled with Sunas's musty aroma, and the acrid smoke from the dying fire. He felt the soft bed of home beneath him and the soft body of Sunas next to him at the same time.

Semi-conscious, he thought he could just wake up Sunas, take her through his house and introduce her to his world. He could show her his computer games. *No. Too violent.* He thought he might introduce her to his friends. *No. I have no friends anymore.* He could show her his trophies — the ones he forgot to destroy at the beginning of the week once that initial urge faded from his memory. *No, they're all celebrations of competition. And if either Mom or Dad found her roaming the house naked with me?* thought Jesse. He chuckled at that scene. But his mirth was short-lived. Disheartened, he realized there wasn't much he could show her of his world that she would find interesting.

There wasn't much about that world that interests me anymore either, he had to admit before a deep and dreamless sleep reclaimed his full attention at last.

Twelve

At sunrise on Saturday morning, the morning after his dream of Vilmar, he woke up to the sound of Feszj whispering in his head.

"Wake up, Jesse. It's time to start changing the world ... one family at a time."

"Don't you ever sleep?" was Jesse's groggy response.

Once awakened, however, Jesse felt surprisingly invigorated. Jesse dressed for the cool morning September air. Per Feszj's instructions, he located a pair of old leather winter gloves, and proceeded to re-arrange the backyard. Dew covered everything on that chilly morning. Soon, his sneakers, then his socks, were sopping with water from shuffling across the damp grass, moving the wooden picnic table closer to the house, taking down the badminton net, and lugging the lawn furniture and squeaky grill on to the patio. Under Feszj's guidance, he cleared the backyard lawn quietly, but efficiently, and with a purpose.

Next, he went into the garage and scrounged up a strange collection of materials — chicken wire, old boxes, duct tape, wooden stakes, garden tools, twine, old carpet, an orange fifty-foot extension cord, a drill, circular saw, and sander, and a bunch of other odds and ends. The garage was so cluttered with stuff that only one car, his mother's, fit into it. The other car, his dad's, was parked in the driveway. Actually, it wasn't really his car — it was a demo — so he didn't care if it was outside in the weather.

Jesse returned inside the house to retrieve a note pad from his room and found his father sitting in the kitchen having breakfast, dressed for the showroom. He paused for a moment, as a sudden pang of disgust made him cringe.

"Don't be harsh, Jesse," whispered Feszj in Jesse's mind. "He had no choice in what he did, so it's not his fault. Re-design his environment and his experiences, and you may change him."

Jesse considered Feszj's comments. Then, taking a deep breath, relaxed, smiled, and headed forth.

"Morning, Dad," he said. Peter blinked when he saw Jesse striding through the kitchen from the back door and out into the living room. Jesse moved so quickly, his father couldn't swallow his coffee fast enough to say anything. He thought Jesse was still in bed; Peter, half asleep when he was dressing for work, heard nothing coming from the backyard. When Jesse returned from his room with the pad, his father had a chance to speak.

"What are you doing up so early? You should be in bed."

"I'm fine, Dad," said Jesse rapidly, without stopping his gait across the kitchen. "Just getting a few things taken care of around the house. Don't be late for work. See you later." The last thing Peter heard was the back screen door bang shut. Peter got out of his chair, leaving his half empty cup of coffee on the table, and looked out the glass patio doors. Jesse had strategically arranged his materials in the backyard, and was writing down notes on his pad. Peter also overheard him talking to himself ... and replying to unheard questions.

He would have gone outside to find out what was going on, but he was running late to the dealership. Peter just shook his head, closed the drapes, grabbed his briefcase, and exited the front door. While heading for his car, he grumbled about what might be wrong with his kid now. "Good thing the neighbors can't see him," he said to himself quietly.

By the time Linda Strich was awake and dressed, Jesse had written an extensive list of materials he needed from the store.

"Paint brush? File? Hinges? Two 4x2 feet pieces of glass?" His mom looked perplexed as she read the list. "What's all this for, Jesse?"

"I'm building a cold frame, Mom. It's not too late in the season to grow some squash. Maybe some pumpkin."

"What's a cold frame?"

"It's like a mini-greenhouse you put at ground level over a garden to extend the growing season."

"We don't have a garden."

"We will soon," he said. He pointed to an area near the fence that had been staked out with string stretched out from corner to corner.

"Don't you need wood for that ... cold frame?" she said.

"I've got wood." Jesse pointed to the partially disassembled picnic table lying on the edge of the patio. Surrounding it was a motley collection of assorted 2x4s and other remnants left over from the construction of the fence several years ago, piled up and left forgotten in a spider infested corner of the garage. Linda also noticed next to the wood the

circular saw, a small can of WD40, a pencil and tape measure. His mother turned her worried face back to Jesse.

"Where did you learn to build a cold frame?"

"It's not hard. Any decent gardening book will have diagrams on how to build one. If you want, we can work together."

Linda didn't know what to think. Only last week, he stormed out of the house before he would help her clean the house by vacuuming the carpet. Now, he's building a cold frame ... and a garden to go underneath it ... and who knows what else.

"We don't eat squash in this house, Jesse."

"That's okay. Other people eat squash."

"You'd grow food for someone else?"

"It doesn't cost a lot. It just takes time. And I'm willing to spend some of my time in the garden to provide other people food they can't afford."

Linda's confusion frustrated her; and her frustration made her angry.

"What makes you think we can afford it?" she said, raising her voice. "Doesn't cost a lot? Look at this list. Seedlings, peat moss, fertilizer ..."

"That's just until the compost pile gets going."

"What is going on?" Linda practically screamed her question at Jesse. Deep down, as soon as she walked outside, he wanted to slap her for the whore she was. He then remembered Feszj's edict: Change the environment. Jesse looked at his mother and realized she wasn't mad at him. He knew all too well what troubled her. He stepped up to her, swallowed, and hugged her.

He hadn't hugged her for over two years, probably for a couple of reasons. It wasn't manly to hug your mother, not for a middle school student, so his dad told him. He also didn't remember his father ever hugging her, so it must not have been the thing men do. Yet as he hugged her, he realized how wrong he had been.

Linda, caught off-guard, didn't quite know what to do. So she began by awkwardly patting Jesse on the back, like she was burping a baby. Then, she reached around his body and squeezed him tight. Soon, she gave in and began pawing Jesse. She started sobbing, and clung to him as her strength left with every tear drop that fell. He held her up as best he could, unable and finally unwilling to hold back his crying.

They hugged for several minutes, together releasing years of regret and anguish. By the time they separated, tears streamed down both their faces and covered each others shirt with them.

"It's been a long time since you hugged me like that," she said. "I missed it so much."

"I missed it too, Mom."

She stroked his sweaty hair and lightly touched his swollen face, wiping the moisture away. She then traced the outline of the tape over his cheeks.

"Look at you," she said. "Are you feeling all right, Jesse. I mean, you hit your head pretty hard in that bathroom. Don't you think you ought to be lying ..."

"I feel great, Mom," Jesse interrupted, amused by her charming concern. "I have so much energy. I have never felt better."

Linda looked at Jesse, and then at the list she held.

"This is important to you, isn't it?" she asked.

"Please, do this for me, Mom. I need to do this."

She wanted to ask why. Why all of a sudden this burst of energy? Why all of a sudden a change in feelings? Why all of a sudden did he hug her? Was he being deceitful or sneaky? Well, of course he was. He wanted these items, and did what he had to do to get them. Even toy with her emotions. *Did your father put you up to this?* she wanted to ask.

But there was something different in his eyes this time, Linda thought, unlike his past deceptions. There was a purity and clarity and honesty she had almost forgotten he possessed. And he wasn't after any toy, or computer game, or junk like that. He was building a garden. A little lot of land used to celebrate all the aspects of life: birth, growth, the giving of their own to benefit someone they will never know, the passing on of seeds to create a new generation, and then a slow, quiet, and painless death, when that which was removed from the Earth will be placed back, and from which the next generation will grow stronger.

She didn't care anymore why he changed. *I wish he hit his head sooner*, she thought. But in a moment of selfishness, she thanked God he had.

She turned and hustled back into the house.

"Mom?"

"I have to get my checkbook, Jesse."

When his mother returned from the store, Jesse had finished dismantling the picnic table, sanded the pieces to an enviable smoothness, and had almost completed cutting the wood to the necessary sizes. She joined right in, listening dutifully to Jesse's instructions. They cut the remainder of the wood, put wood sealant on the pieces, sharpened the blade on the shovel to cut into the dirt more easily, removed the grass layer from the top of his garden plot and threw it into the chicken wire enclosure to provide the beginnings of the compost pile.

For the rest of the morning, and well into the afternoon, Jesse and Linda turned the soil, screened and raked the rocks out, mixed into the dirt peat, manure, and fertilizer. Jesse laid carpet down it's length in the middle for a access path through the garden. After they completed the garden bed, they returned to the wood pieces left to dry in the sun and began assembling the cold frame. Linda listened in amazement as Jesse described how it would look and explained every step throughout its construction.

She was even happier to see Jesse not getting upset every time she goofed up, unlike in the past when even the slightest mistake would ignite his temper. Nails that would bend when struck by a hammer and the dings in the wood when she missed which would have sent Jesse into a ferocious tirade before, brought out only words of encouragement. Wearing an understanding smile, he would make a suggestion or give her a tip, and let her continue — never grabbing the hammer away from her or pushing her aside. Through it all, he was infinitely patient with her.

It was slow going, but never was Jesse in a hurry. Both were just happy to be spending time with each other. Occasionally, when Linda would become frustrated with her ineptness, or unable to vindicate Jesse's faith in her by not screwing up, Jesse would put down his tools and hers, and then lie on the grass with the sun in their faces.

"Do you ever wonder," Jesse said, during one of these breaks, "what it would be like if everyone in the world cooperated and worked together?"

"No," she said. "But I'm sure it would be wonderful."

"Yes, it is."

"But that'll never happen," she continued, not catching Jesse's response. "I'll be happy if people just stopped hurting each other."

"Yes, that would be a good start." Then, after a brief silence, he found the courage to say something he hadn't said in many years.

"I love you, Mom."

"I love you too, son."

She reached out and held his hand. Both she and Jesse remained lying on the ground, and said nothing more, but thought about the good start they had made.

At the end of the day, when the sun set behind their fence, they stood on the patio, arm in arm, shirts stinking from dried sweat, and surveyed their accomplishments. The garden was completed; the squash and pumpkin seedlings planted under the cold frame.

So the cold frame didn't come out flawlessly, considered Linda. She was thoroughly impressed with the results of their first try, and it was good enough for what it had to do. Maybe the next project would be better as they both become more adept with their tools and

abilities. In any case, that wasn't important now. For the time being however, both were overjoyed simply because they had done it together — the first time they had done something together in years.

"When is Dad getting back from work?" asked Jesse.

"I don't know. Today's the big Midnight Madness sale."

The Midnight Madness sale was Peter's marketing coup. After the Labor Day Sale, the dealership was able to better determine the flow of cars arriving and leaving the lot. In years when turnover had been sluggish, Peter thought a Midnight Madness sale would be a great gimmick. The salesmen would stay on the job until every overstocked car was sold. So, the longer the salesmen stayed, the more tired they became, and better deals could be made by the customers. And it invariably brought in buyers at all times of the day and night, mostly during the second day.

However, things suddenly changed for Linda today. Not only didn't she know when Peter would return, she didn't care. Today, the Jesse she had almost forgotten and thought didn't exist anymore returned home. Hope dredged out memories from the past. For the first time after countless nights of tears, the Jesse who hugged her knees, who pranced around with underwear on his head just to make her laugh, who frolicked at the park, sat in front of her.

Parents always remember their children at their best, she pondered once; and without those remembrances, children become faded specters bobbing in and out of memory hinting at a former existence. Perhaps its innate, but selective forgetfulness seems to give parents the ability to always love their children and raise them without expectations of remuneration. Judgments may be passed on the quality of a child's life, but never on the quality of the child. Parents that do, immediately feel shame and remorse. They know it is wrong.

Linda ordered a couple of large pizzas to be delivered from Pizza 'n' Pictures, a combination pizzeria and video store. They were going to be topped with topped with pepperoni and hamburger, Jesse's favorite, until he objected.

"No meat on my half, Mom. Just add onions and maybe a little extra cheese for my slices."

"Becoming a vegetarian?" said Linda, half surprised, half joking.

"I think so," said Jesse, without a hint of humor. This sudden seriousness about vegetarianism astounded Linda. Jesse, just like his father, was an avowed meat lover.

"Don't you want any meat?" she asked.

"No thanks. Mom. Going without meat will be healthier for me...", Jesse smirked, "... as well as the animals. But you can have some on yours."

She accommodated her son's request, ordering extra cheese and onions for the entire pizza, including her own pieces. Next, she was about ready to order a movie to be delivered with the pizza, but Jesse declined the offer.

"No films tonight. I would much rather just sit and talk with you," he said.

Another shock for his mother, but this time, one she said nothing about.

Well into the night and into the following morning, mother and son talked of many things. From what kind of sneakers he prefers, to where she would like to cruise, to how each would want to redecorate the house. The topics ranged far and wide, but through it all, they were opening up and re-learning to enjoy each others company. And though they never mentioned it to each other, hoping not to jinx the moment, each understood that what they talked about was not as important as the fact that they were sitting in the kitchen, munching on oily pizza, talking together. She wept inside at the joy of having her son again, as all the heartaches of the past were forgotten.

Jesse saw a change in her as well. Feszj was right again, he thought. Change the environment and you change the person. Then he noticed something. For the past several hours after the cold frame was completed, Feszj had been uncharacteristically silent. He wasn't whispering in the back of his brain anymore. It has been just Jesse and his mom. Jesse thanked Feszj — even though he wasn't mentally present, he had a hunch Feszj could hear him — for having the confidence in his ability to talk to his mom, and having the courtesy to let him do it alone.

When Jesse could no longer counter his increasing exhaustion with the exuberance of their new found companionship, he got up from his seat in the kitchen. His mother sprang from her seat and clutched Jesse by the elbow.

"Is it time to go to bed? So soon?" she said.

"I'm tired, Mom."

Jesse saw worry in her face — worried that Jesse would revert back to his old, unfriendly self. She worried that she may lose her son once more. She had no clue as to why he changed all of a sudden, but she dreaded the possibility that this same unpredictability of fate could just as easily return him to the way he was before. As long as he was awake, and with her, he remained changed for the better.

"Don't worry, Mom," said Jesse, understanding Linda's fear. "I'll still be here when I wake up." He kissed her on the cheek, and then went to his room. His mom went to her room less hopeful, and slept little between bouts of tears and regret. So preoccupied was

she by Jesse's miraculous recovery and equally possible remission, she never noticed that her husband, Peter, did not return from the dealership that night.

Once asleep in his room, Jesse woke up inside his sleeping bag, but without Sunas in his arms. He looked around for her, but she wasn't in the tent. Nor were Feszj and Catiana. He saw that the rest of the group were awake as well — some already dressed and packing away their equipment — and a new, smaller fire had been constructed by someone, probably Fogran, as Jesse slept.

He dressed inside the sleeping bag, while less modest others clothed their bodies standing in full view. As he squatted down and rummaged through his pack for some food, Sunas walked back into the tent and strode over to Jesse, whose back was to her. She tapped him on his head, causing him to turn around. Seeing who it was, he sprang up to greet her. She kissed him, much more gently than when Beedie did it at the Festival, and they hugged each other.

"Did anything ... um ... happen last night?" he asked.

She shook her head. "You were tired." She handed him his insulate layer and tunic. "Put these on. There's food outside."

As he emerged from the tent, the brisk dry morning air stung Jesse in the face as his breath smoked around his head. A thin layer of snow partially covered the ground; frozen grass and decaying leaves poked through the thinner spots. The sun had not yet risen, but the sky was clear and bright through the dark silhouetted tree limbs. He could now clearly see just above the tree line the jagged yellow sunlit peak of Mt. Tever as it loomed in the distance to the north.

Sunas tugged at his tunic and brought Jesse over to Fogran and Sadal who were spooning something that looked like darker than usual oatmeal, into bowls. It was delicious, remarked Jesse, and ate several bowlfuls. Soon after everyone had eaten, the tents were struck, and the group continued; by mid-afternoon, they completed the hike to the windmills.

Jesse and the others unloaded their gear into lockers next to the six to eight cots interspersed within the sparse living quarters. It reminded him of military barracks he's seen on television; but with the plastic walls, the exposed wood beam ribbing, wood furniture, and a computer table, it looked much less rustic and much more inviting. Towels and bedding were provided, and Jesse was quick to notice the communal shower facilities, situated in a central location accessible from all the sleeping quarters.

At dinner, the hikers met the other technicians of the site in the facility dining hall. The group received additional lessons on the equipment and instructions about how the group

will be divided to complete their week-long assignments beginning tomorrow. The group also received a tour of the facilities, including the underground research hall where, in the evening, they will be constructing scale models of the windmills, dismantling and reassembling windmill components, and other relevant hand-on activities.

The group returned to their beds that night, anxious and eager to begin the inspection process in the morning. Shortly, all the lamps were switched off, leaving only the moonlight streaming through the windows to light up the room. Then, from her cot, came a naked Sunas. There was just enough room on the cot for one person, but Jesse edged over as best he could to permit Sunas to join him. She kissed him but said nothing, sliding into the sleeping bag, and plopping her head on his shoulder. He stroked her bare shoulders as she snuggled next to him. His heart beat wildly as he anticipated what would happen next. Within minutes, however, and to his disappointment, her breathing deepened. She had fallen asleep.

It's just as well, he thought. I probably would have been lousy in bed any way, seeing that it would have been my first time and all.

Jesse lay still in his cot returning his thoughts to the day's events when it suddenly hit him that Feszj had remained conspicuously apart from him, spending most of his time in discussions with Catiana. Not that Jesse minded that. Sunas took Feszj's place nicely. Jesse and Sunas discussed many things during the day's hike. Jesse found out that Sunas hadn't always lived in Vilmar, but had originally been raised in a small desalinization community called Telrym, thousands of kilometers south, along the coast. Though she had experience with kelp farming, she became more and more curious about traditional inland farming. She travelled to Vilmar several years ago on a 'vacation' much like this one — and never left. Arriving during the Fall Festival, she was captivated by the changing seasons and the glorious colors radiating from the leaves. She instantly fell in love with the trees and the mountains and the snow — the first snow she had ever touched in her lifetime.

Jesse ended his reverie when Feszj stepped through the doorway into the room. Guided by a dim flashlight, Feszj came over to Jesse and knelt next to the cot.

"How are you doing, Jesse?"

"I couldn't be happier," he said without thinking.

"I'm glad." Feszj's white teeth sparkled in the dim luminosity as he smiled. "Good night, Jesse." Feszj stood up, rubbed Jesse's head, and looked at Sunas sleeping next to him. "When she wakes up tomorrow morning, tell her I said good night."

"I will."

Feszj started standing up when Jesse thought of something.

"Wait, one more thing." he said. Feszj paused standing over the cot. Did you know that Sunas left her original community to live here?"

"Yes. I was here when she first arrived."

"It just occurred to me that if this world is so good, so wonderful, then why did Sunas leave there to live here? I would think that every place would be great places to live."

"The fact that Sunas could leave," said Feszj, "is what makes our world so wonderful. After all, what could be more demoralizing and destabilizing than to force people to stay in a place they have grown, through the accumulation of certain experiences, to dislike?"

"Course," grunted Jesse in acknowledgement. Feszj backed away from the cot and proceeded to the door.

"Feszj?" Jesse whispered. Feszj stopped and twisted his body around. "Another big day tomorrow?" Jesse asked.

"From now on," replied Feszj, "every day will be a big day for you."

With that, Feszj exited the room. Jesse's heart beat strongly in his chest. *What a wonderful life*, he thought. *I must be the luckiest person alive.*

He kissed the sleeping Sunas lightly on the forehead and pulled up the sleeping bag to cover both of them and keep in the warmth. With a grin on his face and tranquillity in his soul, he, too, went to sleep.

* * *

On Sunday, Jesse overslept. This time, his mother's voice awoke him, hearing her yelling his name from the living room. Moments later, she knocked on his room door.

"You can come in, Mom."

"Jesse," she said, as she cracked the door open, "Rebecca's on the phone for you."

Rebecca. Jesse got out of bed, pulled on some pants, and threw on a sweatshirt. He had almost forgotten about her, and how Feszj invited her over. However, Jesse was clueless about what Feszj had in mind for today's activity. Still, he ought to at least allow her to come over. If anything, they could go to the mall and hang out there. Wait. That didn't sound like something Rebecca would be interested in, considering what Feszj told her. *I'll think of something*, he grumbled to himself. He went to the kitchen and took up the receiver resting on the table.

"Hello? Rebecca?"

"Hello, Jesse. I'm sorry if I woke you."

"No, no. I was already awake." But his voice, he thought, belied his statement.

"I'd like to come over, if it is still okay with you."

Where are you Feszj? he thought in desperation. *What did you have in mind today?* No response. *Well, if anything, I could tell her that I was going to continue working on the garden, but with mom's help, I finished it yesterday. I could invite her over just to see what we did.*

"Um ... sure. C'mon over. I have something to show you."

"Great. Is an hour too soon?"

"No, that's perfect." Jesse gave her directions to his house. Realizing how close his house was to hers, she decided to ride her bike over. Her mom was not up to driving after her return from the hospital, and Jesse assured her that his mom could drive her back home.

"I'll see you then," she said. "Bye."

Jesse replaced the receiver on the hook. An hour gave him enough time to take a shower and have breakfast. He looked at the clock on the microwave. 12:25 PM. *Make that lunch.*

Jesse took a quick shower —washing gingerly around his nose splint which had to stay on at least another week, had some left over pizza from last night for lunch, and spent the rest of the hour talking to his mother in the living room. But still no visit from Feszj.

His mom, in the meantime, was eager to determine if anything had changed in Jesse's demeanor, and if not, to pick up where they left off last night. His mother asked him what he wanted to do today.

"I don't know. Maybe some final touches on the garden," he improvised. "I'm not sure what Rebecca would want to do."

"Oh, so your lady friend is coming over. What is she like?"

"Well, she's smart, well-mannered, sweet." Jesse struggled. He didn't know her that well.

"Sounds like I'll like her a lot."

Jesse let the discussion about Rebecca end there. He didn't want to have to explain to his mother his past teasing and taunting of her and why all of a sudden he's dating her. Furthermore, he couldn't possibly tell her he's seeing another girl on another planet.

Jesse got up from the sofa in the living room and wandered out into the backyard. His mom followed him and stood next to him on the patio surveying their work. He couldn't believe that so much could be done in one day by just two people. Overturning a garden,

making a cold frame, preparing a compost pile. It was a dramatic accomplishment that filled him with pride.

"Hello, Jesse."

Feszj. Where have you been?

"Are you ready to make more of an impact in your community, and start bringing them together?"

How?

"How many trash cans does your family own?"

And so it began again, just like yesterday, with Feszj guiding Jesse through a variety of actions preparing the backyard for another project. Jesse rummaged the garage once more, this time pulling out two garbage cans, one half-decayed bungee cord, trash bags, the hose, a ball of twine, and other miscellaneous items. When his mother wandered outside to see what was going on today, he again gave his mother a list of items to purchase at the store.

"Five bungee cords?" she said, blinking in disbelief. "Eye hook screws? Old wooden pallets? Four more garbage cans? Citronella oil? This is stranger than the last list. I mean, don't we have enough garbage cans?"

"It for my next big project."

"Which is...?"

"A small community recycling depot, a central location where people can drop off their recyclable materials, rather than driving 15 miles to Forest River. You see, most people would like to recycle, but few do because the recycling center is so inconvenient. By providing the transportation for their recyclable materials from their house to the center, thereby removing the major inconvenience of recycling, our neighbors will be more inclined to do their part."

Linda noticed that Jesse's speech was choppy, as if he were listening for someone to give him the words to finish the sentence. She found it disconcerting and worrisome. Hearing him speak with that hesitation had a similar effect on her as watching someone with a head tic. She wanted to ask if everything was all right, but chose to ignore this quirk for now. Especially not now, now that he has changed so much.

"The transportation is going to cost gas," she said, hoping his tic will go away.

"Well, we'll be heading out there anyway with our recyclables." His mom mulled over the comment, not yet convinced. "I guess I could ask for donations to help defray the costs," Jesse added.

"Done," said Linda closing the deal. She would have done it anyway, just to make Jesse happy, but she was curious how he would respond to her reluctance. Satisfied with

the arrangement and her appraisal of his health — the vocal hesitation seemed to have disappeared, she went back inside the house to retrieve her purse and car keys and head off to the store — probably a hardware store this time.

In the interim while Linda was at the store, Jesse searched the top of their refrigerator, moving aside the old telephone books piled there — some three years old, looking for a map of the town usually placed there. He was sure the map would not be very recent, but nothing much has changed in the vicinity when it comes to roads in the last ten years. Finally finding it and dusting it off, he cleared the kitchen table and spread out the map. He located his road, estimated where his home was, and studied the intersecting streets.

The doorbell rang. *Rebecca*. He yelled from the kitchen for her to come in. She slowly entered the house, wiped her feet on the mat, and followed Jesse voice into the kitchen. When she walked in, Jesse stood up from his chair, but suddenly hesitated.

"It's okay, Jesse," said Feszj in the back of Jesse's mind. "I don't think she will mind you hugging her."

As Rebecca eyed him warily, Jesse approached her and gently wrapped his arms around her. After an initial stiffness, his affectionate squeeze prompted Rebecca to give a warm hug in return. This response, plus the fact that he now had something to tell her and something to do with her, boosted Jesse's confidence.

"I'm glad you could come," said Jesse, made almost breathless by her passionate reciprocation. "We have a lot to do this afternoon."

He then proceeded to explain to her what was going to happen that day, the building of a recycling drop-off center for the local neighbors. He told her that his mom will be back in an hour or two with the construction materials. Until then, they would canvas the neighborhood and hand out flyers describing their service.

"Flyers?" Rebecca asked.

"That's next." The two left the kitchen, with Jesse carrying a chair in one hand and her hand in his other, went to his room, and placed Rebecca's chair next to his at the computer desk. He flipped on the computer and printer, then opened his desk top publishing software file. With consummate skill and with the artistic talents of Rebecca making clever suggestions, Jesse quickly crafted his flyer. He printed out fifty copies.

"Fifty copies? Isn't that a little much?" queried Rebecca.

"Not really. Remember, people want to recycle, but don't want to put in the effort necessary. It is going to take time and constant reminding to get people to want to and then get into the habit to separate their glass, cans, papers, and plastics. I'll be lucky to get

more than half involved in the first several months. But, that's more than are recycling now."

The copies having been made, the two exited the house and together walked from house to house describing their new service to the community. He explained that the pick-up service would begin next Sunday afternoon. He also said he would be more than happy to return some time during the week to provide recycling tips or to offer suggestions if the person needed help in separating materials.

Rebecca thought she would burst wishing these people would get a clue and read the flyer, because even though the flyer mentioned pick-up times and dates, people asked him anyway. Jesse, however, remained polite and seemingly unaffected by the barrage of redundant questions, answering them all with respect and courtesy. Most people were also skeptical about assisting Jesse and Rebecca, until he mentioned that there would be no charge for the service. Jesse did not mention anything about donations to his prospective recyclers, though it was mentioned on the flyers.

"Why didn't you tell them about the donations?" asked Rebecca after about the fifth house.

"If I did, my prospects would think a donation would be required. By placing the suggestion on the flyer, I put the thought in their minds but didn't shove it in there."

Many of the neighbors liked the possibility of both recycling and not having to drive to Forest River, but remained skeptical, uncertain how long this fly-by-night project would last, especially when operated by a couple of teenagers. Others asked if this was a school project. When they learned it wasn't, that Jesse was doing it on his own for the benefit of the neighborhood and the environment, they found his motives difficult to comprehend. His sincerity and generosity aside, why would this young kid want to do all this work with so little prospect of monetary recompense? "What's in it for you?" they would ask. "What's the catch?"

"There's no gimmick. No catch. And it's hardly work," Jesse would respond, but this time, Rebecca noticed the same choppy hesitation in Jesse's voice that his mother noticed. "Helping the environment is a noble cause in its own right, and helping others help the environment only enhances the intrinsic satisfaction I derive from the activity."

After distributing the fifty flyers, the pair went over the day's accomplishments. They received five outright commitments and a dozen or so maybes, some more convincing than others, interspersed with strange looks and a couple of doors slammed in their faces. Rebecca found those to be the most disconcerting.

"How can people not want to help the environment?"

"Perhaps," said Jesse, "some people don't see that there is any problem with the environment. Either that, or they feel they will be dead long before the environment becomes something to worry about."

"But what about us? What about our children? What about our future?"

"I don't know, Rebecca. You can only tell people so much, and they can only hear about doom and despair for so long, before they stop listening. Plus the fact that many other experts reject the doomsayers and claim there are ample energy resources or fresh water or clean air, et cetera. It has reached the point where people don't know what to think, so they stop thinking all together. And with nothing really happening and no major ecological disaster in sight, they don't care anymore."

"But those other experts are silly. They claim we have enough oil to last three hundred years. But what happens then? We can't go to electricity; a lot of electricity comes from burning oil. And nuclear fuels are no solution, and hydro-electricity is too scarce, and solar power is in its infancy. The only thing energy apologists are doing now is delaying the inevitable, pushing off the problem for someone else to deal with."

"How do you know so much?" asked Jesse, both perplexed and impressed.

"From my dad. He always used to say, 'If it can be someone else's problem, then it becomes someone else's problem.'"

"Sounds like a smart man."

"He should. He was a marine biologist and an environmental activist with Greenpeace."

"He was?"

"Yep. When I was younger, we went many places. We travelled to Mexico, Florida and California for Save-the-Whale conferences. He taught me how to scuba dive, which was great, because I actually got a chance to swim with dolphins once."

"What was that like?"

"We were floating no more than a half-mile off the California coast taking water samples from our little research boat when the dolphins appeared. They seemed fascinated by our presence. So Dad and I quickly got on our tanks and jumped in." Rebecca paused, staring unfocused into the distance. "They were beautiful creatures, big but so gentle and graceful under water. It was wonderful. Dad said I would never forget it, and I never have."

"What is you dad doing now?"

"My father's dead."

"I'm sorry," said Jesse quickly. He cringed in guilt.

"That's okay," she said. "You didn't know." She paused in thought. "You want to know how he died?"

"Well, only if you're comfortable with it."

"It's okay. I like telling the story."

How could she like telling the story of her father's death? Jesse shuffled his feet. He wasn't sure he wanted to know. But he allowed her to continue.

"It happened before I moved here. We were at a protest rally at a nuclear power plant. My dad and I were a part of a bunch of protesters, and we had all handcuffed ourselves to each other and to the front gate. And as we sat there, not doing anything, not hurting anything or anybody, the police came." Jesse heard her voice becoming more shrill. "Then they started spraying us with mace and pepper spray. All of us. Even me. I was only nine at the time."

"I'm sorry."

"Then my father started reciting the First Amendment to the Constitution. You know. The one about freedom of speech, and press, and the right to assemble peaceably. Anyway, even though my eyes and face were burning, I could still hear him speaking through the mace. Then I heard another voice start reciting the Miranda rights. 'You have the right to remain silent ...' and all that. I forced my eyes open, and through the tears streaming out, I saw a cop wearing sun glasses and a sneer — half smiling, half hate-filled — unloading at least a half a can of mace into my dad's face and mouth."

Rebecca's face flushed, and her eyes swelled with tears, her lips quivered. She sniffled repeatedly and her voice sounded pinched by the tightening muscles in her throat.

"During the next five minutes, my dad's lungs and throat swelled up and sealed shut. He started clawing at his throat, ripping off his shirt, thrashing around so much that the handcuffs that held me and him together ripped the skin off my wrist. I was screaming in pain, yelling for Daddy to stop, but all he could do was gasp for air, and soon even that he couldn't do. He kept kicking and convulsing as he slowly suffocated to death. After those few minutes, his arm fell to the pavement and he stopped moving. I watched my father die, and no one could do anything about it."

Rebecca's body trembled, ready to collapse. Then she lunged at Jesse and wailed her sorrow. Not knowing what else to do, Jesse clung on to her and absorbed her body's violent vibrations while tears fell down his face. Jesse looked down at Rebecca, leaning against him. Her arms were folded up against his chest as she cried. Jesse squeezed her tighter, however, when he noticed the scar tissue wrapped around one of her wrists.

"Every day of her life," said the voice of Feszj filled Jesse's mind, as the young man ministered to Rebecca's distress, "she will be reminded of that hideous day."

Did you know about this? asked Jesse.

"In the not so distant past," continued Feszj, ignoring the question, "when the only tools police had to restrain citizens were bullets and clubs, breaking up protests invariably drew public censure and disgrace. The prospect of public embarrassment forced police to act in a much more restrained and civilized manner. Unfortunately, with the recent advent of so-called 'non-lethal' methods for crowd control like mace, pepper spray, foam, and rubber bullets, exercising one's Constitutional right to assemble peaceably has become much more dangerous and is scaring away many people who would have liked to have participated in civil disobedience. Ironic, how in a supposedly free and democratic country methods have been developed and used to discourage political expression.

"But more importantly, what your political pundits ignore is that protests become more effective when it forces a government to escalate physical sanctions. Violent retributions erode the legitimacy of political groups in power which, in turn, sets the stage for increasing social unrest. But these sanctions result from a population enamored with the status quo political hegemony, a population which prods governments into more drastic measures of social control undermining the social change necessary for the survival and growth of a society.

"For what the vast majority of your population fails to understand is that violence is a call for social help. Violence indicates a demand for necessary changes in the status quo, because it is the stagnation of social change which leads to extreme behaviors. Unfortunately, socialized and romanticized notions of democracy set the stage for the grim reality of political failure due to the lack of political access by marginalized groups, resulting in predictably violent outcomes. Just as a child behaves badly just to get attention, so too do these excluded groups.

"Whether you like it or not, violence is a part of social bargaining processes in any democracy; where political passivity is counter-productive, and peaceful arbitration stifles effective social change."

And your government? asked Jesse.

"We do not really have a government. After all, a government's only purpose is to coerce certain behavior. However, since coerced behavior is always resented, governments are doomed from the start to be at odds with the population. In our world, no one is coerced to behave appropriately because cooperative behavior is universally understood to be the right way to act."

But still, said Jesse, don't some people dominate political debates?

"No, since in a cooperative society, no social clout, political gain, or economic benefits are attached to individuals, groups, or communities which might dominate."

Jesse found it too difficult to concentrate any longer on Feszj's commentary and, at the same time, still try to comfort Rebecca. He stopped asking questions, and remained attentive to Rebecca's needs. Slowly, she calmed down and soon came out of her emotional stupor.

"I'm so sorry, Jesse. I didn't mean to fall apart so badly."

"It's okay. Do you want to go home?"

"No. I want to stay with you. You're the only one I know actually trying to do something about the environment. I need to help you. I think my dad would want me to."

"What about your mother?" Jesse again cursed himself for speaking before thinking.

"She never really recovered." She seemed unfazed by the question. "We had to move. We couldn't afford to keep the house, plus there were too many memories contained in it. So we moved here. Mom also put on a lot of weight, and she's sick all the time. She has trouble thinking straight, and can't really hold jobs very long before she falls into depression."

"And you? How have you held up?"

"I didn't. I had to see a psychologist for months. But as I said, I need to do this with you. For too long, I've tried to avoid anything having to do with the environment. But I like what you're trying to do. It feels good to me, like it's the right thing to do, trying to bring people together gently and without confrontation. This is probably what I ought to have been doing all along. This was the therapy I needed."

She wiped her face with her shirt sleeve. "Anyway, what's next, Jesse?"

"Time to go home and see if Mom's there."

Rebecca nodded, and reached for Jesse's hand, and the pair walked hand in hand down the street toward's Jesse's home. And while they walked, Jesse passed a thought along to Feszj.

You knew about all this, didn't you?

Feszj gave no reply, but Jesse had a hunch he heard him. Jesse could almost imagine seeing him smiling.

* * *

When the couple rounded a corner and started walking down the street where the Strich's house sat, they saw his mother just pulling into the driveway, the rear hatch of the SUV tied down with a clothesline rope as wooden palettes stuck out the back. After brief introductions, all three helped remove the materials and carried them into the back yard.

Then, just like the day before, Jesse began designing the small depot and instructed his helpers on their jobs. He had his mother screw the eye hooks into the fence, bring the large rubber trash cans over and, with bungee cords, strap them to the fence. With Rebecca, Jesse constructed a small newspaper bundling crate, where papers can be placed inside and, when full, tied and knotted ready for transport.

After that was completed, Jesse pulled out the lawn mower, attached the grass catcher, and started mowing the lawn while Rebecca and Linda went into the kitchen and prepared dinner. Pasta, with marianara sauce, described Linda. She told Rebecca that Jesse was now a vegetarian.

"You have a great son, Mrs. Strich," said Rebecca.

"Thanks, Rebecca." However, Linda never mentioned Jesse's years of emotional isolation through which she suffered. She never mentioned the countless times she had tried to comfort him and hold him only to be shunned aside as an annoyance. He was too old to be babied, he would protest. How could she have told him that he will always be her little boy. That would have driven him even further away from her. So she didn't say anything, and lived these past years in silent anguish. Praying and hoping for yesterday to occur. Why poison what might be a wonderful relationship with the past? Let it rest, and let's move on, she thought. Then all of a sudden, she remembered something from her college days she had long forgotten. It was an essay that someone wrote concerning revenge.

In taking revenge, wrent the essay as she strained her brain to piece it all together, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior.... Something ... something... She couldn't recall. It went on. It is the glory of a man to pass by an offense. That which is past is gone, and irrevocable; and wise men have enough to do with things present and to come: therefore, they do not trifle with themselves, that labour in past matters.

An obscure little essay, read once and put aside. Why did this all come back to her? Something must have triggered it. In any case, Linda felt miserable, but masked it from Rebecca. She brooded on what a waste her life had become. Years of life lost, and more years taken away due to the stress and the vindictiveness of her behavior. Although she may never be able to forgive Peter's infidelity, at least it needn't have to consume her.

Once she stopped hating him, she could stop hating herself. In fact, there is no point feeling miserable. That, too, would be a waste of life.

"He is a great son," said Linda.

"I think so," replied Rebecca. On the other hand, Rebecca did not mention to Linda the past years of teasing, the cutting off of her pony tails in class, the placing of centipedes in her lunch boxes. For the longest time, Rebecca herself struggled between hating Jesse's guts and rationalizing his feelings for her. But Jesse had changed so dramatically for the better in such a short time; perhaps the humiliation in the bathroom, or maybe his loss of friends humbled him into turning over a new leaf. Maybe he banged his head too hard. Be that as it may, it didn't seem important to tell his mom about all his past indiscretions.

The two women talked about many things, about school, Rebecca's family, Linda's charity work. Jesse, however, didn't seem to be one of the topics. Apparently, an odd understanding existed between the two — felling that Jesse's change was so miraculous that if anyone mentioned the topic, it would jinx it and both would lose the person they long desired.

While Jesse mowed, and the sun set behind the fence, his dad arrived at the house and trudged through the front door, looking dazed, most likely from lack of sleep. He turned towards the bedroom, hardly noticing Linda, and never noticing Rebecca.

"Hi, dear," said Linda. Peter stopped short. Though half-asleep, he heard her call him 'dear.' It was an unusual sound in his ears. She had stopped using that word around him for years.

"We have a guest for dinner, tonight," continued Linda, walking out from the kitchen to greet her husband. "Her name is Rebecca. She's a friend of Jesse."

"Jesse's got a girl friend?" mumbled Peter, without even a hello. "Where's Jesse?"

"He's in the back, mowing the lawn," said Linda.

"Mowing the lawn? I didn't say he had to mow the lawn."

Linda shook her head. "I don't know. He just pulled out the mower and started. Anyway, will you be coming to dinner?"

"I'm going to bed." Peter continued down the hall, opened, and then shut the door to his bedroom.

At that moment, Jesse switched off the mower and placed it back into the garage. However, as Linda and Rebecca watched in bewilderment, he brought the clippings bag back with him and began dumping out the grass cuttings on the patio. When about half the grass had been removed from the bag, he began spreading out the clippings until most of the patio was covered with a layer of freshly cut lawn. Jesse dumped the remaining grass

into his compost pile and carried the bag back to the garage. Jesse returned the house and entered, though not before taking off his green-stained sneakers. Rebecca couldn't contain her curiosity.

"Why did you do that?" asked Rebecca.

"What? The sneakers?"

"No, the grass. Why did you spread it around on the patio. Isn't it more ecologically correct to put the grass back on the lawn to decompose, or at least put all of it in the compost pile?"

"Yes, it would be, but I need some of the clippings for the recycling cans." The two women looked at Jesse puzzled, though Linda — knowing the ingenuity he had shown over the last two days — grinned slightly in anticipation of the reason.

"You see," Jesse went on, "depending on how clean the items are when we get them, especially the cans, we may have a problem with insects. Dried, steamed grass makes a very effective insect repellent. After the grass is ready, I'll spread it, along with salt and some boric acid, on the bottom of the barrels. Then, I'll spray the inside and outside of the barrels and whatever recycle material we receive with the citronella oil Mom bought. That should keep the bugs at bay."

Linda laughed in pride at Jesse's knowledge as Rebecca stood with her mouth gaping.

"How did you know that?" Rebecca quizzed.

Jesse, blushing from embarrassment, shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. I guess if you just have to read the right books ..." He looked uncomfortable with the response, and his explanation trailed off. He sniffed the air in the kitchen. "Hmm. Pasta."

Linda told Jesse and Rebecca to have a seat. Rebecca had a seat at the kitchen table. Jesse, however, went into the cabinets and brought out some plates and set them on the table. Next, he retrieved silverware and drinking glasses. Only until the pasta was being placed onto the plates did Jesse finally sit down to eat.

The meal was filling and tasty. Spaghetti, carrots, salad, and garlic bread. For drinks, Rebecca and Linda had soda, but Jesse declined, preferring ice water.

"Jesse," spoke up Rebecca, in the middle of the meal, "you're almost too perfect." Linda glanced at Rebecca, anxiety filling her face. She thought the same thing, but refrained from saying anything, worried such comments could jeopardize Jesse's change. "What are you going to do for an encore?" asked Rebecca.

Jesse stopped chewing. He sat there in silence for ten to fifteen seconds. His eyes fell to the plate, his face and his mouth went through subtle contortions, as if he were conversing with someone, and responding to unheard comments. The tension built up in

the quiet kitchen. Linda noticed the fork she held beginning to shake. She placed it down, and folded her hands on her lap, out of sight under the table. Seeing how her comment was affecting Jesse, curiosity slowly gave way to guilt inside Rebecca. Without knowing what it was, she clearly struck a sensitive spot in Jesse. Rebecca searched for a distraction, but fumbled over what to say or do.

"Um ... So, Mrs. Strich, this is store brand sauce, isn't it? What did you add to make it taste so good?"

It was clumsy, but Linda was relieved at the change of topic.

"Well, I just mixed chopped onions, freshly crushed garlic cloves, along with some oregano, parsley, and basil, and sautéed them in olive—"

"You know...", said Jesse, coming out of his trance. The other two at the table held their breath as they waited for him to continue. "... over the last couple of months, I've had several of the weirdest, but most amazing and most wonderful dreams I have ever had."

This statement caught both Linda and Rebecca off-guard. They glanced at each other and by the way the eyes appeared, agreed that this was an odd change of topic.

"Dreams?" wondered Rebecca out loud. "What kind of dreams?"

Jesse thought for a moment, then continued. "No. Not dreams. These weren't dreams at all. They were more than that. These were real."

"What was real?" Rebecca was curious. Linda stayed silent, trying to control her hands.

"Several times over the last few months, ever since my last Little League game, I have been visiting another place. A beautiful place of peace and friendship. A place where cooperation and compassion and community rule. A place with no wars, no hatred, no violence, no competition."

"Gee, Jesse," interrupted a glib Rebecca, "where is this place? I'd love to go there."

"I don't know," said Jesse, very serious. "I don't know how to bring you there. It's on another world."

Linda and Rebecca looked at each other. They began snickering, thinking they had been caught up in a joke.

"Sounds fantastic, doesn't it?" said Jesse, grinning widely now. The two women nodded, still giggling from the ruse.

Jesse's smile disappeared. "Well, it's true," he said, without any mirth. The women's giggling grew nervous sounding in a subtle way. "The place is real," insisted Jesse. "It exists."

Jesse spoke with conviction, with confidence, in a manner which belied any notion of farce.

"I've seen buildings underneath big huge glass domes covering the community called Vilmar. I've met and talked to its people, people like Feszj, and Catiana, and Beedie ... and Sunas." For the next hour, Jesse described for his mother and his friend the little community of Vilmar. He described in intimate detail where its citizens lived and worked. The food they ate. The festival they had, and how he joined in the celebration, playing games and dancing.

"And now, after hiking across the countryside, I'm now sleeping at a research camp at the base of Mount Tever. And when I go to sleep tonight here, I'll be waking up there to work on the windmills which supply electricity to the community."

He did not mention his experience in the chamber in his descriptions. Explaining Linda's private life in front of Rebecca would not be appropriate. Nor did he mention his sleeping with Sunas. Rebecca would not understand.

The two women remained mute the entire time and just stared at Jesse, trying hard to mask their horror at discovering Jesse's mental collapse. When he finished, they said nothing. They didn't know what to say. Jesse saw the discomfort in them, and knew immediately why.

"You don't believe me, do you?" Jesse waited for some sort of response from the two. Neither dared move. "But how do you think I know all of a sudden so much about gardening and recycling? It's not from books or reading or research or web browsing. You know I haven't done any of that, Mom."

He looked to her for support. All he saw were her watery eyes. Disappointed, he continued, now less sure of himself.

"Everything I learned about all this stuff came from Feszj. He speaks to me as I build. He tells me what to do, and he tells me what to tell you. Everything we did outside today and yesterday was with the help of Feszj."

Jesse looked at Rebecca. "Don't you remember last Friday in history class. That entire lecture was Feszj. He occupied my body to teach you. You think I could have done that?"

Rebecca opened her mouth, but had nothing to say. She knew from her little knowledge of psychology that a person should never encourage another person's delusions. Yet Jesse did have a point. How could she explain his sudden brilliance? Did the bump on his head trigger some neural reaction that made him genius? Has that ever happened before? That injury must also be causing his delusions? She had heard of geniuses being partially insane anyway — people like Schumann, Swift, and Van Gogh.

Instead of speaking, she looked away from Jesse and through the kitchen window. It was quite dark outside. She looked at her watch. 8:30.

"Mrs. Strich, it's eight-thirty. I really should be getting home."

Linda never reacted. She seemed to be sitting oblivious to everything around her.

"Mrs. Strich?" Rebecca nudged her. Linda jumped away, startled. "It's eight-thirty, Mrs. Strich," Rebecca said again. "I need to go home now."

Linda vigorously nodded up and down, almost as if she were trying to answer the question and shake cobwebs out of her head. She hurriedly stood up, almost falling backward over her chair in the process. As she scrambled around the kitchen looking for the car keys, she spoke to Jesse, but didn't look at him.

"Jesse, I have to take Rebecca home. I'll be back shortly. If you don't mind, would you mind doing the dishes? Thanks."

Jesse remained sitting at the table, his face empty of all expression except futility.

"You don't believe me, do you? Either of you?"

"We'll talk more when I get back, okay?" said his mother. Rebecca didn't know what to say, so she looked down at the floor, said good-bye, and scampered out the kitchen and out the front door, followed closely behind by Linda.

Alone at the table, Jesse hunched over his plate, put his face in his hands, and rested his elbows in the table. He stayed that way for a few minutes, then began rubbing his face.

"I told you it was a mistake," said Jesse to a vacant kitchen.

"Give it time," replied Feszj in his head. "News like this isn't going to be accepted without question or hesitation."

But Jesse was unconvinced. For perhaps the first time since he met Feszj — this brilliant orator who outperformed Mr. Monroe in both teaching ability and intelligence, a person unaffected by any situation and had a reply to each argument, someone seemingly completely in control of every detail of their relationship — Jesse began to doubt him.

Feszj insisted that he tell his friends about Vilmar, even though Jesse strenuously resisted. Now, what he thought would happen, happened.

"They think I'm going crazy," stated Jesse.

"They must convince themselves that you aren't insane, and you can construct for them an environment in which they can do that based on your behavior."

It sounded reasonable to Jesse. He really wanted to believe in Feszj. He didn't like feeling uncertain about Feszj and his capabilities. After all, Feszj had been right so many other times before.

But the initial doubt haunted Jesse, and that worried him. If Jesse couldn't have faith in Feszj, then perhaps it was all an illusion. The visits to Vilmar, the hike to the mountain, even Sunas. All a cruelly wonderful hallucination. Maybe he was going insane, he pondered.

Jesse stood up, gathered the plates off the the table, and placed them in the sink to rinse off before putting them in the dishwasher. He shuffled across the floor, feeling very old. The stress of being looked upon as a lunatic bore down on his shoulders. There was no spring in his step.

As Jesse began rinsing, he said to himself, "I can just imagine what they are talking about."

"What?" asked Feszj.

"They are probably saying what a lunatic I am. That I should be locked away with all the other crazies. Maybe spend the rest of my life in hospitals."

"Would you like to know what they are really saying?"

Jesse paused as the water ran over his hands. "How can you do that?" he asked, but knew as he said it, Feszj had a way of doing anything.

"Have a seat," said Feszj.

Jesse turned off the water, let the plates sit in the sink, and returned to his chair by the table.

"Rest your arms and head on the table, and close your eyes," Feszj instructed.

Jesse did as he was told. Soon, he felt the same sensations he experienced back in Mr. Monroe's history class. His body slowly disappeared from existence. Watery images began appearing to his mind as he separated from his body. Once his mind was completely extracted from his body, the images coalesced into an interior of a car, his mother's car. He was sitting in the passenger's seat, and to his left was Linda. He was seeing through Rebecca's eyes.

For several moments, nothing was said. Each person sat stiffly, staring ahead at the gray road and passing headlights. The radio was not on, the car engine ran almost imperceptively hidden by the soft drone of the road noise. The car seemed nervously silent. Initially, Jesse was relieved to know they weren't talking about him, at least not yet. But while Jesse waited, his mind suffered the tension filling the inside of the car, and he grew impatient. Rebecca felt the same and started speaking, the sound of her voice jarring both Jesse and his mother.

"Mrs. Strich, I think Jesse should see a doctor."

Linda mulled over Rebecca's comment, licking and biting her lips. "Would you like me to turn on the radio?" said Linda.

"Mrs. Strich, it seems pretty clear that Jesse is having hallucinations."

"He's just pulling our legs, that's all. I thought it was pretty funny." Linda forced a pathetic chuckle. "You sure you don't want the radio on? Here." She reached for the dial. "Do you like country-western?"

"Mrs. Strich," said Rebecca, raising her voice to prevent Linda from turning on the radio. Linda placed her hand back on the wheel, but her fingers commenced an apoplectic dance on the leather grip.

Rebecca regained her composure and began again. "I know this must be very hard for you, and I'm sorry, but I really think Jesse needs psychological help."

"What do you know about psychology?" barked Linda, with a slight snarl. "What kind of credentials do you have to know he's unstable. You've known him how long? Two? Three years? I've known him all his life."

Linda took a deep breath. "For thirteen years, I have fed him, clothed him, made his meals, bathed him, and comforted him when he was sick. You think I don't know when he's kidding around? No. He's just fine, thank you."

Jesse understood right away that his mother was protesting too much, fighting too hard to assure her son's sanity. Rebecca knew that as well.

"You heard what he said," responded Rebecca. "He sincerely believes that he's visited other worlds. He wasn't kidding. Not for a whole hour, describing in excruciating detail everything he's supposedly seen. I don't know about you, but I saw in his eyes that he was pleading with us to believe him."

"Other people have spoken to God and have seen the Virgin Mary," said Linda. "Many more have had out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, seen UFOs. Yet they aren't automatically deemed insane."

"But it's not just one event or one person he's seeing," argued Rebecca. "He claims to be visiting an entire world — on a regular basis even. He's slipping out of reality and into a fantasy world all his own."

"And what harm has that caused?" Linda shot back. Rebecca had no ready reply, so she dropped her head. Linda continued. "He hasn't hurt anyone. Everything he's done has been geared to helping someone. The recycling, the garden. Where's the insanity in that?"

"I'm sorry," said Rebecca. "It's just that—."

"You can't possibly know what this means to me," interrupted Linda. "You don't understand how wonderful it is to now have the perfect son after years of being used, abused, exploited, with no love or gratitude returned at all. All demands, but no responsibilities — that's how they see the world. And as a mother, you are condemned to love your children despite all their faults.

"But now, Jesse is helpful, intelligent, kind, forgiving, sympathetic, supportive, and any number of other synonyms. Now, because a wonderful quirk of fate, my patience has paid off, and he has come back to me — better than I ever could have imagined. I don't care how. I don't care why. Whatever happened to him has made him a better person, and given us both a new start to a better life. I will not lose that. I do not want some anonymous doctor pumping drugs into my son so he can return to his former spoiled self, and me to my former interminable wretchedness."

"Mrs. Strich, he got hit really hard on his head. He could have some brain damage or something?"

"The doctors did a CAT scan and found nothing damaged. At most a mild concussion. But no swelling, no fractures."

"But Mrs. Strich—."

"I appreciate your concern, Miss Ramey, but you are mistaken. Jesse is just fine."

With that stern assertion filled with a grimaced finality, Rebecca sighed, turned towards the road, and folded her arms together across her chest. She said nothing more.

"How 'bout some music?" asked Linda, in a fake light-heartedness, and not really expecting a reply either.

Jesse began feeling his limbs again as the image inside the car blurred and faded from sight. In a moment, he raised his head, and saw his kitchen coming into focus. He stayed seated until his legs stopped twitching.

"I'll never get used to that," said Jesse. He found it easier to vocalize than to think his questions.

"Few people ever do," replied Feszj, with an enigmatic tone of voice, meaning more than he actually said. Jesse paused to consider what Feszj implied, but quickly moved on to what was on his mind.

"So, Feszj, what was the point of that trip?"

"The point is," said Feszj, speaking slowly, "that a person's actions often mean more than words. So only through action sometimes can you provide the necessary environment to promote a cooperative and compassionate community."

"Community is what people truly desire in their hearts, and they will willingly let rationality and logic fall by the wayside if it gets in their way of achieving this objective. However, in your world, not everyone has access to the most cooperative or most compassionate communities. Unfortunately then, without access to good communities, your people must settle for bad ones."

"If people want good communities," asked Jesse, "then why don't people just get together and create them?"

"Since your society stresses competition, people are prevented from working together. Competition trains people to act in their own self-interest. For example, the greatest institution of the modern world, capitalism, demands self-interest as its underlying premise. It is hard to imagine individuals both morally and ethically concerned about their neighbor when they are at the same time consumed with the passion to look out for themselves.

"What exists is moral schizophrenia, where people are asked to be cooperative and competitive simultaneously."

"But that's impossible."

"Is it? One of your writers, George Orwell, knew it to be true. He called it doublethink: the rational acceptance of contradictory moral positions."

"Yeah, but that's just fiction stories," argued Jesse, assuming Feszj was referring to another work by Orwell aside from *Animal Farm*, which Jesse had read last year. "We're talking real life."

"Do me a favor and indulge me by thinking back to when your coach implored your team to cooperate and work hard together in order to beat the other team." Jesse immediately saw the point and conceded it with a glum nod. Feszj continued. "Having been assailed by this paradox over the years, your mind has been numbed and no longer thinks about it. You doublethink, because the co-existence of cooperation and competition makes it necessary for your mental survival. Which makes one wonder: who is the more insane? You, or them?"

Jesse, both mentally and physically exhausted, heaved a big sigh. Saying no more, he got up from his seat, walked over to the sink, and finished rinsing the dishes. He still worried. Even though Feszj seemed so right once again, the doubt still persisted. There must be somebody somewhere who will not be persuaded by either words or deeds. Someone who won't take the time to listen or become involved. Someone so lost in their own quest for self-interest and self-glory that he or she will never be able to undo all the doublethink training they have had. Jesse hoped that that someone was far, far away.

By the time Linda returned from dropping Rebecca off at her house, Jesse had already placed the dishes in the dishwasher and went to bed. She wanted to step into his room to talk more, but what would she say? What would he say? Most likely, he would want her to believe him and his wild tales about this imaginary land, which she really couldn't honestly do. But at the same time, she wants to keep the new Jesse just the way he is. Any doubt he might sense from her during the conversation would assuredly tip the balance of an already unstable mind. She would lose, not only the new Jesse, but the old one as well.

Jesse heard her footsteps pause at the door. He tensed up. He didn't really want to go through another explanation. The results would be just the same, and he was depressed enough. Surprised, however, he heard Linda walking away from his room and into her own. Then tragically, the nightly procedures he knew intimately began once again. He felt the floor vibrate as she lay down heavily on her bed. And though it may have been faint to her, in the still of the house Jesse could always easily tell she was crying. It was a sound to which he had often fallen asleep many times. Apparently, it was going to be no different tonight; except this time, the whimpering would thunder a bit louder than usual in his ears.

And in the back bedroom, Jesse's father rested, on the verge of sleep, but kept awake by the voices from the kitchen which echoed loudly down the hallway and through the door to Peter's room. Whether he wished to or not, Peter followed Jesse's entire conversation with Linda and Rebecca before they left, and he had also listened to Jesse talking to himself in the kitchen. It was hard to miss. *Damn it*, he groaned to himself before dozing off and snoring filled that end of the house, *that kid is cracking up*.

* * *

Jesse woke up in the common bedroom at the research center, but all the cots were empty. The cool, dry, but comfortable air caressed his exposed skin when he got up out of his sleeping bag, naked. He looked around a little and listened for voices or movement, but no one seemed to be there. He took a private shower, which was both gratifying and disappointing. He wanted to know how he would react to a communal shower with men and women.

When he returned from the shower room, he discovered that the clothes that he wore yesterday and placed on the chair next to the bed were missing. His boots remained on the floor where he left them, but his outfit had vanished. *Were they missing when I got up?*

He couldn't remember. He hadn't checked; he hadn't thought to check. Why would any one take his clothes? He checked the dresser at the foot of his bed. In one of the drawers, he found a half a dozen rust-colored leotards, neatly folded. Examining the other drawers, he found socks, tunics, one of those silver insulated pullover, hats, and a pair of tinted goggles to protect from snow blindness. He dressed and then tried to remember his way back to the dining hall.

When he arrived, it was empty, except for Feszj, whom Jesse was surprised to see. At Feszj's table, there was some food — still warm — waiting for Jesse. The young man took a seat next to Feszj, and began eating his breakfast.

"Where is everyone?" Jesse asked.

"They are out working on the windmills."

"Why didn't you wake me up?"

"You weren't ready to leave Earth. You can join them now."

Jesse let out a tired sigh. "No. I don't feel like going out there in the cold. I think I'll just stay here today."

"If you wish."

Jesse peered at Feszj out of the corner of his eye. He didn't expect Feszj to be so accommodating. "You're not going to persuade me to go out and work?"

"No."

"You mean, I can just sit here all day and play video games if I want to?"

"Yes."

Jesse stared at Feszj more intently, as if he were trying to read his mind. Feszj returned Jesse's gaze, understood its meaning, and answered Jesse's intuited question.

"It is true, we would like you to share in the group endeavors, but we will not force you. We don't force anyone to do anything."

"Then why does everyone work?"

It was now Feszj's turn to sigh, in an almost despondent way. "Haven't you figured that out? It is no fun being by ourselves when things need to be done. All your friends are out there, doing what will benefit the community — not only through their repair efforts, but by sustaining the interrelationships necessary between human beings. They are perpetuating community.

"Everyone is committed to helping everyone, unlike in your society where a person is expected to help themselves even when there are so many friends around to share the burden and dissipate the suffering. That approach to life makes sense in a world where self-interest is the guiding principle for accomplishment and success, and where loneliness

is common. So much so that in order to survive it becomes a requirement to learn to love loneliness and yearn for solitude.

"Face it. Despite thousands of people in your town, you are relatively anonymous. To accept that psychological alienation, you must convince yourself that you are an individual, and that individualism is good. What is painfully ironic is that when someone falters, and eventually gives in and cannot survive without help from others, what we view as natural and necessary, your society looks upon as being a symptom of either mental or spiritual weakness."

"Feszj," said an irritated Jesse, "it's too early in the morning for this. Besides, can't you just talk to me normally, rather than with all this philosophy crap? I'm getting sick of it."

Feszj grinned, and said while getting up from his seat, "That's a good sign."

"What?"

Feszj walked over to the dining hall wall, pulled down a cabinet door, reached for a pitcher of water, and filled one of the glasses sitting to the pitcher. He set the pitcher back down, closed the cabinet, returned to the table, and sat down.

"Yes," Feszj began, "it is a good sign. Philosophy isn't meant to be gentle or easy to swallow. It is meant to challenge you and your views of the world. Your sickness is due to two possible reasons. Either you are getting tired of fighting what I have been saying to you, or you are learning how sickening your world really is, especially when compared to ours."

Jesse hadn't thought about his exhaustion in that sense. But it seemed to make sense. Things in Feszj's world move so smoothly, efficiently, and yet with consummate effortlessness, it's as if nothing should be getting done, but everything is getting done, and done superbly. On Earth, everything is like pulling teeth, a constant struggle because people refuse to cooperate and pool their resources for their own benefit because they are skeptical, scared, too lazy, or too competitive to work together.

"But on Terah, Jesse," said Feszj, patting Jesse on the shoulder, "it is okay to relax. Here, you have been given the rarest of opportunities to step out of your world — to go from what is, to what ought to be. And when you are ready to join us, you will. But, again, we will not force you. You will join us of your own volition. Only then will our way of life become your way of life as well."

Feszj took one last swallow from the glass, and placed it on Jesse's tray, and left the room. Jesse, left alone, no longer felt hungry, and left the food and the tray on the table.

He walked out of the room and headed back to the sleeping quarters, where he lounged on his bunk in the relative quiet of the room ruminating on what Feszj said.

All of a sudden, he heard a burst of laughter, the shuffling of feet, and animated conversation from a room upstairs. He tried to ignore them, but the joviality of the strangers unceasingly worked its way into his psyche. Their presence made his loneliness — though a valued escape on Earth — intolerable here. His guilt flared up as well. Lying on the cot like a couch potato, he thought of all the new friends he had met who were looking forward to inspecting the windmills together. He was letting them down; and in doing so, was letting himself down.

Just then, Sunas walked into the room, her face rosy from the cold.

"Feszj said you weren't feeling well," she said. "Would you like some company?"

At last, Jesse was all alone with Sunas. Ever since she crawled into his bunk naked, he had dreamed of this moment. Yet having carnal thoughts while the others were outside making sure that the communities which depend on the electricity are safe. The guilt of disappointing his fellow hikers consumed him and overwhelmed any sexual desire for her.

Angry that her presence caused such a reaction, he said gruffly, "Shouldn't you be out there with the rest of the group?" However, as soon as he spoke, he knew he shouldn't have said it. He couldn't do anything right.

Sunas stopped in the doorway, shocked by his abrupt greeting.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I can come back later if—."

"No, no. Please stay," pleaded Jesse. "It's me who should say I'm sorry." Sunas glided over to Jesse's cot and sat next to him, putting her arm around his waist. Although chilled by the cold fabric touching his body, he remained next to her. Silent, they sat arm in arm for a few moments, her head resting on his shoulder. He stared straight ahead into the grain of the wood paneling on the wall.

"I love you," said Jesse softly. It was an involuntary statement, without thought, without hesitation. He blushed after he said it.

Sunas smiled with radiant softness. She took his hand and stroked it.

"I know," she said, with a special softness. "We love you, too."

"What about you?" said Jesse. "Don't you love me? God, you went to bed naked with me."

"I love you." Sunas's face showed signs of confusion.

"But don't you love me more than other people? Am I someone special to you?"

Sunas peered deep into Jesse's eyes — perhaps probing for sympathy, perhaps desperately thinking of a reply. Perhaps both.

"She can't, Jesse." A voice coming from the door interrupted them. They both looked up and Catiana leaning against the door jamb. "She can't love you more than anyone else. It would not be right."

"Why not? That doesn't seem fair to me. I love her." He turned to Sunas. "I love you more than anyone I've ever met."

"Try to understand," said Catiana, "that the full attention of the members of our community must always be to the community. An obsessive loving relationship — what we refer to as an infatuation — fragments the community into smaller and smaller self-absorbed cliques, each pursuing their own personal passions and desires at the expense of the needs of the community."

Jesse shook his head. "That doesn't make any sense. Love is part of the world."

"Don't misunderstand me," cautioned Catiana, walking over to sit next to Jesse on the bed, opposite from Sunas. "Love, friendships, and relationships exist, and exist everywhere, but to the benefit of the community, not to its detriment. Everyone understands that and agrees to abide by that. To risk the well-being of hundreds or thousands of people to simply entertain the individual interests of only two people is inconceivably selfish. Surely, you can admit that being infatuated is an irrational state — people do stupid things when they are obsessively in love. It therefore makes no sense to determine a course of action under its influence."

"But why did she sleep with me?" said Jesse, pointing a thumb at Sunas while growing cynical. He hoped to mortify Sunas with that embarrassing confession. "Was that for the community's benefit?"

"I like spending time with you, Jesse," said Sunas, seemingly unaffected by his comment. "You are kind and interesting and complex young man; but, at the same time, you are filled with bitterness and disappointment. I was trying to do what everyone in our community has tried to do from the moment you set foot in Vilmar: to help you to accept our world, and everything it entails. All the beliefs, the stories, the traditions, the philosophies, and truths."

Sunas reached her hand up to his face and eased his head towards her.

"What I did," continued Sunas, "I thought may have helped in this process. I'm sorry if I acted improperly. I really do think you are a very special person and have a lot to offer this world as well as your own, but I can't love you in the way I think you want me to. It wouldn't be fair to the community."

"I think, Jesse," said Catiana, placing her arm around Jesse as well, "you are confusing the act of sex with the act of love. Perhaps you are confused because of the expression

"making love" which your society has grown fond of using. It is merely a euphemism for the sex act. In reality, people can and ought to "make love" in many non-physical ways. Yet because of this poor use of language, you have mistakenly learned to equate the physicality of sex with love, while forgetting how to love your community and the members in it without sex. What our society has done was separate the spirituality of love from the physicality of sex. In this way, we can enjoy the pleasures which the physical sensations give, and at the same time maintain our loving commitment to everyone in the world.

"Unlike in your world, where love has been turned into the scarce resource of 'Romantic love', which insists that only one person out of an entire world — the mystic and mythical dream girl — can provide emotional satisfaction. More significant, however, is your society's overt preference for these impossible and often ridiculous relationships.

"But there is a benefit to this unending quest for unrequited love, at least to the supporters of the dominant ideology. Ideal love breaks down the simpler day-to-day loving relationships between ordinary people, friends or strangers. The expression of this basic love for one's fellow human being would cause people to question the harsh demands of a competitive lifestyle, soon to lead to a challenge to the competitive lifestyle itself."

Jesse hardly paid any attention to Catiana's comments. Still dealing with the sense of rejection from Sunas, he continued to search through Sunas's eyes for some inkling of love that might be reserved just for him, but to no avail. He then tried to imagine loving everyone else as he loved her, but he couldn't. He had no conception of what it was like to love everyone. He decided that the task was impossible and gave up looking for love anywhere.

"I feel like I'm being used," said Jesse, finally releasing himself from Sunas's gaze, dropping his head to look at the floor.

"But you shouldn't," said a male voice this time.

Jesse looked up to see Feszj at the doorway, with Ratalla and Catiana's entire helpcrew behind him. Feszj entered the room, and the group filled in behind.

"You know, Feszj," said Jesse, "for someone who wants to be alone, this room is getting pretty crowded."

The group laughed in response. The way he expressed himself did sound amusing to Jesse. However, he restrained his mirth. He wanted to remain angry and express it.

"It's not funny," spit out Jesse. The group quickly quieted itself. "Laughing at me like that. Using me for a cheap joke."

Feszj stepped forward as the rest of the group hung behind, leaning against the wall and sitting on near-by cots.

"Yes, Jesse," said Feszj, standing next to the sitting Jesse. "In a sense, we are all using you."

This statement caught Jesse off-guard. He was expecting Feszj to deny it all. Once again, Feszj agreed with Jesse, but it sounded nothing like an admission of fault. Feszj went on.

"We use you to derive pleasure in your company. We use you to help us find humor in our world and our situations. We are even going to use you to help us augment our knowledge of people and places."

"I don't understand. You said I shouldn't feel like I'm being used."

"Do you feel like you are using any of us?"

Jesse thought for a moment. "Well, no. How can I? You're all constantly offering assistance before I even ask for it."

"That's right. Remember, just by you being here makes everyone of us your friend. So I doubt if any of us feels *used* in even the slightest sense. You see, Jesse, the difference is that we willingly give to others and the community all that is needed from us. We're glad we can help. It constantly reinforces our belief in the cooperative way of life. We ourselves and we as a community gain nothing by hoarding our abilities. We hurt ourselves and our friends by doing so."

"So you're saying I should *like* being used?" said Jesse, still unconvinced.

"You make it sound so terrible," said Feszj. "But it is normal, at least to us, to use other people and to be used by others for the mutual benefit of everyone in the community. You might even say we consider it an honor to be useful to our community. On the other hand, *you* feel *used* only because you are still acting and thinking like an individual, with your own needs and your own attributes that this world seemingly wants to extract from you. Due to your social conditioning, you envision us treating you as some sort of pawn with which to achieve our goals. A means to our ends.

"But it is not us. Rather, it is the environment in which you are in that is challenging your pre-conceived notions. You feel used because the environment in which you find yourself encourages you to give of yourself in ways your pre-conceived notions resist. Our world offers you the wonderful opportunity to give of yourself to benefit our community, but still your previous influences resist."

Jesse glanced at the group milling about the room. They were all looking at him, and he thought he would be uncomfortable being the center of all the staring, but he wasn't.

Their eyes were clear and their taut faces were filled with concern. They were the same kind of visages as when an athlete is injured. The team runs to aid their fallen comrade. Wanting to help, but unable to do anything.

Catiana, Ratalla, Sunas, and the rest of the on-lookers held their breath. They all wanted to help — desperately even — but they could really do nothing. It was up to him now. It had always been up to him. It was all part of Feszj's perpetual refrain. They provided Jesse the best of environments in which he could develop and prosper — a place to drink in the emotional satisfaction of community, the physical connection to the humanity of compassion, and the obvious logical necessity of cooperation. It was a place where Jesse could learn by doing. It was now time to commit to the doing.

"Jesse," said Feszj, "you don't have to be lonely anymore."

Jesse looked up and delved past Feszj's eyes and into his hopes and wishes. He next turned to Lasho who said they would always be there for him. Then to Amora and Catiana, who both forgave and forgot his uncontrolled outbursts of ego and anger. To Ratalla, who automatically invited him to visit her community with hardly a question as to his character.

And finally, he faced Sunas. "It must be hard to love everyone," he said to her.

"Not really," she replied. "I imagine it must be much harder to pick and choose whom among all your fellow humans is more worthy of your love than others."

Jesse slowly nodded his agreement. Once again, his brain wracked itself to assimilate and comprehend what it all meant. But in his heart, it all made complete sense.

He stood up from the bed and grabbed Sunas's waist with one hand, his tunic, hat, goggles, and insulated vest with the other. He started leading her through the people standing around the bed who followed him with uncertain gazes. At the door, he stopped and twisted around to speak to the others.

"Well, what are you standing around inside for? We've got a bunch of windmills out there to check on." Then out of the room he sped, with Sunas by his side.

* * *

When Jesse returned to Lynvern High Monday morning, news of his Friday history lecture had already travelled around much of the ninth grade and was beginning to trickle into the upper grades. Students who once turned away from him in snobbish aversion now sought him out to compliment him on humiliating his teacher. The fickle behavior of these students — enamored by watching other people humiliated, voyeurs searching for the

catharsis of domination — disgusted him. Yet even though it was behavior he understood all too well, he was more shocked that it actually disgusted him. It was only a few months ago when he would have done exactly the same thing.

So much has happened since then, Jesse pondered. So many things have changed.

When Rebecca showed up to school on Monday, she was glad she didn't have many friends to discuss her visit on Sunday to Jesse's house. To the few she did have, she said very little and remained tight-lipped about his questionable mental state. Despite her better judgment, she hoped Linda Strich was right — that Jesse had changed for the better, and that his delusions will not ruin his life.

Still, even though she was ashamed and chided herself for doing so, for most of the morning Rebecca discreetly avoided Jesse. *I can't deal with him*, she debated in her head. *I've got problems of my own*. Sad, and full of mixed emotions and thoughts, she knew she would sound uncomfortable engaged in any conversation with him. She had no desire to embarrass him or herself with such an awkward meeting. However, she didn't have to worry much about that. As soon as third period began, a call came down to Jesse's science classroom.

"Please send Jesse Strich down to the office."

Though no one knew exactly why he was being called down to the office, there seemed to be a sense throughout the classroom, considering what happened last Friday, that this was serious. His teacher eyed him with opprobrium, Jesse's signal to leave. Rising from his seat and walking out the classroom door amidst the murmur of teasing and gossip, he glanced back at Rebecca. She looked away. *You think you know your friends sometimes*, he thought. Feigning a stoicism he didn't have, he continued out the door. He didn't see the tears she hid from him, and he would never find out. He never saw her again.

As he trod down the hallway towards the main office, Jesse struggled to figure out what he had done wrong. Did it have something to do with the bathroom incident? Maybe something is up at home. But he was kidding himself. It didn't take him long to face the fact that it almost certainly had to do with Mr. Monroe.

He told on me. Damn.

Growing desperate, Jesse searched his mind for Feszj's presence, but he felt nothing. Jesse sank further into despondency.

Jesse reached the office, hands in his pockets and shoulders hunched as if his life had run out of hope. He told the secretary, Mrs. Gallavino, he was called down. He could smell her perfume from across the desk. She looked up from her computer screen.

"Your name?"

That was an ego-deflating question. Even as a trouble-maker, even with a face full of metal, anonymity still prevailed.

"Jesse Strich," he mumbled.

"Oh yes," she nodded, disapprovingly. Jesse noticed there was not one gray hair on her head out of place, having been molded firmly in place by hair spray. "You're to see Mr. Peters," she continued, this time with a certain sting in her voice. "Go upstairs. I'll let him know you're coming."

Not him again. Jesse's life sagged even more. He slowly scaled the steps and arrived at the second floor. Facing him was the now familiar sight of several secretaries working quietly at desks placed along the right wall, each across from a door leading into a vice-principal's office. The only exception was the principal's office door, which was at the opposite end of the room and facing him, and guarded by another secretary, also facing him. Mr. Peter's office was the last door before the principal's.

He walked through the secretarial office, imagining everyone staring at him, though few actually took notice of him. He reached Mr. Peter's secretary who told him to go right in.

He walked into Mr. Peter's office. The room was bright; the window overlooking the atrium of the school let in a great deal of ambient lighting. On the floor was dense, flat brown carpet. The walls were covered with dark stained wood panelling. Several half-filled book shelves lined the right wall. Jesse noticed dust covering many of the books. On the left wall hung Mr. Peter's diplomas, a Bachelor's and Master's degree, along with plaques featuring football players in various poses. On the credenza below the plaques were numerous additional sports trophies — football, baseball, bowling — all sparkling and clean. On each side of the door was a large corn plant, which looked like small palm trees.

Silhouetted against the window glare, Mr. Peters stood directly behind his desk chair with his back to Jesse, looking out over the main foyer.

"Have a seat, Mr. Strich," he said, without turning around.

Jesse went to one of the two chairs situated in front of Mr. Peter's desk and sat. Not knowing what to do with his hands, he folded them together and placed them on his lap. He noticed his palms were sweaty, his breathing shallow and quickened. He rubbed his hands on his pant legs to dry them off.

"So, we meet again, Mr. Strich," said Mr. Peters, again bouncing his voice off the glass. Jesse said nothing. Mr. Peters's intellectualisms annoyed him.

Hearing no reply, Mr. Peters turned around and faced Jesse. "Do you know why you are here?" he asked.

Jesse had a good idea, but he wasn't going to give away anything. After all, he might be wrong. Jesse shook his head. "No. Not really."

"Come now, Mr. Strich," said Mr. Peters. He proceeded to walk behind Jesse, circling him like a vulture might circle prospective carrion. "You and I, and probably the rest of the school by now, know all about your erudite display of history last Friday afternoon. Mr. Monroe told me all about it."

Jesse noticed that Mr. Peters voice was different. It didn't have that thunderous quality. It sounded gentle, almost sympathetic.

"I'm really sorry about last Friday," rattled off a scared Jesse.

"Mr. Monroe seemed quite impressed with your surprisingly sudden and voluminous knowledge of history," continued Mr. Peters, unconcerned by Jesse's apology.

Jesse thought about what Feszj might say in this situation. "I did all that to help Mr. Monroe improve his teaching."

Mr. Peters eyed Jesse in the way a gifted stage performer might stare down an amateur heckler. "However," said Mr. Peters in a more gruff voice, "Mr. Monroe was very upset at the way you proceeded to make that knowledge known. Furthermore, your presumptuous behavior in telling Mr. Monroe how to teach was exceedingly irksome. What do you know about teaching, Mr. Strich? What background do you have? Have you been taking education classes? Are you so modest that you are in possession of a teaching degree but haven't told us? Why hide it? Maybe we could hire you."

Mr. Peters smirked the entire time he was speaking. It was almost as if he enjoyed humiliating Jesse. Jesse, in turn, involuntarily played his part by begging forgiveness.

"I'm sorry. I...I don't know what came over me."

"That is what I want to find out," said Mr. Peters, with cryptic inflection. Immediately, Jesse became even more nervous. *What did he mean by that?*

Mr. Peters returned to his desk, sat down, and opened a manilla folder resting in front of him. Jesse assumed it was his school file.

"According to Mr. Monroe," began Mr. Peters, "you claimed that your recent intellectual outburst came from, uh, someone inhabiting your body?" Jesse could tell by the pursed lips that Mr. Peters was holding back a laugh. "Am I right?"

Jesse said nothing. He was horrified by his choices. If he said he heard voices, they would think he was crazy. If he denied hearing voices, they would say he was a liar and still claim he was crazy. He had no option available to him except to not say anything. The

worst that could happen then would be indefinite detention. Maybe a suspension. Not great alternatives, but better than being thought insane.

"Mr. Strich, I am talking to you," said Mr. Peters, raising his voice slightly, but ominously. "Is it or is it not true that you told Mr. Monroe you were hearing voices?"

What to do? What to do? Why has Feszj deserted me?

"I'm here, Jesse."

"Feszj!" blurted Jesse. Mr. Peters's eyes sprung open.

"Feszj, Mr. Strich? Who is this Feszj?" asked Mr. Peters. But Jesse didn't answer. He was talking to Feszj.

Where have you been, Feszj?

"I have been listening," replied Feszj, his voice filling Jesse's mind. "I wanted to see how you would handle the situation and the pressure. But you seem to be stuck. May I slip in to help?"

Anything. Just get me out of this mess.

"Jesse," interrupted Mr. Peters, "aren't you listening to me?"

"What else does my file say about the incident," said Jesse, repeating what Feszj had instructed him to say. Mr. Peters started reading the file. In his irritation at Jesse's obstinate behavior, he read slowly and aloud a great deal of the file.

"Relax, and try not to fight. Mr. Peters's review of your file will give us time to switch."

Jesse slumped into the chair, positioning himself for the switch. He braced himself by gripping the arm rests, worried that something — some twitch — would give away what was going on. Once again, he felt the odd sensations of his body dropping out of existence. Jesse doubted if he would ever grow accustomed to its strangeness; it wasn't really a 'neat' or 'cool' feeling, just uncomfortable. But he remained quiet and let the painless transformation proceed without resistance.

As the transformation took place, Jesse half heard Mr. Peters's comments. Remarks like "disorderly conduct in class," "lack of respect for teachers and students," and "disobeying and disregarding teacher requests" caught his ear. He wanted to respond to these accusations, feeling less intimidated now that Feszj was around, but Feszj insisted that Jesse just sit back and relax.

"These comments are not our concern right now," Feszj said. "What we need to do is to divert Mr. Peters's attention from what you did to what you believe."

Soon, Jesse was floating in limbo as Feszj controlled the body. Just in time, too.

"Is there anything else you would like to know, Mr. Strich?"

Feszj shook his head.

"Fine," went on Mr. Peters. "Then perhaps you would be so kind as to answer my original question. Are you hearing any voices?"

"Yes," replied Feszj, smiling. Mr. Peters sat back in shock at the ease of the confession.

Jesse cringed emotionally. "What are you doing?" Jesse asked.

Feszj continued with Mr. Peters. "I hear voices all the time. Your voice, Mr. Monroe's voice. After all, I have ears."

"Mr. Strich," said Mr. Peters, his face switched from a self-satisfied smile to an angry grimace, "I am not a fool and do not like being made the butt of jejune banter. You know what I mean. So don't fight me on this."

"I apologize. I don't mean to be trouble." Then Feszj exposed a sly grin. "All I want to do is cooperate."

"So do I, Mr. Strich," said Mr. Peters. "So start cooperating and answer my questions."

"What would happen if I don't answer your questions?" quizzed Feszj.

Mr. Peters took a deep breath to reduce the obvious strain in his neck muscles. "Don't even think of going down that path, Mr. Strich. Your life here at Lynvern can be very unpleasant."

"More unpleasant than last week?" shot back Feszj. "More miserable than being ostracized by peers? More miserable than bearing the brunt of physical and psychological torments? Where were you and your faculty last week when all this suffering was going on? What kind of environment have you created here where students cannot even walk down the hallways without being physically violated?"

Mr. Peters slapped his hands on his desk, rose slowly from his chair, and hung over Jesse's face, trying to use the weight and proximity of his body to intimidate.

"How dare you, of all people, tell me how to run my school."

"It is the students's school too, is it not?"

Mr. Peters stood looming over Jesse, his face twitching, infuriated by this little kid's calm reply. The intimidation that was so effective only moments before was now having no effect. Something happened inside Jesse, but he didn't know what.

"You are being very uncooperative," said Mr. Peters.

"Uncooperative or unintimidated?" Feszj replied. "Uncooperative or disobedient? Uncooperative or inobsequious?"

"I am warning you, Mr. Strich," said Mr. Peters, squeezing the words through clenched teeth.

"Being forced to cooperate is hardly cooperation," responded Feszj. "You are trying to coerce me, forcing me to behave in the way you have autocratically determined. You are trying to dominate, and this domination will only be placated if I become a myrmidon to your every request. I, on the other hand, am simply choosing not to be coerced, not to be dominated. However, I am more than willing to cooperate, if you'll eliminate the threats."

"Then stop fighting me," snarled Mr. Peters.

"Am I fighting you?"

"Of course you're fighting me."

"As a cooperativist, the last thing I wish to do is fight you."

"A cooperativist?"

"Yes, Mr. Peters," replied Feszj, calmly as always. "Someone who believes that humans ought to be a cooperative species rather than a competitive one."

"Your behavior in this office has hardly demonstrated that. In fact..." It was now time for Mr. Peters's voice to calm down and became smooth and almost soothing. "...you're contradicting your own statement. By your very actions, you've demonstrated that it is more natural for humans to fight and compete than cooperate, Mr. Strich."

"Resisting tyranny is a way of reminding the tyrant that cooperation is a two-way street. Civil disobedience is a way of promoting cooperation with the oppressed."

Mr. Peters neck swelled as he stifled a flood of invective ready to be unleashed at this impudent child. Keeping his job was more important than putting this one little brat in his place, he thought. He huffed and puffed but, in the end, said nothing.

"But that's not important, nor is it really the issue," continued Feszj. "I am more curious to learn how you know humans are naturally competitive?" asked Feszj.

Mr. Peters swallowed his unused insults. Besides, he doesn't have to deal in *ad hominum* attacks. *If this little twirp wants to engage in verbal sword play, considered Mr. Peters, then so be it. His history may be top-notch, according to Mr. Monroe, but he's still only a ninth grader. It should be easy to overwhelm him with logic.*

"Look around you, Mr. Strich," began Mr. Peters, "and tell me where competition isn't functioning, where aggression isn't determining the human hierarchy. Economics, politics, education, interpersonal relationships. Even animals fight each other. Look at yourself. You're just doing what comes naturally. A scared animal, backed into a corner, fighting back for survival. Competition is as natural for humans as laziness is."

"Excuse me, Mr. Strich, but I believe you are in error on several points" Feszj spoke with confidence.

Mr. Peters's grin vanished. "Am I?"

"Yes," Feszj began. "One logical error is that you imply that because competition is everywhere, it is somehow innate. Yet pottery and houses and clothing are everywhere with humans. Are these also innate propensities of humans? In other words, is a human baby born with the knowledge to build a house, or clothes, or a clay pot?"

Mr. Peters sat mute. He chewed his lip. Feszj went on.

"You also claim that humans are both naturally competitive and naturally lazy. However, people cannot be both naturally lazy and competitive. If humans are naturally lazy, for instance, they wouldn't compete. Competition, after all, takes a lot of effort, too much for an indolent person. If people compete, they have been forced to compete. Competition, therefore, becomes unnatural. On the other hand, if competition were natural, laziness would have been a liability. It would have been a trait quickly forced into extinction by evolution. But that didn't happen either."

"Lazy people survive because we are an advanced species," argued Mr. Peters. "We don't eliminate those who don't compete. We provide for them. But as history has constantly demonstrated, those who compete win the rewards of society. Those who don't, fail and live off the scraps of the philanthropists."

"That may be true, but you are talking about Social Darwinism," countered Feszj. "How a person succeeds or fails in society is based upon how that society was constructed. Humans construct societies. Therefore, all the suffering that goes on at the bottom of the social hierarchy is man-made. And because it is man-made, humans can just as easily re-construct their societies to benefit everyone. After all, this isn't the only way the world must function."

"There is a poignant aphorism which goes something like this: An optimist says that this is the best of all possible worlds; a pessimist would reply that the optimist may be right." Feszj paused for a moment to let the significance of the statement have its impact. "Instead, I respond by insisting that the best of all possible worlds exists, but still resides in our dreams waiting to come out. The most discouraging aspect about our these dreams is that they can so easily come true, but don't."

"Is that so?" Mr. Peters seemed wholly unimpressed. "And what is your solution?"

"Cooperation. After all, cooperation is so much easier and less strenuous than competition; people have more energy and thus more is accomplished in a cooperative environment."

"It'll never happen."

"That's why it fails." Feszj pointed at Mr. Peters to add emphasis.

"Don't stick your finger at—."

"Is it really so hard for people to work together?" continued Feszj. "Is it really so hard to develop cooperative games and cooperative environments? It's not. Remember, Mr. Peters, people aren't afraid or unwilling to cooperate. People are afraid of losing their material possessions and gains, for they have been convinced that accumulated wealth is the road to physical comfort. It is a shame that these same individuals cannot envision physical comforts in a cooperative world. Sure, there may be a loss of the high-end wasteful opulence enjoyed by a few lucky individuals, but everyone's suffering would be eliminated. Unfortunately, too many people's dreams revolve around wasteful opulence.

"Even certain children's books about utopia emphasize the pursuit of materialist gains. *Try to Remember the First of October* by Theo. LeSeig — a pseudonym of Ted Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss — emphasizes the joys of the utopian month of October, where "everything is yours." But what is everything? Skateboard TVs, green kangaroos, a jeep-a-fly kite, soda, pools, pennies from heaven, fireworks, no school, and a boat that sails to the Garden of Eden. It is a month when greed is provided the ultimate satisfactions, but racism, sexism, war, poverty is never addressed. Perhaps Geisel believed that these were not concerns of children, but of adults and the prejudices children have yet to learn. Unfortunately, the children have no use for adults either. October is a month when adults are mere spectators and servants to the gluttonous appetites of the children. Children are shown doing nothing but pleasing themselves. These are the dreams we encourage our children to dream."

Mr. Peters said not a word. Feszj continued.

"You must also realize as well, Mr. Peters, that children's books are marketed to the parents, not the children. Thus, what we have in the end are adults supporting and encouraging the dreams of materialist acquisition. Tragically, October becomes the utopia parents want their children to pursue."

Mr. Peters seemed unprepared for Jesse's strong commentary. He tried to re-establish his position.

"Competition is necessary to encourage people to work hard, thus providing constant impetus to social progress."

"First," responded Feszj, "competition doesn't encourage anyone to work — competition is a force that drives people to work. Second, competition slows progress by

limiting the exchange of information between competing individuals, competing countries, and competing companies. Effort is duplicated, and thus wasted.

"Furthermore, to what are we progressing towards? More materialism? Greater opulence? None of these physical benefits have made people more moral. More selfish, maybe, but not more humane."

"But—"

"Mr. Peters," interrupted Feszj, "before you continue, I would like to say that I'm afraid you're not trying very hard."

Mr. Peters glowered at Jesse. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, you don't really believe what you're saying. Your support of Social Darwinism, for instance, uses arguments discredited decades ago. You're much smarter than to use such spurious argumentation. I get the feeling you're testing me, having me dismiss the simpler arguments for competition one by one, while saving the really powerful defense of competition for later, only if I pass. Well, do I pass? What is your best argument for competition?"

Mr. Peters stared at Jesse. Then, the Vice-Principal's face changed entirely, instantly shifting from a dark shroud of frustration to gleeful wonderment. He rubbed his chin, scratching the stubble on his face.

"You are a very perceptive young man, Jesse, and a formidable opponent."

"Opponent?" said Feszj with a puzzled look. "As I said before, I am not competing against you."

"You want cooperation? Hah. It's competition you really want. Face it, Jesse. Despite what you may believe, you and I are very much alike."

"How do you mean?" said Feszj, stretching it out slowly. Jesse has heard that methodical verbal pacing often. Feszj does this when he wants to draw out more information, to find out the fundamental premises of the other person's position. What Jesse also likes about this manner of discussion is that Feszj never interrupts someone's explanation. "It is a much more rational method," said Feszj weeks later, when Jesse asked him about his approach to discussion, "unlike your audience-pandering talk shows, where we learn that the average attention span of people in the heat of debate is quite short, where the desire to want to understand and appreciate different points of view is practically nonexistent, and where if a point is not made in five seconds or less, the opportunity to do so is lost. Consequently, any potential to construct a reasonably coherent position for discussion remains untapped. Moreover, the more people are exposed to this style of

debate and the more they imitate it, the more useless debate becomes. It is a method of argument which states implicitly that nothing another person says is worth considering."

"Ah, so it's my turn at playing word games, eh?" Feszj responded with a noncommittal shrug. Mr. Peters sat down and leaned back in his swivel chair, a big grin filling his face. He placed his hands behind his head and relaxed for a moment, carefully considering the determined young man in front of him as well as his next comments.

"You surprise me, Jesse," began Mr. Peters. "I didn't think you were as strong-willed as you are turning out to be. Recalling the previous time I spoke to you, you seemed to be no more than an insignificant addition to a long list of petty hoodlums with mediocre intellect. Spineless creatures, all of them. They lack any integrity and seek personal prestige through physical intimidation — intellectual debate being beyond their abilities. They operate in secrecy, hiding anonymously within groups, incapable of any open display of conflict and deathly afraid of being caught. They have no guts to stand up for what they believe except among either oppressed or like-minded audiences, because they have no intelligence to formulate and defend a truly independent belief. I have those kind of kids for breakfast.

"So I misjudged you. You seem to be different from those. Intelligent, and quite a rhetorician as well, I am positive you, just like myself, enjoy a good argument. To match wits in a test of mental skill and stamina. To jab and counter, to posit and rebut. Together, we dance around each other to music that is a curious mix of spontaneity and structure. We try to out-dance the other, yet also knowing that we cannot dance at all without the other. And that is just what we are doing now."

Feszj leaned back in his chair, entertained by Mr. Peter's presentation. "And you are saying that competition is this type of dance?" suggested Feszj.

"Exactly. You and I, Jesse, are playing off each other. Listening, debating, probing, and learning. Each looking for the advantage and developing our abilities and ourselves in the process. You see, competition is a mutual process. We need each other in order to improve ourselves. And by constantly challenging each other, we steadily enhance our abilities, reaching closer and closer to that elusive goal of excellence — to be the best. We can never know excellence unless we place ourselves in positions where we just might be bested; and where winning and losing pride, prestige, or status prods us into putting our complete effort into all that we do. We take our chances every time we compete. But in the end, we will all become better for it."

"So, to put it in a nutshell?" asked Feszj.

"Competition is a mutual quest for excellence."

"I see." mused Feszj.

"So," asked Mr. Peters, "shall we begin our dance?"

* * *

Feszj remained mute in thought, while Mr. Peters waited quietly for a response. The two of them said nothing to each other. To Jesse, the the moments passed with interminable anticipation. Floating above it all, he grew uncomfortable with the turbulent silence between the two, like a couple animals circling each other, looking for an opening to pounce and kill. "Are arguments like that?" he wondered. "A search for a way to undermine and humiliate another's point of view? Feszj seems to do that a lot."

Do I? interrupted Feszj. Jesse forgot that all his thoughts are exposed in this disembodied condition. *I'm sorry if that is the case, but do I really sound argumentative and competitive?*

"Well," Jesse began, "sometimes you push your case against competition to extremes."

One cannot push the case against competition far enough. Place yourself in my position, Jesse, and imagine how difficult it is to overcome thousands of years of ideological inculcation and socio-political advocacy for competition. What we have lost in time, we must make up in the strength, maybe even severity, of one's assertions just to provide a balanced perspective. For it is not logic we need to deal with; the logic is sound. It is the will to accept these arguments where the difficulty lies.

Jesse was about to pursue Feszj on what he meant about this 'will to accept arguments' when Mr. Peters spoke up.

"Jesse, are you going to dance with me, or are you going to sit this one out?"

"Knowing how you have defined competition," said Feszj, "perhaps you can define for me cooperation."

Mr. Peters considered the request for a second, and then answered, "Simply stated, cooperation is working together."

"That's what I thought. But doesn't your definition of competition mean the same thing? A mutual quest for excellence? Isn't that what cooperation is, after all?"

This time, it was Mr. Peters's turn to sit back and mull over that statement. He wasn't expecting such a unusual retort. He breathed heavily through his nose, hissing in the process, as he ruminated and searched for a coherent reply.

Apparently, he hadn't anticipated that, remarked Feszj to Jesse. *I guess he didn't expect anyone to challenge such an innocuous definition.*

"What do you mean by that?" asked Jesse.

Well, defining competition like cooperation makes competition seem so much more beneficial than if one defines it as an expression of selfishness or domination. People are more willing to accept competition if congenial interpretations are utilized. And perhaps everyone Mr. Peters has discussed competition with has come away feeling mollified, and satisfied that there is some good in win/lose contests. But the benefits are illusory, because it seems no one has asked him my question. After all, dressing a pauper in king's clothing doesn't make that person royalty. If the definitions of competition and cooperation are the same, why is there an obvious difference between the two?

"There is no difference," said Mr. Peters. "Competition is just another type of cooperation."

"How can he say that?" said Jesse, shocked. "They're totally different. It's obvious ... isn't it?"

Maybe. But let's hear his reasons.

"Again," began Mr. Peters, "it is not the actual nuts and bolts of competition that are important. It is the end result that matter. In other words, in spite of the winning and losing that takes place, both individuals are pursuing the same goal, which is excellence. And they need each other to achieve that. Ergo, the final motivation which envelopes the ultimate goal of competition is cooperation."

Feszj nodded his head in understanding. "So, the whole point is to keep the larger perspective in mind, correct?"

"To a certain extent," asked Mr. Peters.

Jesse floated in nothing, curious what Feszj was going to say next, and amused by Mr. Peters self-satisfied attempts to argue with Feszj. It was a losing battle for Mr. Peters, thought Jesse. "He'll never know what hit him."

We are not here to beat him, replied Feszj. He could have easily scolded Jesse, but Feszj's voice was calm and patient. *We are here just to present. It is up to him to assimilate and accept the new world view we are offering.*

"Don't you ever get frustrated whenever they don't accept?" inquired Jesse.

No. One would get very frustrated if that person felt that every argument or presentation must cause a change in ideology that very instance.

Jesse silently agreed as Feszj continued.

"That's an interesting position to take, Mr. Peters, but one that leads to an unusual situation."

"And that is?" asked Mr. Peters.

Well, first of all," began Feszj, "by placing competition under the umbrella of cooperation, you admit that cooperation is the ultimate goal of all joint actions. Yet, you continue to resist allowing all actions within the competitive event to be cooperative as well. You seem to have a double standard then. If cooperation is clearly the final justification for competition, then competition should be just as clearly unacceptable at any other time in the contest. If the ultimate goal of competition is cooperation, then it makes no sense to maintain competition in light of cooperation in any time."

"You don't understand," remarked Mr. Peters. "The mutual quest spurs on the accomplishment of overall excellence. Granted, competition is necessary in the early stages of the event, but in the end, everyone benefits by the excellence eventually achieved. Even though there are winners and losers, competition will improve everyone's outcome."

"Ah," said Feszj, pondering his reply, "so what you are stating is that present results of competition, when people are forced into losing, is acceptable because it leads to a possible future good for the losers."

"Yes."

"So you are claiming that if people work towards the goal of winning, then the mutual quest for excellence will take care of itself and society. However, if this is the position you wish to hold, what you have instead is the 'mutual quest for excellence' turning out to be a vile justification for social paternalism."

"How so?" Mr. Peters remained calm and composed, which baffled Jesse. Feszj continued.

"In any competitive structure, there must be a constant creation of losers — usually with many more losers than winners, for that matter — and what you are saying is that this vast number of losers must accept being losers for their own good.

"And who insists on this structural imperative? Certainly not the losers, for why, if they are struggling so hard to win, *want* to be losers? No, this perspective of competitive social structure must obviously be promoted by the winners. After all, haven't you ever heard the common sense belief that individuals learn more when they lose than when they win? Or the assertion that money can't buy happiness? Or any number of other statements which makes winning seem like a curse and losing as a boon. They have been formulated by winners to persuade people that losing isn't all that bad, and that there may actually be some benefit to losing.

"Pure drivel, of course, but they serve two purposes. The first is that these statements will reduce the passion and drive to compete by eliminating the onus of losing. Second, it will sustain the competitive ideology because will find these aphorisms continually useful

in mitigating the psychological stress and damage from losing. The result is that the winners will find it easier to maintain power in the midst of wishy-washy competitors.

"Ironically, in order for the mutual quest for excellence to function properly, these statements must be eliminated and replaced with pro-competitive statements like 'Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing.' For if the joy of winning and the misery of losing is where the incentive lies in competition, then any idea which interferes with this will reduce the resultant excellence. For the maximum amount of excellence to be achieved then, one must attempt to win at all costs, for winning must be the ultimate ecstasy, and losing the ultimate wretchedness."

Mr. Peters took in all of Feszj's comments, but remained eerily impassive. Feszj paused to take a breath, allowing Mr. Peters to insert a comment.

"Understand, Mr. Strich, that because competition is a branch of cooperation, eventually competition will fully merge with cooperation."

"Yes," said Feszj, quickly latching on to the line of thought begun by Mr. Peters, "you might respond that this process will come to an end someday, and there will no longer be any losers. However, as one of your philosophers so eloquently put it: a possible good future is no justification for a clearly evil present. So tell me, Mr. Peters, how long will the hapless minions have to wait for the end to their futile yet supposedly beneficial struggle? Will competition end tomorrow? Next week? Next year? The next century?"

"That is impossible to predict," said Mr. Peters, discounting Feszj's question as unimportant.

"The end to competition is impossible to predict," said Feszj, slowly and potently, "because if you perpetuate the idea of a mutual quest for excellence, it will never happen — especially if you want to make materialist progress your determination of success."

By this time, Feszj had leaned forward and rested his hands on Mr. Peters's desk. Mr. Peters's face contorted into a slight scowl, and appeared ready to scold Jesse for this impudent encroachment, but he held his breath and forced himself to overlook it.

"You see," continued Feszj, "There will be no end to material progress, because as long as there is an innate human yearning to redesign one's own environment, and there are things to mold, reshape, and re-configure, people will always be making things. Therefore, there will never be an age then when there will be no more losers. And while the waiting game will forever benefit those with the most things, these wealthy individuals benefit most from the grand social myth of competition which guarantees and justifies the existence of losers for the eventual benefit of 'everyone.' It is a world view which will never realize the end to competition — or to losers."

Mr. Peters sat unmoved and unfazed by how the discussion seems to be going, which increasingly confounded Jesse. Jesse tried repeatedly to interrupt Feszj with comments like, 'What's he thinking about?', 'What's he got up his sleeve?', or 'What kind of trap is he setting us up for?' And each time Jesse uttered a comment, Feszj patiently reassured Jesse that they will find out when Mr. Peters is ready to reveal himself.

"Not everyone can be equal," insisted Mr. Peters.

"Physically, no," replied Feszj. "But materially and morally? Emphatically yes. Since both of those are man-made constructs, we can decide how we wish to manipulate them and live with them. We may not have any say in the way the body and mind functions, but it is possible to eliminate the connection between material possession and status, and spread the wealth."

"But spreading the wealth will effectively excise one of the major motivations for production."

"So," said Feszj, with a glint in his eye, "you admit that competition will never permit equality."

Mr. Peters said nothing, but his jaw and face hardened. Jesse saw for the first time the effect this discussion had on Mr. Peters. However, the reaction seemed remarkably restrained, especially for Mr. Peters.

"You needn't have to answer, Mr. Peters," said Feszj. "In any case, this complete re-configuration of material needs requires a change in the moral foundations of society, a change that establishes a cooperative morality which is internally consistent throughout society — not a perplexing choice between the material promise of competition driven by self-interest and the spiritual resurrection of the individual and society through cooperation. You can't have both if you desire a stable society."

"Well, maybe." Mr. Peters grumbled the practically inaudible agreement, and folded his arms over his chest.

"Face it, Mr. Peters," continued Feszj. "The notion that a competitive society functioning on the principle of the mutual quest for excellence will someday, somehow, achieve cooperation without a rejection somewhere along the line of the very principles which make competition morally acceptable is nonsense at best, and oppressive cruelty at worst."

Jesse strained searching for some sort of reaction in Mr. Peters. But there he sat, as enigmatic as ever. Feszj, unconcerned with Mr. Peters lack of emotion, went on. "Thus, to claim that the mutual quest for excellence is somehow a branch of cooperation is a linguistic trick, and nothing more."

"But you would have to admit," said Mr. Peters, hardly resisting sporting a ingratiating smile, "living conditions have improved for everyone."

"But hardly at an equal pace," said Feszj sharply. "It is a travesty that in a world of such opulence, only a small fraction of the globe ever receives adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical attention, et cetera. And besides, your statement reeks of the paternalism of which we just spoke."

"You are saying that some people should be happy they have a slum home swarming with roaches, and rats that leave excrement on the floors. That these tenants should feel satisfied living through miserable diets and unspeakable amounts of pain as violence and abuse assail them, while their children grow up learning disabled simply because they had the misfortune of being born in such destitution. They should be happy and content that capitalism gave them this lift in living standards. They should be happy, and ought not to blame the wealthy landlords who have given them a roof over their heads — despite the leaks, a floor under their feet — despite the vermin, and four walls around them, despite the chipping lead-poisoned paint."

"You exaggerate," said Mr. Peters, dryly.

"Am I exaggerating, or simply following a line of reasoning to its logical conclusion?" Understood by both as a rhetorical question, Feszj did not wait for a reply which was not forthcoming. "Yes, admittedly they are losers in the mutual quest for excellence ... but they exist for everyone's best interest. After all, all persons of all races, colors, and creeds should be overjoyed, misguided as it surely must be, that there are people in this world doing their part for the good of society by sleeping in the fetid pustules of the globe in the hope that the world of the future will be a better place for all of us. Humanitarianism has no greater champion than the homeless."

Feszj stared at Mr. Peters and concluded with what sounded like a snarl, "Don't you find that in the least bit ludicrous?"

The two stared severely at each other, as if their eyes were trying to push the other's back into submission. But then, to Mr. Peters's and Jesse's surprise, Feszj started laughing. Feszj fell back into his chair, catching his breath from what seemed to be a hilarious joke that no one else comprehended.

"I'm surprised with you, Mr. Peters," said Feszj, after his fit subsided. "With your education and background, I would have expected a more reasonable position. With that in mind, we can safely assume you were merely testing me — as any former teacher probably would, of course. I can appreciate your position. But enough wasting time with unnecessary tests. The question was posed as to what is the difference between

competition and cooperation is both can be defined as a mutual quest for excellence. Since the assertion that there is no difference is demonstrably faulty, then there must be a difference. What is it?"

Feszj posed the question, and left it in the air as both he and Jesse waited for a reply. They watched as Mr. Peters shifted in his chair and heard him clear his throat. The Vice-Principal then smiled, and soon broke out in laughter himself. Feszj joined in. The only one who still didn't understand was Jesse.

"What's going on?" Jesse asked Feszj.

You will see.

Jesse hated to 'wait and see.' He had little choice, although.

"You are a very bright and perceptive young man, Jesse," began Mr. Peters. "It is surprising none of it ever showed up on your transcripts. But no matter."

Mr. Peters readjusted himself in his chair, and loosened his tie. Wondering how to proceed with this educational anomaly, he considered his opponent carefully.

"You are right," continued Mr. Peters. "It would be foolhardy to try to redefine competition as a form of cooperation. Obviously, then, they must be different, and the difference between competition and cooperation is fairly simple. We agree that competition utilizes winning and losing to encourage individuals to work hard and at their best. Cooperation, on the other hand, has no equivalent ostensible prod, so the quality of cooperativist effort is unpredictable and unreliable. Competition, therefore, assures the best results from group action, which cooperation does not and cannot."

"Interesting reply," said Feszj. "But why is that the case? Are you saying there are no sufficient reasons to create quality without extrinsic forces? Are you saying that humans are incapable of working together to achieve goals without some external motivation other than the goal itself, like winning or avoiding losing, or making money, or accepting awards? Essentially, only through competition will anything of value be achieved. Is that what you are saying?"

"No, of course not," said Mr. Peters, loosening his tie a second time. "You are clearly misinterpreting and deliberately twisting what I mean."

"Am I? You said that competition assures the best results from groups. It follows that cooperation produces poorer results from groups. Does it not?"

"Well ..." Starting to get flustered, Mr. Peters paused to think, but Feszj left him no time to do that and continued with his end of the discussion.

"Therefore, if groups compete against each other due to some sort of external motivation, like a bonus or not losing one's job, the results are predictable; the winning group will have the best product."

"That seems to be right," Mr. Peters agreed, but with a slight hesitation, because he hadn't had time to think through the premises. He stuck to his original point, but he hedged because he was unable to discern in which direction Jesse was going with the discussion. Furthermore, what Jesse said was basic common sense. *How could it be denied?* thought Mr. Peters. Still, he was unnerved by Jesse, and began doubting himself.

"Unfortunately," said Feszj, "studies by your social psychologists have demonstrated that people placed in groups not competing against each other, without any onus of losing a job, and without the supposedly necessary spur of a reward waiting for them at the end of the project, achieved remarkably imaginative solutions of comparable or better quality than in the competitive control groups. The results point to the possibility that working together to accomplish a task was the only motivation necessary. And, aside from less stress, less antagonisms between group members and other groups existed, and more outside-the-group relationships developed. People work together because they simply like working together. Or on the other hand, if competition is necessary to force people to work together, it simply demonstrates the amount of ingrained individualism that prevents cooperative actions from spontaneously taking place."

"But this doesn't make any sense," insisted Mr. Peters. "Look at salesmen. They work tremendously hard to make money, and it is the reward of bonuses and commissions which spur them on. It is one of the highest paying professions."

"I'm not saying that people don't do things for external rewards. I am saying that external rewards are not necessary to get people to do things."

Mr. Peters laughed, and pointed to the door. "Yeah, right. If I go out there and tell my secretary 'I'm sorry, Ms. Shields, but we're no longer giving you a performance bonus because we feel you will work just as hard without one,' she'll quit. No, first she'll have my head, then she'll quit."

"Yes, she probably would."

"So, you agree." Mr. Peters threw up his hands and shook his head in disbelief. "What's your point then?"

"The point is," said Feszj, "that your secretary, along with millions of other employees in the United States and throughout the world, have been poisoned by rewards."

"Pardon my French, but what the hell are you talking about?"

"Consider this," said Feszj. He stood out of his chair and began walking around the room, gesturing as he spoke.

I think better when I'm standing, he commented to Jesse. Then returning his attention to Mr. Peters, "Do you have a hobby?"

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"My hobby is playing the flute," said Feszj, not wanting to waste more time on tangents. "I enjoy playing the flute, and I practice every day so I can enjoy the pleasant sounds of the flute, and so others will perhaps find pleasure in my playing as well. But I need no extrinsic reward to justify my practice. Playing the flute is intrinsically satisfying."

"Yeah, so what? This has nothing to do with employees being poisoned."

Jesse's face sagged in disappointment.

"What's wrong," said Jesse.

The dilemma is staring him right in the face, and he doesn't see it.

Feszj raised his head, and turned to the door. "What if Ms. Shields," he said, pointing towards the office behind the wall, "intrinsically enjoyed her occupation? Based on what we've discussed so far, what would happen to her job performance?"

"That's easy. If she truly enjoyed her work, her performance would probably improve."

"Of course. She would get to school on time, take less sick days, assure her tasks were performed accurately, stay after normal quitting time to clear out any unfinished business, leave with a smile on her face and look forward to tomorrow.

"Yet, what is it your school administrators do, and what millions of other employers do, to get their employees to work harder?"

"They pay them a salary, give them raises, bonuses, etc."

"Employers reward their employees."

"I just said that," said Mr. Peters. He was getting impatient. "Look, have a seat, Jesse. This conversation is going no—."

"What's happening" said Feszj, interrupting to make his point, "is that employers give their employees everything they can to encourage increase productivity except what the employee really wants — an intrinsically satisfying activity. As the saying goes: If you want your employees to do a good job, give them a good job to do. But more interesting, by paying someone who is doing what is intrinsically satisfying, we start shifting away from an intrinsic motivation to do the job towards an extrinsic motivation."

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Peters, suddenly intrigued by the conversation once again. "Are you saying that by paying someone to work, the intrinsic enjoyment of that job is reduced? That, in the end, salaries lead people to hate their jobs?"

"Yes. For if people truly enjoyed work, then they would not count the days until the next holiday, would not care for pay increases, would not ever think about leaving for someplace else other than where they are right now. If you truly enjoyed work, that would be home. Instead, your society's workers would rather do nothing at all than go to their jobs."

Mr. Peters rocked almost imperceptively in his chair, seeming incredulous to what he had just heard. Then, he grinned. Not a pleasant grin, but an uncommonly expressive one full of delightful cunning and the smug satisfaction of superiority. He spoke with an air of arrogant confidence.

"That's interesting, Mr. Strich. Please proceed with your discussion." He leaned back in his chair, folded his hands over his belly, and twiddled his thumbs — all the while smiling like a little child who knows something but won't tell until the price is right.

Jesse grew uncomfortable. "What's he smiling at?" asked Jesse. "He must know something."

We will find out soon enough, replied Feszj.

"Aren't you curious?"

Of course. But he will tell us when he is ready. Only at that point will we deal with it. Until then, we should continue with our current line of development.

Feszj continued.

"So what happened is a continual spiral downward into the depths of employee ennui. Once salaries are given, intrinsic motivation — if there was any to begin with considering that most work inspires no intrinsic satisfaction whatsoever, being little more than repetitive, uninteresting drudgery. Assembly lines, data processing, and secretarial positions."

Feszj winked at Mr. Peters. Mr. Peters simply smiled and let Jesse continue.

"Intrinsic motivation, what there was, is replaced by extrinsic motivation, which in turn reduces productivity — people don't like their work as much anymore. So employers give employees other incentives — some costly like like raises, bonuses, incentive packages; others inexpensive like recognition, certificates, and new titles. After a while, however, bonuses will no longer suffice because they will no longer be new. They are now expected and, consequently, inspire no motivation. Thus, the amount of bonuses and other trinkets have to increase.

"But it's not their fault. After all, in the end, people have been forced to sell their love of intrinsically satisfying activity for the need of food and clothing and shelter. Furthermore, based on levels of production rather than levels of employee satisfaction, people are paid compensation to suffer though the misery of employment. Activity in general has lost so much of its intrinsic value, that many people go home from their jobs and do nothing at all."

"But what does this have to do with the mutual quest for excellence?" said Mr. Peters, confident that Jesse was talking for the sake of talking — rambling commentary to avoid admitting he had nothing relevant to say.

"If competition uses winning and losing to spur people to do their best," replied Feszj, as he began to tie all the loose ends, "how does that explain the fact that individuals perform an act better when not competing than when they are? How many time have you seen athletes achieve personal bests in practice, but flounder and come up short in competition?"

"Obviously, a competitor must learn to deal with the stress," responded Mr. Peters.

"Obviously, but don't you see the problem?" asked Feszj. "Excellence derived from competition is not the highest level of accomplishment we can achieve. Apparently, we achieve the highest levels only when we do not suffer the stresses and distractions inherent in competition. To promote, therefore, a lower level of achievement through competition than what could be gained without competition does not speak well for competition, nor do things bode well for a competitive society.

"Furthermore, the idea of a mutual quest is faulty as well. Bringing people together to compete is hardly enough to inspire mutuality of purpose. After all, each individual in a competitive contest is pursuing his or her own end, and to think some realization of community or mutuality can arise from such a single-minded acquisition of personal ends while preventing others from doing the same, is unimaginable.

"Of course, much of the problem lies with the ill-conceived idea of excellence itself. Cooperation doesn't require excellence because excellence is an outgrowth of competitive situations; in other words, excellence is determined competitively. And since excellence is a competitively determined entity, only one person can be truly excellent. Thus, the notion of a mutual quest for excellence cleverly hides the obvious fact that only one person or one group of people will achieve excellence. It isn't so much a mutual quest, but a mutually exclusive result that distinguishing competition from cooperation — with excellence now becoming the external motivation, or reward or cattle prod, of choice. MEGA — mutually exclusive goal attainment — is what competition is all about. People come together simply

to provide the environment in which this MEGA can occur, in much the same way people get together to make wars occur."

"I don't think I would go that far," resisted Mr. Peters, finding it more difficult to think quick enough to return what he felt would be an adequate response.

"Oh no?" said Feszj, standing in the middle of the office, dominating the room. "Compare the two. In each case, people volunteer to be thoroughly and vigorously trained, learning to skillfully execute tactical maneuvers to achieve victory in battles in which they had no say. Above them, the varying levels of leadership and varying organizations from intelligence to logistics involved in the strategic manifestations when the conflicts occur. Above the generals are the administrators who sanction and organize the battles. Then there are the officials who oversee the battles, much like United Nations observers and peacekeepers. And after all is said and done, after the wounded are tended to and the armies withdraw from the field of battle, the most tragic consequence is that the entire enterprise starts all over again. The armies, both winning and losing, start training once more; the generals, both winning and losing, re-conceive their strategies; the administrators, both winning and losing, re-organize another battle. In the end, nothing really changed."

Feszj returned to his seat in front of Mr. Peters's desk. Mr. Peters followed Jesse to the chair, but said nothing.

"Mutually exclusive goal attainment," stated Feszj, a little slower and with a little more sharpness, "that is what competition is all about. Don't try to gloss over the realities with manipulations of language and vocabulary, making this one egregious case where a particular use of language redefines truth.

"But I can understand why you would do it. After spending a lifetime extolling the benefits of competition, after recruiting hundreds or thousands of children into the fold who really don't know any better, after learning that everything you were taught, everything you defended, and everything you believed is a myth and a lie, I might do the same."

Mr. Peters inhaled and prepared to speak, having had an opportunity to conceive a reply, but restrained himself when Jesse raised his finger, indicating one last comment.

"Granted, there is much to lose by relinquishing one's competitive mindset," said Feszj. Then, pointing his finger at Mr. Peters, continued, "But lose it one must. Competition benefits only the winners, whereas cooperation makes winners of us all. You must give up competition, if not for your own sake, then for everyone else's."

Mr. Peters sniffed a dismissal of Jesse's imperative, leaving it unacknowledged as he returned to the thought he held back moments earlier.

"Jesse, there are very few activities which bring people together as competitive events do. Football and baseball games bring together tens of thousands of people. The Olympic Games brings together hundreds of thousands and millions more on television. What cooperative activity does that?"

"First of all," said Feszj, "the interpersonal activities you refer to happen far outside the competitive venues. Tailgaters at a football game congregate outside the stadium. At the Olympics, only in the Olympic Village will one find any kind of multicultural exchange taking place — not on the volleyball court, or in the boxing ring, or hundreds of yards apart when racing yachts. If the sole purpose of a sporting event is to bring people together, they why have the event at all? Is it because people can't join together any other way? Is it perhaps because people have lost the ability to come together on their own? Does you society lack the wherewithal to find solace in each others company, simply for the intrinsic satisfaction of comraderie and community? In fact, these sporting events have become surrogate communities for far too many lonely persons. And as these gathering become larger and larger, communities outside the site-specific nature of these attractions will continue to suffer. Sports communities hurt all of our day-to-day communities as people learn to escape their neighbors for the sake of a beer with friends for a few hours and cheer on their team to crush the opponent."

"But Jesse," said Mr. Peters, pulling his handkerchief out from his pant's back pocket and wiping his forehead, "how does all this relate to your previous tangent on external motivations and being poisoned by rewards?"

Feszj smiled. "Your society's fixation with competition," he began, "has reified the quest for external motivations and external gratification. In a consumerist society constantly assailed with tokens of appreciation and rewards of innumerable kinds from without, people have grown to expect something tangible, whether it be salary or entertainment or pleasure, for even the littlest of their efforts."

"So?" Mr. Peters became impatient. Feszj, however, was in no hurry.

"Because of the immediacy in which competition provides rewards, people obsessed with the acquisition of external gratification will more than likely seek competition to fulfill their needs. Unfortunately, and here is where the horrors of competition are even more frightening, citizens are also expecting competition to provide things which will address psychological needs, like self-esteem, no matter what the cost and no matter how precarious such purchased psychological satisfaction is."

"But self-esteem is an internal state?" interjected Mr. Peters.

"Yes, but it is built, like all other things, by the environment. In a competitive environment, the accumulation of wins, along with all their accompanying material signifiers, becomes for many the quickest way of enhancing self-esteem. And the more that competition occurs, the more society becomes enamored with the products of effort, and the more self-esteem becomes linked to tangible items ... of transient quality.

"Tragic, because as people lose these tokens of esteem in which so much significance and emphasis has been placed, inevitably people will lose their self-esteem. More tragically, as people lose their formerly high self-esteem, they will do whatever it takes to keep what they have left. Just like compulsive gamblers who will eventually lose everything as they bet more and more money to either get more money or recoup what they have lost, people who begin losing self-esteem will compete more and more, and harder and harder, to regain what they once had. Soon, if traditional methods of competition fail, they will resort to violence and anti-social methods to achieve self-esteem. And the rise and fall of individuals' psychological states will never end, because in a product-oriented, competition-based society, one can never have enough self-esteem — if, and here's the important part, if one buys into the competitive ideology."

Wait a minute," said Mr. Peters. "Are you saying that a cooperative ideology has no external motivations? That everything comes from within? That everything one does is intrinsically satisfying?"

"Is that too hard to believe?"

"That's a bunch of crap," Mr. Peters spit out, slapping aside the comment floating in the air with the back of his hand.

"Is it?" replied Feszj. "When we construct jigsaw puzzles, the resulting picture is usually of poor quality because of the distortion made by the cuts. We could simply buy a better version of higher quality. But still we put puzzles together. Why? Because it is the process which is internally satisfying. And when completed, the end product reminds us of the process and the enjoyment we derived from it.

"Now, imagine life being a continually developing process, just like the creation of a puzzle, where the end product is insignificant compared to the doing. Imagine a world where there is an unlimited opportunity to use one's mind and body to accomplish intrinsically desirable tasks. It is the pursuit of Play taken to its global and logical extreme. It is living as Art. It is an infinite game where there are no boundaries, no time limits, and where rules are constantly adjustable and adjusted to benefit the players; and since it is a cooperative game, there are no spectators. It is a game in which everyone participates."

"What if someone doesn't want to play?"

"Then the environment and rules change to the point when they will want to play."

"But what if someone else rejects the changes?"

"No one said it was an easy process, but it is the only humane one."

Mr. Peters shrugged. Feszj went on.

"Get rid of competition. Replace it with cooperation. Almost over night, people will forget about the product of their endeavors and learn to enjoy and appreciate the comraderie that exists only during the process of achieving goals. What is accomplished is of less importance than simply being together when it is accomplished.

"Start here — in this school. You must realize that the demands of competition in the classroom have turned teachers off to education — more and more concerned about salaries, comp time, and who has bus duty or not — just as much as the students have been turned off — having been forced to concern themselves with grades, awards, and those little shiny stars placed on the classroom wall indicating for all to see who is good and who is bad, something any teacher, if done to them, would find humiliating. The spiral of malaise between students and teachers drills deeper and deeper into the pit of apathy."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Peters, with a snarl, "but you have already vented your spleen with Mr. Monroe. So don't start lecturing me, young man. Besides, the mutual quest for excellence is, by its definition, concerned with process."

"Yes, by definition. But not by reality. By your own admission, people are prodded to perform competitively because of the benefits of winning — be they psychological, material, social, and fleeting — and the detriments from losing. And even if you break down the process of competition, there are smaller victories and defeats against your opponent throughout the process as one player takes advantage of another player's inability or ineptness, like beating a person to the ball, or outrunning someone for a score, or blocking a shot. Even the, quote, process of competition is overwhelmingly packed with products. After all, in competition, the winner is the one with the most positive, or the least negative, products."

"Hold it," said Mr. Peters. "You're forgetting that there are also products in a cooperative process as well."

"I have been waiting for you to say that, Mr. Peters." Feszj smiled. "Yes, there are products in cooperation. But they do not arise from the forced failure of others. You see, in competition, where the accumulation of products determines winner or loser, the process becomes an afterthought. In cooperation, where the accumulation of products **do not** determine winners or losers, the product becomes the afterthought."

"You're splitting hairs, Mr. Strich."

"Maybe, but as chaos theory claims, even the littlest difference, when magnified over time and space, will result in the most striking differences by the very nature of the dynamics involved in its development. Even if competition and cooperation can be argued to within a hair's breadth of each other in similarity, they are destined to part ways very early on, and in the most dramatic ways."

Momentarily distracted by the tone ending the period, Mr. Peters spun around in his chair to the window behind him, and looked out over the entrance foyer of the school, keeping an eye on the students as they scurried off to lunch. After a minute, he continued the conversation, but remained overlooking the students.

"Don't you agree that this is a wonderful design, Jesse? All the administrative offices perched over the main entrance to the school, scrutinizing students from above as they enter, mill about, and leave. We can watch them at our leisure, but they can't easily check on us. Because of this design then, we have the upper hand when it comes to discipline. They don't know when or if we are watching them, so they behave appropriately a great deal of the time, fearing being seen and getting caught.

"Unfortunately, we do not see everything. Some things will escape our purview. That is why when someone is caught, we make it very public. Everybody will hear about all the times these windows have succeeded in stemming the tide of school disorder, and everyone will be convinced that we are constantly watching. And whenever we miss — there will a slight indiscretion here and there — the students will believe that we are being magnanimous and be thankful for our grace. Some may even taunt our surveillance abilities with minor acts of disobedience. That's fine. They can happily piddle away all they want with the small stuff, as long as the big stuff is eliminated. As I've always said, 'Let them have the little sins, so we can control the big ones!'"

Mr. Peters stopped talking and concentrated on his inspection of the student body. Jesse, who was fascinated by the conversation and had remained quiet while Feszj did most of the talking, found that lost comment, however, filled with ominous foreboding.

"Watch it, Feszj," Jesse said. "Mr. Peters doesn't usually say stuff like that unless he's grandstanding his power over the students." But Jesse was less worried about Feszj than he was about himself.

Thank you., Jesse. I will be careful.

The second tone sounded, prompting Mr. Peters to fling himself around to face Jesse once again.

"Where were we?" ask Mr. Peters.

"You were about to tell us what you have secretly keeping to yourself throughout most of our discussion," replied Feszj.

"Oh yes." That familiar grin appeared on Mr. Peters's face. "You claimed that people who receive salaries begin to hate their jobs."

"They find their work turning into a necessary evil to receive income, which tarnishes any kind of intrinsic enjoyment they once had for the occupation," Feszj corrected.

"Even so, if I can find one person who loves his job, despite the salary and bonuses, then your thesis is kaput."

"If you could find someone who would insist that employment was not a drain on the intrinsic enjoyments of life, excluding those wealthy enough not to have to be employed, it would seem to be the case that the thesis is in error."

"Well, I know if one person."

"Who is that?"

"Me."

"You?" said Feszj, who feigned surprise.

"Of course." Mr. Peters puffed out his chest, gloating. "I love going to work. I love being an educator. I love being a vice-principal." He leaned back in his chair, and clasped his hands behind his head. He started putting his feet up on his desk, but since Jesse was in the office, thought better of it. But, then, decided to do it anyway. His shiny black shoes landed with triumph on the desk. "Therefore," he continued, "I guess you'll have to reconsider your clever but unsubstantiated thoughts on competition and cooperation, won't you?"

"If it were true, yes. But it is not true." Mr. Peters's smug expression disappeared, replaced by a withering glare. "You dislike your job no less than many other people dislike theirs."

"What?" Mr. Peters ripped his feet off the desk. "Are you contradicting me? Look at me. I just told you I love my job."

"That is what you said, but it is not what you believe."

"Are you calling me a liar?" ranted Mr. Peters. "How can you possibly disagree, you impudent little snot? How dare you claim to know my motivations?"

"I do not claim to know your motivations," replied Feszj calmly. "However, I do claim that your actions may hint at your motivations."

"What do you mean, 'my actions'?"

"For the past two years, ever since the school administrators overlooked you for promotion to Principal of Lynvern, you've been secretly floating resumes to other school districts throughout the state."

Mr. Peters's whole body leaned forward in his chair, ready to slug Jesse. "How the hell did you know that? Are you spying on me or something?"

"And do you know why they picked someone else?" continued Feszj, undaunted.

Mr. Peters spoke slowly, still recovering from the rage experienced from his exposure. "He was better qualified, of course." Mr. Peters, though bombastic, sounded unconvincing.

"No, that's not the reason, and deep down you don't believe it, either," said Feszj. "They picked someone else because they needed you to remain the disciplinarian of the school. You are considered a better vice-principal than a principal."

It was the first time he had heard someone else state a different reason why he was overlooked for the job — a decision about which he always had suspicions, but he tried to mask the surprise and contempt he felt. Still, he had to confess to himself that it was more than likely. He placed his hand on his desk to brace himself as the enormous weight of exposure began boring down upon him.

"How did you know?" *If Jesse knows, then everyone must know*, thought Mr. Peters. "Where did you learn all this?" The secret may be out, but he was going to find the source. Feszj left the question unanswered.

"Tell me the truth. You don't want to be a vice-principal."

Mr. Peters focused on Jesse's eyes, hoping to penetrate that calm exterior. But Jesse's face exuded the confidence of already knowing the answers to any of the questions asked. The visage infuriated Mr. Peters, not only because it made his intimidation tactics worthless, but because a 14-year-old boy was humiliating him and dominating the flow of discussion.

Mr. Peters desperately wanted to regain the upper hand. He wanted to end the conversation right now, but he was condemned by his own ego. He couldn't stop now. To do so would be an admission that he could be out-argued by a lowly, albeit precocious, freshman brat. Furthermore, curiosity was slowly deflating his confidence. *How much does he know about me*, he wondered. He had to find out.

"How much do you know about me?"

Feszj began. "I know that you came from a dirt poor area of Mississippi, where you spent most of your early childhood killing roaches with a fly swatter, and dodging your

father's drunken rages. You were a large and muscular boy, however, and grew up fast and tough. Yet underneath your mattress was your greatest treasure."

Mr. Peters breathing instantly shallowed to a delicate wheeze. "No one knew that. No one knew any of that. How did you know?" Feszj went on.

"Your family was too poor to purchase books for you. So, on the rare occasion you went into town, you went off by yourself and stole books from the public library."

"It wasn't theft," interrupted Mr. Peters, involuntarily. "I deserved books."

"I understand. But being children of itinerant farmers, your parents didn't have a high regard for education. Elementary school was more than good enough for you. But you ached to learn, so you had to acquire those books somehow, and you had to keep them, because there were few things more necessary to you than reading of places far away from your ramshackle hovel.

"But most importantly, to someone with almost nothing, the books were yours. Secreted underneath the mattress and stuffed inside through slices in the cover, they were windows to a different life, a better life. Books, therefore, were dangerous instruments in the hands a desperate youth such as yourself."

Mr. Peters sat in awe, as Jesse retold his life story, racking his brain to find the answers to just one thought: How?

"At age thirteen, when you completed elementary school, you ran away from home, not wanting to go down you father's career path as an inept handyman. You wanted to go to where the best schools were, and they were in New England. So you travelled northeastward, moving quickly by thumbing rides through Alabama, then Tennessee — passing yourself off as sixteen to deceive the social workers and truant officers, outrunning those you couldn't trick — eventually ending up in Virginia. You would have been there sooner, but you couldn't resist stopping at every library you happen by chance to pass.

"In Virginia, several weeks after you started your trek, just outside the little town of Louisa, you were invited to join a small band of utopian idealists who were also looking to escape. On about 150 acres of scruffy forgotten farmland, the group lived in a dilapidated farmhouse and barn, and a motorhome which one of the other members brought.

"You became a valuable asset to the community, displaying a great deal of knowledge about farming, and turned their apparent wasteland into useful soil for planting. In return, the other members, some of whom were college educated, taught you and gave you more books to read. Once you had devoured everything they could provide, they knew they could not, with a clear conscience, keep you in the community. So they made a few phone

calls, and a possibility opened up. So they all chipped in and purchased a bus ticket which transported you to the Avalon School, a private academy in Connecticut. There, with a glowing reference from the community, you were to meet Mr. Greenway, someone who owed a member of the community a favor.

"What they didn't tell you, however, was that Mr. Greenway was also the football and wrestling coach for the Academy. He saw you, and your recommendation, and knew instantly he was going to find a way to have you play for their sports teams. As he once told you, 'You can't train size, and you have it'. You and Mr. Greenway crafted a fictitious past, changed your name to Horace Peters, and in just one year after you bolted from Mississippi, a new future awaited you and you threw away your past."

Sweat streamed down Mr. Peters's face. *Impossible*, he thought. *No one knew*. He raced through all the possible people who might have known. *Perhaps one of them, through some fluke meeting, caught Jesse's ear*.

"Mr. Greenway coached you and developed your talents throughout junior high. When you reached high school," said Feszj, "you were a bull of a man, and was quickly under recruitment by almost every private academy in New England. Feeling a sense of loyalty, you stayed in Connecticut, and went to the upper school of the academy. Through high school, you excelled on the field and on the mats, and became one of the dominant athletes in the region. But you also excelled in academics, and graduated tenth in your class.

"Unfortunately, at college, it was your love of academics and your preference for wrestling ..."

"It was more intimate, more one-on-one," interjected Mr. Peters in an aside.

"... which prevented you from going into the professional football ranks. As your talent suffered due to your passion for study, you were relegated to second string by your sophomore year, and to third string by senior year."

"Yes," said Mr. Peters, giving up the masquerade for Jesse, "I was smart enough to realize that I didn't have the mentality for professional football, and professional wrestling was a joke. But I was one of the lucky ones, unlike many of my teammates. Most didn't have the talent to make the pros, but they believed they could compensate for their lack of talent through hard work, dedication, and sacrifice. Few of these players made it, because there were hundreds of other players who worked just as hard. Many of those which did make the pros were out in five years or less, and without any education to fall back on. Everyone of them sacrificed all right, but it was a college education that they sacrificed."

"You left college with your Bachelor's in Physical Education" said Feszj, "and quickly found a job in Massachusetts, but very soon after, you began spending most of your

waking moments dreaming of the salaries school administrators received compared to teachers. You went back to college to get your Master's Degree, and since then, you have hopped from one administrative position to another, climbing your way up the ladder, eventually landing this position. A position, as I said, you are not satisfied with at all."

"The principal's a bozo," blurted Mr. Peters. He would regret that comment later, but right now, he was more concerned with Jesse. "But how do you know all this stuff?" continued Mr. Peters, staring at Jesse, this time without the harshness in his eyes and face. He was genuinely curious and concerned. "I've never told anybody about my past before Avalon. Not the books under the mattress, not the visit to Virginia, not even being beaten by my father. I thought I had completely eliminated my past from the face of the history of the planet. But then you come along and dredge it all up. How? How do you know all this? Who did you talk to?"

Feszj sat back in the chair and said nothing for a moment. Jesse was pleading with him not to tell him anything about this other world Terah. "Just let it go, Feszj, and we can walk out of here with our skin intact."

We can't, Jesse. Mr. Peters is expecting an answer, and there is no other answer that would explain how we knew.

Jesse cringed, realizing Feszj was going to spill the beans about everything once again.

We are committed, Jesse, to see this through without deception.

Feszj looked at Mr. Peters. "My name is not Jesse, but Feszj. I am using Jesse as a conduit through which our world of Terah can communicate with yours and help with your society's comprehension of the problems of competition and the benefits of cooperation."

Mr. Peters sat perplexed and still, saying nothing, permitting Feszj ample opportunity to describe how he used the chamber — Feszj called it the Opticon — to learn about Mr. Peters's secret life. Feszj further explained Jesse's role in this process — to learn about the cooperative worldview and way of life and disseminate this knowledge throughout the society. Then, to further demonstrate the veracity of his statements, Feszj and Jesse switched places in front of Mr. Peters. Mr. Peters looked on in a combination of amazement and panic as Jesse's body started twitching and convulsing. Soon the seizure subsided and ceased, and Jesse leaped from his chair, clawing at Mr. Peters's desk.

"I can explain everything," said Jesse in hysterics. "It was that hit to my head in the bathroom. That's what is doing this. I'm not crazy."

Mr. Peters raised his hand to silence Jesse, and gestured the young man to take his seat again, which Jesse reluctantly and solemnly accepted. The vice-principle shook himself

from his shock, stood up, and walked around the desk. He placed his father-like hand on Jesse's shoulder.

"That's all I wanted to hear, Jesse," he said. He proceeded to the door to his office. "You stay there, Jesse. I'll be right back. Then Mr. Peters exited.

Jesse sat in the room alone, and distraught. He noticed that the room seemed to have shrunk since he first entered. The walls had closed in on him. He listened to his wildly pounding heart, and the faraway sounds of the students's laughter and conversations in the lunch room. He felt his freedom being snatched away from him, and he slumped wretchedly in the chair experiencing the paralysis of knowing he was powerless to stop anything that would happen to him.

"They think I'm a lunatic," was Jesse's grim and lifeless assessment of his situation, expressed to an empty room.

"No, you're not," said Feszj, softly.

You know that, and I know that. But they don't.

"Don't you see, Jesse, what's going on? You're not a discipline problem nor crazy, despite what they may want you to believe, and despite how much they may want you to feel like you are at fault. Everything they are doing are attempts to silence your questions — questions they cannot or refuse to answer."

But why? What did I ever do to them?

"You are a threat — a threat to all the sexism, racism, imperialism, and ideologies that are perpetuated by the educational, political, and business institutions of America. By rejecting the ideological foundation of competition, educational pundits, for example, are at a loss. Everything they believe about grades, testing, measurements, accountability, national standards, etc., are all brought into question.

"Employers are at a loss. They have no idea how to encourage employees without the spur of competitive structures built into the environment of the work place — spurs like salaries, bonuses, commissions, as well as those tiny, practically insignificant awards worth little more than the paper they are printed on. Employees want you to compete for these little pieces of status over your co-workers and friends. After a while, the more dominance these little trinkets gain, the more petty become the concerns of those employees struggling for them. It is an unwritten assumption that humans are influenced by tapping into certain preferences, likes, and dislikes. Employers, thus, treat their employees as simple-minded animals, contented to have their behavior modified with the proper bauble or a lump of food. The moral character of humanity — the fact that there is more to life than self-interest — is completely lost on those making these demands on our malleability.

"What you are doing is challenging all competitivist viewpoints of sports, economics, politics, and every other institution and making them impotent. The competitive ideology is insufficient to deal with these cooperativist arguments. Their worldview is incapable of assimilating them. Eventually, their views disintegrate, and their spurious and tenuous positions of authority based on these views collapse. Your very presence and premises make them uncomfortable. You chip methodically away, slowly cracking their shell of willing and willful ignorance — an ignorance that is hardly their fault or even voluntary, in at least two ways.

"On the one hand, some people are quite successful in competitive arenas, having gained substantial amounts of the scarce resources of prestige, wealth, and power. They believe, perhaps sincerely, that if they could do it, anybody can. But they have to believe this — that through determination, their inspiration, their hard work and dedication, achievements are possible by anyone. It's just that these select few were more determined, more inspired, more dedicated and worked harder than the rest.

"However, when competing, at least half must fail. They fail or refuse, however, to see that not everybody can. They overlook the fact that theirs is a selective lifestyle, based almost entirely on the luck of being in the right place, at the right time, with the right parents, with the right schooling — essentially they were lucky enough to have all the right contingencies to make them successful. And though they can believe the luck had some minor role in their accomplishments, they cannot believe that luck was the sole determining factor. Their ego won't allow them to believe that it was mere chance, not competitive prowess, that made them who they are.

"On the other hand," Feszj went on, "they may feel exactly as you did; because of their present situation, being one of those who needs money, health care insurance, social security, and a host of other hand-outs to survive as a loser in the competitive struggle for social pre-eminence, they are coerced by the winner's wealth, power, and ideological dominance into accepting all these necessities of subservience. You remind this vast pool of failures of their powerlessness and obsequiousness.

"So, to some you are a threat to all that is supposedly good to people — status, power, wealth, ego. To the rest, you are a threat to all that is to be forgotten."

Jesse exhaled out of sheer exhaustion listen to Feszj. Sometimes, Feszj could be very dry and tedious. At others, he could be so compelling and riveting. But in either case, it took a great deal of effort to listen.

Well, thought a tired Jesse, in either case, whether I'm crazy or threatening, they're going to lock me up and throw away the key.

Jesse started when he heard the door latch click and Mr. Peters walked back into his office. A short and overweight woman whom Jesse had never seen before followed the vice-principal in.

"Jesse, this is Ms. Simon," said Mr. Peters, unusually amiable this time, "the school psychologist. She would like to have a chat with you."

"A psychologist? Why would I need a psychologist?"

"Why don't you come with me," said Ms. Simon, in a pleasant though matter-of-fact voice, "and we can talk about that."

Jesse sat lower in his chair. He had a terrible hunch that if he moved, he was doomed. This was his last resort — one final act of resistance. However, since it seemed to Jesse that his future has already been determined, the act would, in the end, be a futile one.

"Come on, Jesse," said Mr. Peters. "There are also some people outside who wish to see you."

Still, Jesse stayed put. *If they want me to move, they'll have to pry my fingers off the chair arm and carry me out kicking and screaming.*

"Don't fight it, Jesse," said Feszj. "We tried, but Mr. Peters seems to be unable to accept or even understand what we are presenting."

Mr. Peters stepped up to Jesse and placed his hand on the young man's arm.

"It's time to go, Jesse."

"There is no way to avoid it, Jesse," said Feszj. "And fighting the unavoidable will only make it harder for you and everyone else and solve nothing. We will have to take our offer of global happiness elsewhere."

Jesse glanced down at the hand resting on his forearm. He pondered his situation for a moment, then exhaled from his body all tension, going limp, and gave up. Jesse let Mr. Peters help lift his heavy body from the chair. Ms. Simon take his other arm, and they both escorted Jesse from the room.

Jesse shook himself into alertness when he saw waiting for him outside the office his mom and dad. His mom looked devastated; the red eyes and streaked make-up gave it away. His dad, on the other hand, looked annoyed. Jesse could tell when his father was embarrassed by the presence of his son.

He probably wants to be at the dealership with Louise.

Jesse and Peter met eyes. In the past, Jesse would always turn away in obedient deference to his dad, but not this time. He stared back at his father with a searing intensity Peter found unexpected and uncomfortable.

I know all about you, Dad. You can't intimidate me or impress me anymore.

Peter coughed to one side, breaking eye contact in the process. Jesse smirked and turned away.

Ms. Simon and Jesse proceeded to her office, they had to walk between his parents. While passing his mother, Linda grabbed her son aside and squeezed him inside her arms. Her clench was vice-like, as if she were trying to protect him by forcing him back inside her womb. Her tears flowed uncontrollably. Jesse felt his mother's body convulsing with spasm of agony. He let her hug him for several moments, and then he separated himself from her.

Holding her at arms length, he looked into her helpless eyes. Resigned to his fate, he mustered courage he didn't think he had. "I'll be fine, Mom. I love you."

He resumed his place next to Ms. Simon as they walked to the elevator. She pressed the button, the door opened instantly, and they entered followed by his mother. His father stayed behind with Mr. Peters. Before the doors closed, he heard his dad clear his throat and say to the vice-principal, "Did you see the game yesterday?"

The elevator opened downstairs, and Jesse, Ms. Simon, and Linda stepped out into the school's main office. As Ms. Simon moved to her right and down the aisle towards her office, Jesse stopped. On his left, he noticed Mr. Monroe through the window of the duplicating room making copies. Jesse gravitated towards him.

Mr. Monroe acted slightly startled at the sight of Jesse holding open the door of the duplicating room. Neither person smiled at each other.

"Jesse? How are you doing?" Mr. Monroe stammered.

"They're coming to take me away," replied Jesse, his demeanor and voice flooded with contempt, but lacking any inflection. "Ha ha. Ho ho. Hee hee."

Infuriated by Jesse's insolence, Mr. Monroe could have just slapped Jesse across the face and across the room. Instead, he said, "It's for the best, Jesse."

"Mr. Monroe," said Jesse. Mr. Monroe waited for the continuation, but since nothing came after his name, dropped his eyes back to the machine to watch his copies being spit out as he waited impatiently. Jesse had paused mid-sentence, as if he were carefully considering the next words he was about to utter. Then, a few seconds later, Jesse continued in a strong, self-assured voice, "If you had only fed your hamster, Spot would not have died so miserably of a ruptured intestine."

Mr. Monroe violently snapped his head up to confront Jesse, his eyes wild and wide, his breath gone, but all he saw was the brown stained wood door thumping shut.

* * *

"And you know the rest of the story after that, Doctor Macy," said Jesse. "A long litany of therapy sessions, medications that failed, et cetera. But there are some bright spots. Mom is still tending the garden; and I heard that Rebecca removed all the materials from my backyard, placed it in her backyard and is now running the recycling route from her house. Makes you kind of hopeful, doesn't it?"

Dr. Macy, however, only half heard his comments. She had another thought on her mind. "Why didn't Mr. Monroe come to your aid after that revelation?"

"Just as Mr. Peters overlooked everything said to him about his secret life no one ought to have know about, Mr. Monroe didn't want his teaching credibility damaged more than it had already been by supporting the assertions about Feszj and the entire other world of Terah. He would never have taught again. If he were younger, he might even have become a patient of yours."

"Has Mr. Monroe been keeping in touch with you?"

"Oh yes, constantly. He felt so guilty that his rash actions began the chain of events that eventually had me committed."

"Is he the one sending you the utopian novels?"

"Yes."

"Is he convinced that you have visited another world?"

"No. But I know he's now no longer certain that I haven't." Jesse thought about Mr. Monroe, and went on. "But he has more than apologized enough. Besides, he began taking Feszj's advice on education. By the end of December last year, he had completely turned around his style of teaching. The student's flocked to his class. He took the study of history away from the tyranny of textbooks and put it into the hearts and minds of his students. Sometimes, he would even dress in the garb of the age they were discussing. He went from a mediocre teacher who did what he had to do, to an educator who gave his students all he had. It was hard work, but he was inspired to those ends by the way the students became alive with the desire to learn history. In fact, on his last day of class, his students applauded him."

"Amazing. I envy the students who will be taking his class this year."

"Don't."

"Why not?"

"Because of Mr. Monroe's unique style of teaching, he created a great deal of friction with the other teachers and their inability to teach as well. Essentially, he made them look

bad. He stayed at school longer hours preparing materials and performed constant research on his own. By the end of the school year, the students in other social studies classes had heard so many amazing things about his class, they began resisting what their teachers would do if it failed to live up to Mr. Monroe's standard. Parental complaints rose dramatically, asking why their sons and daughters weren't getting the best education possible and insisting Mr. Monroe be their kids's teacher, which caused increasing antagonism with the school administrators, including Vice-Principal Black.

"Mr. Monroe's presence, as well as his out-spoken criticisms of traditional educational techniques, became a problem. So the school tried, at the end of last year, to promote Mr. Monroe to district coordinator of the social science curriculum in the schools. They also awarded him with a state teaching grant which would have had him travel throughout the state for the next two years to work with other teachers. But in both cases, it would have meant his classroom teaching would end. This made no sense to him. What logic was there in taking gifted teachers **out** of the classrooms? If anything, poorer teachers should be removed from their classes to see him teach, not the other way around. In any case, he declined both offers."

"That's quite commendable. So how is his teaching going this year?"

"It's not. He was denied tenure and laid off last month."

Thirteen

"Once again, we come to the conclusion of another academic year at our institution — a year which featured its particular brand of triumphs and tribulations ... "

Speaker after speaker droned onward, invoking the standard graduation drivel, while hundreds of soon-to-be-graduates, dressed in the standard black rented gowns — except for a few idealistic graduate students who purchased their robes, sat in rows of uncomfortable metal folding chairs atop a mat-covered basketball court. Blah, blah, blah they thought, but as it was impossible to do anything but slouch in their seats, they waited courteously though impatiently for the ceremony to end.

"... Your education will influence you and influence all with whom you come into contact as you proceed out that rear door ... "

Sweat dripped from every face in the congregation and attending audience of proud parents and bored fidgety children. The air conditioner wasn't working today, and the warm, dreary rain pouring outside increased the humidity inside the gymnasium — a rising humidity aggravated by every speech — prompting students to wonder into whose pockets all their tuition money finally came to rest. Some of the students quipped secretly to each other that the money was used to supplement the cost of the new sky-boxes overlooking the stadium — sky-boxes which ironically did not bring in enough revenue to pay for the interest on the loan drawn to construct them. Or maybe the money was used to pay the lawyers defending the university against a class action suit filed to recover money defrauded from the students.

The lawsuit caught everyone's attention. It seems that a textbook service company called Buy Back of America had under-refunded students for their returned textbooks, and over the years collected hundreds of thousands of dollars. This might have gone unnoticed by the university administration and its auditors were it not for the confession of a student with a guilty conscience who worked for BBA. BBA quickly admitted their error and paid back upwards of a half a million dollars in restitution to the university.

And that was the problem. The university President said it would be logistically impossible to reimburse every student who was defrauded over the last decade, so the money would be spent on campus beautification. This did not sit well with the student body — a project which enhanced only the university's reputation and did nothing to help reduce the financial burdens of a student's higher education. The animosity was such that it was only a matter of time before one enterprising recent law student graduate filed suit, claiming that the university had no authority to appropriate money that was never its to begin with — money wrongfully taken from the students and, therefore, rightfully belonged to the students — and demanded the return of her \$100. The administration dismissed the suit as a joke, but with the free assistance of other recent law graduates banding together, other students joined the litigation, eventually raising the amount in the class action to well over a quarter of a million dollars.

The university administration argued, through its legal advisors, that the school was acting under its *loco parentis* obligations; in other words, the university was acting in the best interests of the students as surrogate parents in holding the money. However, the students's attorneys responded that if the university persisted in its claims of protection under *loco parentis*, then they would then sue based on breach of contract. Student lawyers argued that by failing to provide adequate financial safeguards and inspections concerning BBA's activities on campus, the university failed in its fiduciary responsibility implicit in the contractual agreement between student and university when the student made payment to attend the institution. In this case, the university was responsible to reimburse and pay damages, including lost interest, to the students.

It was an intriguing lawsuit which kept the university's Board of Trustees on pins and needles, and the school newspaper — The Student Voice — well supplied with editorial commentary. By the graduation date, no settlement had yet been reached and the case remained in the courts.

"... university to forget the eloquent words of one of the worlds greatest playwrights, William Shakespeare, when through the voice of Polonius ... "

Most of the attending students, however, cared little about lawsuits and sky-boxes. On their minds was simply surviving the oppressive atmosphere inside the gymnasium where the school's basketball teams play, tossing their caps away, and leaving the school to get on with their lives.

But one woman sitting in the front row, among the other doctoral students and graduating Summa Cum Laude, was oblivious to the verbose diatribe that spewed forth from the podium and accosted the the student body once a year. She sat stiffly, hands

folded in her lap, and looked at the speaker but didn't really hear or see him. Instead, she daydreamed the time away, recalling the previous night and replaying it over and over in her head.

It started with a veal cordon bleu dinner at the Alsace Restaurant a couple towns away, she reminisced. After dinner they went back to his place for a Cabernet night cap, and then was dragged into bed for an hour of sex. The woman bit her lip as she recalled the details of those sixty minutes. Her skin curdled at the memory.

Still, she went through the motions — moaning at the right times, saying all the right things. When it was over, she lay on her back, staring at the ceiling, suffering through the affectionate caresses from this man. Whenever he looked at her, love in his eyes, she smiled as if on cue. When he looked away, she returned her fascination to the stucco paint above, and the ceiling fan spinning hypnotically.

"Tomorrow's the big day," the man said to her.

"It sure is." However, she had plans quite different from his.

"I had something to give you at the restaurant tonight," he said, "but I forgot it at home. I was probably thinking so much about giving it to you, I forgot to get the item itself. Then I thought about giving it to you after the graduation ceremony tomorrow, but you know me. I can't keep a secret; and something like this I can't hold inside. Wait here."

The gentleman threw the covers off himself and ran naked out of the bedroom and into the apartment. He was a gaunt man in his late thirties with pale skin, a sunken chest, and a bulbous belly. His receding hair was in the process of changing from auburn to white.

The woman gagged once more at this decrepit excuse of a physique. She also cringed at the thought of what this surprise assuredly must be. She sat up and reached down to the carpeted floor and picked up her panties. She was standing up in the room, putting on her bra when the man re-entered the room.

"Getting dressed so soon?" He looked disappointed.

"I was getting cold," she lied.

The man thought the response odd, but he let it go in order to continue with his presentation. He ran to the other side of the bed and gently guided his lover to sit on the bed, which she tolerated. He then knelt in front of her and produced a small black velvet case.

"Years ago," he said, "I asked my mom how I would know if I found the right woman. She said that I'll know in my heart. At the time, I didn't think it sounded very helpful, but that's all she could tell me. So I asked my dad how I would know when I found the right woman. He said 'If you can't imagine her, or at least can't imagine her looking bad,

squatting over a toilet going to the bathroom, she's the one.' I was surprised at his frankness. He had never been so open before. 'Is that how you knew Mom was the one?' I asked. He shook his head and said that he didn't figure out that method until after he was married." The man's voice sagged a little. "Perhaps that's why they slept in separate bedrooms for so long."

Casting the memories aside, he promptly straightened up. "In any case," he said, "I can't imagine you ever looking bad peeing. So, here you go." He opened in front of her the little black case he was holding. Inside was a three-quarter carat marquis-cut diamond ring. Despite her repugnance of the man, she was struck by the gem dazzling in front of her.

He offered the case up to her, holding it closer to her as he said, "C-C, would you marry me? Would you ever so kindly and generously allow me be your husband? To allow me to call you Mrs. Loman?"

It was obvious to her that he had carefully crafted what he would say and had thoroughly rehearsed the lines before, in spite of the botched presentation. She looked at the ring, and then at the eager and hope-filled man on his knee in front of her. She reached for his hands and without removing the ring, closed the case and pushed it back towards him.

"No, Doug, I won't."

The crestfallen young man fell back on his heels, dropping the case, and said the one word his mind raced to answer with thousands of others.

"Why?"

She smirked. She knew this day was going to come. It was inevitable and unavoidable. She considered just running away, but there was no closure and no satisfaction in that. So, she, too, had rehearsed what she would say; though what she would utter would have none of the niceties embedded in Doug's heart-felt sentence.

"Doug, you're a nice guy and all that, but I don't love you."

This statement completely confounded him.

"What are you talking about? Everything you did, everything we've ever done together ... I thought you loved me. Everything seemed to add up."

"Maybe to you," she replied, standing up. "I'm sorry, Doug, but I don't love you. I can't love you. I'm gay."

This caused Doug to sit back and plop on the floor. He shook his head and suddenly began giggling.

"Oh, now I see. This is another one of your little jokes. Boy, you had me going there for a second." Smiling in relief, he picked up the case, re-opened it, and re-offered it to C-C. This time, a look of disgust covered her face. She pushed his hand back into his chest, and walked away from him.

"Don't you get it?" She looked back at him with harsh eyes. "I don't love you. I never loved you. Why are you making it harder for both of us?"

Still trying to find humor in the situation, Doug struggled to his feet and, with a half-hearted laugh, spoke again. "Okay, you've had your fun. But will you marry me?"

She groaned in frustration. "No. Why isn't that simple little word sinking in?"

"It doesn't make any sense," he shouted back. "After all we've been through these past two years. After all those wonderful intimacies—."

"Intimate to you maybe. But for me, they were torture." Doug could not comprehend what she was saying. She sauntered around the room gathering her clothes and dressed as she started explaining. "In the beginning, when we started going out, every time we went out, I was hoping I could come up with another excuse to push off the anticipated bounce in the bed. I said I wouldn't have sex again until I was married, having been burned in the past by the very same hope of finding true love that was merely an infatuation. Then, when I noticed our relationship flag, I tempted you back by saying yes to your ministrations, only to make the excuse that my cycle had begun that day, or anything else I could think of. But I couldn't keep up the charade long enough. Finally, I had to cave in and let you screw me, just to keep stringing you along."

"Stringing me along? What are you talking about?"

She paused in her narrative. "Doug, sit down, and let me describe for you my life — my *real* life. Not the fictionalized account about an ex-model devastated by a failed relationship with a photographer, a woman who turned to alcohol and drugs to run from the pain and becoming an addict, a woman who came to this school trying to get her life back in order. What I told you was no more than a fairy tale story about my former life. Let me tell you what really happened."

As C-C put the rest of her clothes on and began her story, Doug sat on the edge of the bed, still naked but motionless, riveted by the account. He listened, his mouth parched, as the woman he thought he knew became more and more foreign to him, more and more a stranger. She became a completely different woman, suddenly sprouting into existence and mercilessly killing off the woman he had grown to love and cherish.

But why? he thought to himself. *Why the deception? Why the artificial past? What was she really hiding from me?*

She began by describing her youth, her truncated relationship with her mother, her days as a basketball star in high school, all the way through to her career as a All-American at Denison University — up until the point at which her father walked out of the gymnasium.

"After laying on the basketball court for an hour," she said, "I wandered the darker recesses of campus for several more hours. Maybe I was hoping to be raped, just so I could get some sympathy; I don't know. But nothing happened. It was as if even the muggers avoided me, as if my moral wretchedness was so contagious and so vile, even criminals wanted no part of me.

"I returned to my room in the athlete's dorm well after midnight to find all my clothes, toiletries, books — everything I owned — strewn throughout the hallway. Nor was it enough that they had dumped all my stuff in the hallway. Apparently, other women in the dorm had been picking through the mess before I arrived searching for items that would complement their wardrobes or vanities.

"I gathered up what I could — by myself, of course; no one helped me — and stuffed everything into several garbage bags I grabbed from the janitorial closet. I dragged them down stairs to my car but, not surprisingly, the tires were flat. I loaded the trunk anyway, drove the crippled car out of the lot and off the campus, found a convenient overpass to park under, and slept the night away there.

"The following mornings, having been *de facto* moved out of the dorms, I scrambled around town for a room — not easy considering all the students living off-campus. After a couple of nights under the overpass, I eventually located a small one-bedroom apartment on the outskirts of town, accepted a job as a telemarketer to pay the rent. That's where I began rebuilding my life, biding my time. I started saving as much money as possible — which wasn't hard; my mutual funds did quite well considering the bull market over those years. Eventually, all the players I knew had graduated and/or left for the WNBA or other careers. A few years after that, when the team sank as rapidly into national obscurity as it rose to national prominence, my old coach, Daniels, was fired and replaced.

"At that point, I reapplied for admission, hoping the memory of that game was now gone. And I was right; all too painfully right. They forgot. They all forgot. It seemed as though I was the only one who remembered my father walking out of my life on that night. No one else remembered. No one else cared. Not my coach, not my teammates. My life had fallen apart, and no one had given it a second thought. These were the people I remember."

Abruptly, she looked away from Doug and stared into the distance, looking at something well beyond the walls of the room.

"Friends," she started. "As fickle as New England weather. You can't trust them. You can't count on them. By all mean, never confide in them. They are the first to run from you when things go bad. Friends only want to share the good times. They only want to sap from your life pleasures they can't otherwise get. Parasites, content to live vicariously on my happiness and glory, until tastes change and they spit you out like poison."

C-C noticed the distorted look of concern in Doug's face and realized she had been venting on an unrelated tangent.

"In any case," she continued as she smiled at her silent listener, "it was at this point I decided to go into psychology — not so I could help other kids who were as screwed up as I was. That was a good line, wasn't it?"

She stared at Doug, winking to him and gloating to herself at the way she had suckered him. Doug tried to interject an objection here and there during her diatribe, tried to reply to her comments, tried to stem the flow of these mind-numbing revelations but, unable to capture enough mental stability for coherent speech, heard himself stammer instead. He wanted to say so much; instead, he struggled to control the avalanche of thoughts careening around in his psyche. With too many things needing to be said, he didn't know where to begin.

"No," she went on, further amused at Doug's speechlessness. "I wanted to learn psychology so I could manipulate and control people; so I could get the most of what *I* wanted out of life. I had no need for friends anymore, so I had no worry about turning acquaintances into enemies. But that rarely happened. I was very careful, very sophisticated. Getting what I wanted from them, and then pleading poverty, or ignorance, or any number of other social ills to gain sympathy and forgiveness.

"The men were easy to exploit. Wave a breast in their face, stroke their cheeks with fingernails, lick their ears, and they focused only on my physical attributes and not at what I was doing to them. The women were more difficult, but I found ways of using their innate cattiness to turn friends against each other while I end up on top of the heap smelling like a rose, all of them thankful that I came along to clear away the lies.

"I never went home after discovering what I wanted. I had everything I needed here at school. In the end, Dad was right. He was always right about how to succeed in this dog-eat-dog world. Friends get in the way. Teamwork slows individual progress. And the first thing he ever taught me was probably the most important. Men are in the positions of

domination — material, social, physical, et cetera. Everywhere you look, men are looking around at themselves; women are always looking up at them.

"So what do we do? We sell ourselves, and make money off the one thing they want most. Naturally, men tried to outlaw prostitution. Take sexual gratification out of the marriage, men have to now compete for their thrills, when before they could just ... dominate. But there are other ways of prostituting ourselves, other ways to level the playing field, other ways to dominate men."

C-C stopped. The statement required a response. Though shocked and amazed at the tale he was hearing, Doug shook himself out of his stupor of disbelief for a moment of lucidity, and responded to the question.

"What other ways?" he said on cue.

C-C grinned ominously. She had waited for this moment. She had waited almost two years for this moment.

"As I said, men are easy to exploit, just like you, Professor. I chose you to guide my dissertation research because you were young and ugly, and would be so flattered that a pretty little thing like me would be interested in you romantically, you wouldn't notice all the work you'd be doing to construct my dissertation. And while you diddled with that throwaway schlock in standard research format, I had time to do my own research, extensive research, on the mind's weaknesses and the manipulative qualities of psychology. But instead of writing about it, I practiced it — on everyone I could, including you."

"That was not a piece of schlock, Miss," said Doug, now able to stand up, his senses cleared with the instant irritation at the way she viewed her dissertation. In general, he was thoroughly disgusted at the way the conversation had proceeded and his one-sided relationship with C-C was being revealed. "It was an excellent work on—."

"Oh, blow it out your ass. It was crap and you know it. That's why you edited it. That's why you rewrote almost all of it, adding literature I had never read, guiding the research protocol, tabulating the results, offering several conclusions based on the results. The reason why you think it's so good is because it's *your* work."

"But—."

"Oh, don't get me wrong," she interrupted. "I'm very grateful for all your efforts to get me that degree and out of this place. So don't feel so bad, Doc." She turned around, lifted up her skirt, dropped her panties, and mooned him. "You were paid quite well for your services. In fact, you should feel honored. It's not every man who gets to f— a willing lesbian."

Doug stared at the smooth rounded buttocks and, involuntarily, reached for them. C-C scooted away from reach and pulled up her underwear.

"Uh-uh, bud," she said, shaking her finger at him. "No freebies. Your services are no longer needed anymore."

He looked at her, but discerned no warmth in her body, no love in her face, and no soul in her eyes. Finally, after a furious battle waged in his skull to resist what was happening, it was over. Her comments finally forced him to comprehend what his emotions could not accept. He plopped heavily on to the bed, his face buried in his hands. Doug's breathing was imperceptible, almost as if it had stopped. His mouth stayed open, drool dripping to the floor

"I can't believe you did this to me?" he said. Doug glared at C-C, though she hardly noticed him. "You conniving, manipulative bitch."

"Thank you."

"Well, don't be so smug. Tomorrow, I'll be heading over to the dean and have your degree revoked."

"Go ahead," she replied, with a devilish grin. "We can all go together. And as soon as you're done, I'll go in right after you and tell him all about your two year sexual relationship with a student. I'll tell him all about how you wrote my dissertation for me. I'll even tell him about how we had the whole thing planned. I'll get the degree, join the faculty, and then we would have two incomes when we got married."

"That never happened," he said, incredulous. "We never talked about that."

"He doesn't know that."

He fumed. "Bastard."

"So go ahead," she said, revelling in her new found prestige, "and then we'll see whose career plummets the fastest. You'll never get another professorship anywhere in the country. And even if you do, I'll be there to make sure all your colleagues know about your academic indiscretions. After I get through with your life, you won't be able to step inside a classroom just to empty the trash can."

She was right, and both of them knew it. Her planning had been flawless; or if it wasn't, he was in no condition to find the mistakes. He was trapped. He dropped his head in resignation. Yet what made him even more miserable was the knowledge that once she was gone and he started to regain his composure, he would begin thinking of innumerable and wonderful counter-arguments, witty ripostes, and withering insults.

But right now, all that consumed his thoughts were the agony of never seeing her again and the humiliation of having her around. And for the moment, there was nothing he could do to her without risking his entire life.

"Well, you're right, C-C," he said grudgingly and tried to provoke her in response. "My career isn't worth ruining over a vile creature like yourself."

C-C said nothing. She took out a brush from her purse and stating straightening out her hair. She remained unaffected by the insult. She beat him again.

"Why did you do this to me?" he asked in a weak, tinny voice. "Don't you have any semblance of compassion in you? Where are all you high-minded morals? I thought you wanted to help kids who were psychologically impaired—." Doug caught himself. He sighed heavily, remembered that that was one of her many lies. C-C laughed. "Instead," he went on, "here you are as demented as the worst of them."

"But the difference is," responded C-C, "I know what I am doing. Those kids don't. They are told that they are doing the most horrendous things, but they can't control themselves. I, on the other hand, can control myself, choose to use my talents in this way. I don't see any reason not to."

"So," said Doug, struggling for an effective rejoinder to silence her holier-than-thou attitude, "you're going to live life treating people like shit, and stepping on them like bugs?"

C-C strode over to Doug quickly and placed her face right in front of his. "I'm going to compete, like every good American should. And I'm going to win, like every good competitor tries to do. And I'll do whatever it takes to win."

"So the end justifies the means, I guess?" Doug felt he had the edge this time. *How will she answer that?*

"If the ends don't justify the means, Doug," she responded, grinning, "what does?"

Damn, he thought, *she got in the last word once more. She's brilliant, all right, just like a mad scientist.* Doug's mouth twitched, his brewing anger making his face taut. This time, she had all the right answers. C-C noticed his expression, and tried to be conciliatory.

"You and your little friend got what you wanted," she said, pointing at his penis. "I got what I wanted. It was a win-win situation. Isn't that what education is all about?"

"Education," said Doug, "is learning and grappling with the material on your own. Don't be surprised when you discover how poor an employee you'll be when you get a job. You're going to be in way over your head."

"Oh, I don't think so." C-C scoffed at his contention. "You and your colleagues often think too highly of yourselves and your value to teaching — as if a person can't learn what is important or necessary without your presence. What hubris! Well, I learned a great deal about what I wanted to know. I didn't need you to learn anything, especially those things important to me. All I needed you to do was the grunt work, and get my paperwork out of the way. And you did that quite adequately."

"God!" You are the most self-centered and narcissistic—."

"I am a survivor," interrupted C-C. "We all have to be survivors in this world. No one else is going to look out for me and my interests. No one looks out for anyone else's interests but their own."

"I can't believe you." spluttered Doug. "You seem to see the world as somehow always against you, filled with opponents ready to destroy you at their first chance. What a horrible way to live a life — to exist in constant competition with everyone. And you compete not just to win something or anything — but everything."

"I didn't make the world," said C-C, in a monotone laced with animosity. "The world is beyond changing. I merely have to deal with it. Besides, isn't that what psychologists do? Isn't that what we are trained to do? We don't show people how to change the world. We show people how to adapt themselves to the world. Whether or not the world is good, or bad, or disgusting, we help people mold themselves to fit in. To find happiness in not bucking the system; to convince people they ought to be happy with what little they have."

"Christ girl, what drove you to this ubiquitous negativity? This madness?"

She sighed. "I'm not mad. Just tired."

"Tired?"

"Yes, I'm tired," she said, gritting her teeth, and increasingly frustrated by Doug's lack of comprehension. "I'm tired of having to study all the time for tests and reports. Tired of rushing around from one class to another, from one conference to another, from one appointment to another, feeling my gut wrench up from anxiety every time even the littlest delay occurs, all the while jumping through hoops in this three-ring circus you affectionately call academia. My body weakens and my life shortens every time some bureaucrat looks at me sideways because a form is missing a signature, or some researcher needs a study from me tomorrow so he can look good in *his* paper and presentation.

"I'm tired of having to put off repairing my car ever time something breaks, and risking getting into an accident because I don't have enough money to fix it. I'm tired of having to worry if the water pipes will burst because it's so cold outside. I'm tired of worrying that I might get hurt and lose all my savings because I don't have health insurance.

"I'm tired of having to mill around with the scum of the world. Tired of eating at Arby's instead of at The Alsace. Tired of having to be afraid of policemen because I can't afford to pay fines. I'm tired of worrying about being able to survive."

C-C's eyes flamed with contempt.

"People tread water all their lives and go nowhere. Most just sink. But not me. I understand what it takes. Only money and wealth can ever buy the relaxation people need and the decent life people crave. The wealthy can purchase travel to faraway lands to sip other cultures, while you and I can only sip their tea. The rich can procure entertainment and pleasures which enhance their enjoyment of life, whereas we can only watch and live vicariously through their adventures.

"We voraciously read about how to change the way we look, or the way we talk, or the way we walk or wear our clothes, all in hopes of being the person in the picture of the advertisement, craving to be better than who we are, more than what we are. We languish in a society full of hope but with no future, so we willingly fill the coffers of those who have a future and no longer need to pray for one, just so a little of that confidence and peace of mind rubs off on us.

"We even compete amongst ourselves for the opportunity to have a good life, because the good life is itself a scarce resource, something only a few of us will ever attain. If experiences are the measure of a full life, we must either reduce our expectations of satisfaction and comfort to the point where they are already being met — which is almost never — or we just shoot our brains out and hope the next life is better."

"No, no, C-C. How can you even consider suicide? You read your Camus, didn't you?"

"Sure, I read Camus, but even though he argued against suicide, claiming that this is the only life we have and we had better make the best of it, he failed to understand that people, for the most part, cannot make the best of anything — and that success in life is a competition just like everything else — and that the vast majority will fail.

"The only people in this society who can win at the sport of resting and peace of mind are those with enough money and wealth to be on top of the world, or those lucky enough to reside six feet under it. I plan on doing both."

"At the same time?" Doug joked sarcastically.

"If it's at all possible, yes." C-C enjoyed turning the joke around.

"You're crazy," said Doug.

"No, no. I'm not crazy. It is you, and people of your sensibilities who are crazy. Thinking that behaving morally and ethically is the right thing to do. Well fine. Go out and be Socrates. See how you enjoy the taste of hemlock in your gullet.

"Face it, Doctor Feelgood. You can't pay the bills with good intentions, nor can you pay the bills with good behavior. The most moral behavior you can muster in the world won't put food in your empty stomach."

"That's not what I meant."

"You know what, Doc?" said C-C angrily. "You can just go to hell. I really don't give a damn what you mean anymore, or what you think anymore. I've had to listen to your inane prattle for the past two years, nodding at appropriate moments, squeezing your hand in encouragement, and looking interested the entire time. In the last few months, I've gone home after our liaisons and vomited because of how disgusted I felt indulging your vanity and ego, while mine seethed underneath the coy exterior."

Doug wallowed deeper in humiliation, but still finding it hard to believe that everything between them was merely an act, and that he was just an instrument for C-C's wants. How could he have been duped so easily? *Because I wanted to be*, he mused. *C-C is right again. She played my ego like a virtuoso, stringing me along, completely unaware.*

C-C calmed down and went on. "We all have different ways of dealing with the realities we face, Professor. I have chosen my way based on what I know and what I feel will be the best for me. And you, of course, did the same for yourself."

"Sure, I acted like a fool," he admitted to C-C. "But that still doesn't mean that self-interest is not morally justifiable."

"Self-interest is the only thing that can be justified," shot back C-C, "for self-interest stems from our innate need to survive. There is nothing else more important than our own survival. Everything else is a rationalization, foisted upon us by others who want us to sacrifice ourselves for their self-interest and their survival. Leaders talk of the glory of war, the need to protect sovereignty and freedom, et cetera. But who are we really protecting? Their butts. Why do you think leaders are willing to place the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, soldiers and civilians alike, to stop the aggressions of another leader? Because if they start resorting to assassinations, their own lives would be at stake. They have the power to order others to die for them, so that is what happens.

"Self-interest determines even the more moral of justifications. The golden rule, for example. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' Here, you and your self-interests become the foundational principles around which a moral philosophy grows. Surely you've heard of the aphorism: 'Man is the measure of all things'?"

"You're amazing," said Doug, exasperated. "You twist and distort everything — philosophy, history, literature — to fit your own version of reality."

"You idiot!" she yelled. "Where did you get your degree? Mickey Mouse U? Of course everything has to be fit into my view of the world. My version of reality is the only one I have."

"Whether it is true or not?"

"Each person's version of reality at every moment, by definition, always ring true — at least to that person. Look Doug, don't talk any more. It's too painful to listen to you spew out your stupidity."

Doug stood shaking his head, with a face filled with a contradictory mix of frustration, anger, and sympathetic pathos. C-C saw his expression.

"Oh, relax. And don't feel sorry for me, Dougie-poo," teased C-C. "I'll survive. I'm a competitor. I'll do just fine because I know the meaning of life."

Doug's ears pricked up. "And that is?"

"To win."

"Oh, is that all?" said Doug, with sarcasm. "Well, where's your mountaintop?"

"Go stick it," raising her middle finger to him. "You should talk. You don't even have a meaning of life to guide your aimless rambling on this planet. You're still searching for it, hoping to find it in some philosophy book somewhere. No, you won't find it there. Competition, that's where it's at. An arena with well-defined rules, clear roles and obligations, unmistakable objectives, and obvious results. There is no question to how one ought to behave within those parameters. There is no moral relativism in competition. Think about anything other than winning, and you've lost. Sure, it may not be the calmest way of life, or even the prettiest, but it is the most understandable."

"Maybe so," said Doug, calming down now that he more intimately understands C-C's perspective and what makes her tick. "But you'll be a very lonely competitor."

"But of course," shouted C-C. "Finally, you figured it out. To be the best competitor, you must thrive on being alone. Friends get in the way, but a passion for solitude is nothing but a boon. Having no friends makes one an effective and efficient competitor. Learning to enjoy and prosper in loneliness is the only way life will be bearable in this society. I learned it the hard way, but learned it I did."

"Hell," said Doug, snapping back. "I learned my lessons about competition as well, and tried to follow them, but I later regretted my choice. Now, I realize that the successes of competition are poor substitutes for the experience of just being with one good friend."

"Yeah, so I've heard," she replied cynically. "But it's all crap. Look at you. Where has this love of humanity brought you? To a professorship? But only after you have beaten others to get here. In bed with me? Only to have your heart broken because you were too much of a sap to see me as a profiteer. You're either an abuser or an abusee. And the only time you stop competing is when you have no more competitors around you."

"Friends don't compete, C-C." Doug tried to reach whatever humanity was still inside her, but he had little hope.

"Friends are the cruelest competitors. They command your time, they command your attention. And you are the one who feels guilty if you don't give them enough of either. Strangers come and go. Competitors are in the way only briefly. But friends drag you down all the time."

"Besides," she continued, brightening up her disposition, "since there is so much flux and movement between people in society, today's friends will easily be tomorrow's enemies, and vice versa. Therefore, in order not to find one's career and life objectives slowed down because of ethical debates or moral indecisions, it may be best in the long run not to have any friends at all — and compete."

The two remained quiet for a few seconds, appraising each other. Doug seeing a beautiful woman with a heart of stone and a cold, calculating mind filled with self-obsessed plans and goals. C-C stared at a scrawny man with naïve and unrealistic notions of morality guiding him through a life that will go nowhere.

C-C had nothing more to say to the man; but Doug, thoroughly disgusted with C-C and yet unable to be mad at her, was curious about one more thing and broke the silence.

"So, what are you going to do now? Any plans?" He prayed she had none. He wanted her back in her car and under that overpass forever.

"In fact, I do have plans," she answered with pride. "After I graduate tomorrow, I'm heading north. I just got word last week that I was accepted to the position at that children's psychiatric center you wrote that wonderful recommendation for. Thank you. How can I ever repay you? Oops, I'm sorry. I have repaid you, many times over."

C-C finished adjusting her attire and went to the closet for her coat. Doug remained standing in the bedroom, naked and feeling useless. He looked at C-C, his eyes filled with both dread and desire.

"I always thought you were the best lover I ever had." His persistent and idealistic hopes made him utter this last comment which he felt, if he were extremely fortunate, might bring her back to him; but he knew the statement was silly when he heard himself say it.

Not likely, he thought, trying to reassert some rationality into his psyche to avoid debasing himself anymore.

"Thank you again. That's so sweet of you," she cooed, taunting him. "My acting skills paid off." Then her voice turned harsh. "But that's hardly a complement coming from you. I was probably your only lover. And if I may comment on your abilities, though I may be a bit prejudiced — being a lesbian and all that, I always felt you were a lousy lover."

She headed to the front door, in no great hurry, and with an air of complete confidence and superiority. Doug followed her like a puppy dog. He became desperate.

"I love you," he said, chastising himself in the process, but he couldn't stop. "I'll always love you."

"Stop acting like a pathetic little fool and have a little dignity," she said firmly. "It's over. And as soon as I walk out this door, you'll hate me. But don't worry. It's okay to hate me. I won't mind, because I won't care one iota about what you think ever again."

On the verge of tears, his dignity and rationality useless to him, he pleaded for mercy.

"You ruined everything! My life, my plans — everything is shattered."

Opening the door and letting the stale and musty hallway air rush in, she quipped condescendingly. "Not really. Maybe, if you're real nice, you can convince your wife to re-marry you. Just tell her that the tramp which broke up your marriage left you. You're pathetic enough that she just might feel sorry for you." Then she chuckled. "Not!" She proceeded out that door.

"But C-C, I can still forgive you."

She stopped, turned around, and spat in his face. "I'm sorry, but it's not C-C anymore. It's Doctor Cecelia Macy — to you. So get a f— clue."

She strode down the hallway towards the stairs as Doug called after her. She never turned around. If she did, he would have seen her smiling from ear to ear.

Fourteen

The session ended. Doctor Macy, disappointed slightly, closed her note pad. There wasn't much else to add to her report that wasn't already in the others she received when Jesse arrived. She had learned nothing new or different, and she was stumped. She contemplated a new round of drug therapy, but that option seemed senseless considering that the previous reports described of an litany of failures using drugs. Hypnosis? Regression therapy? Aversion therapy? Shock therapy? Dr. Macy's mind ran down a list of possible next steps in her treatment of Jesse but couldn't decide on one at the moment.

She rose stiffly from her chair — her muscles tight from sitting so long — arched and cracked her back. She looked across the carpet trying to remember where she had dropped her pen; so caught up was she in his previous tale that she had given up on writing notes and had let the pen roll off her pad. Then, Jesse asked her a question that made her pause.

"Would you like to speak to Feszj?" he asked.

Doctor Macy's heart skipped a beat. Her head snapped around; in a wink, her eyes went from scouring the floor to staring at Jesse. She thought deeply for a moment. Although ready to end the session for the day and head out for lunch, she licked her lips instead and slowly turned the rest of her body around considering the possibility.

"He would? That's odd." She reached down to the carpet to pick up her pen she just stepped on. "The other psychologists's reports never mentioned talking with Feszj."

"That's because he didn't."

"Why?"

"He discerned no passion in the other doctors to want to engage in a discussion on the merits of cooperation and the evils of competition."

"And Feszj sees interest in me?"

Yes, he does."

"Why?" Slightly flattered, Dr. Macy assumed Jesse, through his imaginary persona, was making a pass at her.

"I'm not quite sure, but he would like the opportunity to speak to you. He is willing to answer any of your questions."

It is many times considered taboo in the profession to indulge a patient's schizophrenia. For some reason, however, this time Dr. Macy couldn't resist. Was it because the case was so interesting? She wasn't sure; she has had other interesting cases. Was it because this was a new development in Jesse's condition? Probably. In any case, the urge was powerful; something was egging her on to agree. In fact, for a brief moment, she forgot that Feszj didn't really exist.

"Sure, I'll speak to him. Maybe I can tie together some loose ends."

Jesse nodded, and with a deep breath, closed his eyes and settled back in the sofa. Shortly, with Doctor Macy looking on in wonder, his limbs jerked subtly for a few seconds. Then, Jesse opened his eyes, and the transformation was over. Again, Doctor Macy was disappointed; she expected more, yet what she received was so anti-climactic.

But there were obvious changes in his facial expression and idiosyncratic gestures. Jesse sat differently; he seemed less confrontational in stance, more accommodating and relaxed. His muscle tone lost its tension. His breathing slowed. Even his eyes gazed at her with a sense of affection that wasn't there before. Still ...

"That was hardly the dramatic conversion I had expected based on your past descriptions," she remarked.

"Yes, it is much smoother now."

"So, may I presume I am presently talking to ... Feszj?"

"Yes, I am Feszj. It is a pleasure to finally have an opportunity to talk with you."

"Yes, the same here," she replied, feeling awkward.

Then, unexpectedly, Doctor Macy just sat there in her chair and said nothing more. She was not prepared for this impromptu opportunity. She figured she would have numerous questions to ask initially, but she had not planned this far ahead in the brief time to consider the offer.

The discomforting quiet continued. Unaccustomed to indulging her patient's fantasies, she contemplated her options, unsure how to approach this situation. Does she satisfy her curiosity and find out how elaborate Jesse's imagination is by weaving through all the details? Or does she try to establish a systematic return to normalcy, albeit through an unorthodox back door approach.

"Cecelia?"

The doctor shook herself from her quandary, glad that Jesse ended the silence.

"Yes?"

"Is there something troubling you? You seem suddenly speechless."

"No, I'm fine, Jesse."

"Feszj."

"Oh, sorry." *This was probably a bad idea.*

"That's all right. I am sure it is very confusing to you. Having spoken to Jesse for so long, it must seem disconcerting to hear his voice but know someone else is talking."

"I guess." She wanted to remain noncommittal until she can assess Jesse's psychological status. At this time, her best guess was that he was channeling — in other words, controlled schizophrenia — but it was still too early for an accurate diagnosis.

"Dr. Macy," began Feszj, "I asked Jesse to permit me this opportunity to talk to you. As you must by now realize, his continued stay in this hospital is hindering the enlightening of your society to the ills of competition. I am here to ask you personally to allow Jesse to leave so we can continue our endeavors."

Presumptuous alter-ego, thought Dr. Macy. But, for the moment, she played along.

"And what will he be doing once on his own again?"

"Anything he can. Write letters, sign petitions, start petitions, join groups, get others to join groups, go to where he can help, aid victims, ease suffering. The worst thing he, or you, or anyone can do is do nothing."

"It seems an overly daunting task for just one person."

"For one person, yes," replied Feszj. "there is little you can accomplish. But he will not be alone for long. Together with some friends, some other community members, and some other organizations, a lot can be accomplished on many fronts. After all, ideally, if Jesse just taught one person the pure benefits of cooperation and the pure evils of competition on the first day, and on the second day these two people taught another one each, and on the third day, these four taught another one each, in little more than a month, the entire population of the world would be cooperating."

"Idealistic, in the least." Dr. Macy smiled at the simplistic possibility. "Besides, isn't that what our governments are for?"

"Unfortunately, now it is. People created government, in the beginning, to force people under its power to do certain things. Government, by its very nature, is a coercive entity. However, common sense philosophy caught up with this reality, and now government provides a way for the population to abdicate its responsibility to take care of itself, and protect themselves from the memory and concern of society's refuse. The state takes care of the poor, the state takes care of education, the state takes care of the weak, the hungry, the expendable — even businesses. People think government gets in their way by

its insistence on taxes and regulations, but they should be thankful. Governments allow people to be as selfish, as single-minded, as closed-minded as they wish. The poor and the miserable can be forgotten about because the government will take care of them. Once forgotten, the rest of the population can go on with their acquisitions and their competitions."

Doctor Macy licked her lips. The rhetorical ability of Jesse's alter-personality was more than she had assumed. It may be more than she can handle.

"Is this what you had in mind for Jesse?" she said. "Was he going to take on city hall? Change the world one person at a time?"

"Of course, changing the world probably will not happen that quickly," continued Feszj. "But you can see how fast such changes can occur, and could occur if Jesse were only allowed to continue unhindered. You, Cecelia, have nothing to lose, and everything to gain."

"Jes—, Feszj," she said, correcting herself, "you must realize that I have only limited ability to release Jesse. He was institutionalized by his parents, and unless I can demonstrate that his mental illness is eliminated, or at least controlled, I would be remiss in my obligations as Jesse's therapist."

"But he has no mental illness," objected Feszj. "It is you and your society which has ascribed one to him."

"Is that so?" Dr. Macy sat amused.

"Has not Jesse already mentioned that? Have you not been taking notes?"

"I'm sorry, but my hands are tied."

"Your hands," said Feszj, "are yours to do with what you wish. Yet I am incredulous that you would jeopardize your world's betterment — a process that could proceed with just your signature — simply because you might give the impression you made a mistake. Psychologists have made mistakes in the past. You aren't the first, and you certainly won't be the last. Your career will hardly be affected, but your society and global community will be forever indebted to you."

"And how should I go about explaining away your existence, Feszj?" Dr. Macy asked.

"You need not have to explain anything away. I exist. I know it. Jesse knows it. And hopefully now, you know it."

"Simply because Jesse hears voices proves nothing of your existence."

"You have me at a disadvantage, Cecelia. How am I to prove my existence to you? Perhaps I could answer some questions about Terah and our small community of Vilmar? Or perhaps you would like me to clear up certain incidents during the past few months of

Jesse's life? But for some reason, I don't think my answers to even these questions would allay your doubts about my existence."

It was the second time Jesse called her by her first name. Dr. Macy didn't remember mentioning her first name to Jesse. Wanting to maintain the aura of professionalism necessary to encourage and induce certain behavioral changes, she is usually very careful about not mentioning it. So how did he know? She figured she must have let it slip at some point during the interviews. *It's not important at this juncture in the therapy anyway*, she rationalized.

"Perhaps not," replied Dr. Macy. "But we can certainly find out."

"Fair enough."

Doctor Macy re-opened her note pad, clicked her pen into action, and began taking notes as she asked her questions.

"Let's begin," she started, "by re-examining and clearing up some of the unexplained incidents in Jesse's life. Like the first time he became dizzy on the baseball diamond. Do you know what happened then?"

"It took a little time for Jesse's psyche to respond to the call from Terah."

"But why Jesse?"

Feszj smiled. "Why not Jesse?" he questioned back.

"Well," Doctor Macy replied, "if you really wanted to change the world, don't you think that a thirteen year old boy is an odd place to start? One would think you would have tried to convince the President or some other world leader?"

"One would think that, but would it have made that much difference?" Feszj re-adjusted himself in the couch. "After all, every person in your society and on your world has contingent and institutionalized forces bearing down on them at all times, constantly influencing their every thought and action. If we contacted the President, he would have had little success changing the global push for cooperation. He would have been voted out of office because of his unpopular decisions, or because he was unfit for office — having been found insane. The same exact thing you are doing to Jesse. Somehow, the President would be prevented from expressing the message.

"Consequently, it really makes little difference who we contact and talk to and present our world to. Everyone is equally constrained by innumerable forces. However, because of the universality of these constraints, everyone is equally capable of breaking out of the competitive mold to begin teaching cooperation and commence the changing of your world. It all depends on luck. This time good luck was not on our side."

"But, if it make no difference with whom you talk, why did you choose Jesse?"

"We didn't. He was the most sensitive of all those who responded to our psychic search. Again, it was simply a matter of luck."

Doctor Macy considered her next question. Perhaps, though it was a long shot, she could eliminate the alter-ego from the inside; convince it to leave on its own. "Did it not occur to you," she said, "that Jesse may not have wanted to be a part of all this? Don't you think you ought to have asked permission before inhabiting his body?"

"Cecelia," said Feszj, "if you will recall your previous sessions with Jesse, you will realize that at every step of our journey, Jesse had the option to leave. But he choose not to. We would like to think it is because we offered Jesse something your world could not. We provided unconditional friendship, opportunities to explore his own abilities and capacity to learn and grow, and an environment in which to do so safely. I sincerely doubt there is any place on your world which offers as much."

"Is that offer still available to Jesse?"

"Of course. But he understands that we have more to do. Our journey has just begun."

Doctor Macy quipped to herself that the journey is pretty much over, at least while he is in the hospital.

"What makes you think a 13 year old will have the political clout and personal influence to change the world?"

"As I said before," said Feszj, "he won't be alone, nor will he be doing all the activities by himself. It will just take time. Whether or not you have time is another question."

"What do you mean by that?" Doctor Macy felt insulted. Jesse's comment just sounded as if it were an insult. But she wasn't sure why she should feel slighted.

"Taking time is something your society is finding more and more inconvenient. But it isn't your fault. Your corporations, in their never-ending search for profit, and your media, in their never-ending search for marketable news stories, have converted the ordinary into the extraordinary and have made minor technological improvements seem like major advancements. Like going from picture tube televisions to flat screen televisions. From analog modems to ISDNs.

"Or how about from copper wires to fiber optics? From the telegraph to the telephone? These may seem like major advancements, but are these inventions really that monumental? Or are they simply incremental movements within a much more grand scale? After all, ever since the introduction of moveable type in Europe in the fifteenth century, books have pretty much stayed the same. That's over five hundred years with hardly a major advance. Or the introduction of gun powder which revolutionized warfare. Now, people can be

killed cheaply. Trained archers were expensive. Firing a gun was easy. As time passed, the only changes that occurred in war are the increasing distances people could remain apart, the size of the explosions, and the ease at which death can be delivered.

"Looking at change from these grand scales, Cecelia, not much really has changed."

Doctor Macy scratched an itch on the back of her neck. She gave cursory attention to Jesse's statement; for another, more potent, question brewed in her head. She waited politely until Jesse completed his thought. Then she transitioned away from this line of inquiry.

"I'm glad you have time on your side, Feszj. However, isn't time your greatest threat?"

"In what way?" asked Feszj.

"Well, trying to achieve this utopian dream on Earth may be elusive to the point of impossibility."

Feszj's eyes peered intently at Cecelia. He leaned forward placing his elbows in his knees.

"How so?" he asked, his voice inflecting curiosity.

"Well," Doctor Macy went on, "you have this vision of utopia, and you construct your solution configuration of it based on the environment you wish to alter. But by the time you're putting your principles into practice, society has changes, evolved if you will, and you will have to construct a new utopian scenario solution. However, by the time you have finished that, society has evolved once again and your solution is obsolete. You'll never catch up."

Feszj sat back in the sofa, and smiled. "Zeno's paradox."

Doctor Macy cocked her head. "Do you really think that applies in this case?"

"Of course. Think about it. Zeno imagined a race between Achilles and a turtle. Zeno claimed that, if given a head start, the turtle will win all races of all lengths all the time. How?"

"I'm familiar with the story," said Doctor Macy. "When Achilles reaches the turtle's starting point, the turtle has moved ahead a certain distance. When Achilles reaches the second point where the turtle was, the turtle again has moved ahead just a little more. The theory is that Achilles will never be able to pass the turtle to win any race, because Achilles must first catch up to the turtle. And since the turtle is always moving, there will always be some distance between him and the turtle he has to make up before passing the turtle."

"That's right," said Feszj. "And you are claiming very much the same thing in your objection — your society represents the turtle and we represent Achilles. Yet, despite the

paradox, Achilles passes the turtle all the time. Why? This is where quantum physics comes in to play."

Doctor Macy coughed. "Are you sure we really need *that*?"

"What we have," continued Feszj, "is a geometric series made up of an infinite number of terms constructed with infinitely decreasing amounts — in this case, the distances between Achilles and the turtle. However, what Zeno didn't consider was the relationship between the distance covered and the time it took to cover the distance — a constant. Consequently, as the distances shrank dramatically, its relation to time increased exponentially — to the point when the smallest moment of time, the smallest particle of time, is greater than the time it takes a distance to be travelled. It is at that point — the limit point, to mathematicians — where and when Achilles passes the turtle."

Doctor Macy knew what was coming next, as Feszj slowed his pace and emphasized his next words. "It is also at that limit point when utopian theory will catch up to reality — if only people would give it a chance, and not so flippantly write it off as being an impossibility."

Doctor Macy felt she was unfairly chastised, in spite of the fact that she thought of herself as one of those who believed the cooperative enterprise is impossible. Her argument was, however, quickly and effectively handled, which made her cautious and unsure of how to proceed.

"Okay," she began, stalling for time as she drew from deep down in her past studies. She rummaged through half-forgotten snippets of social theory, sociology, and history, uttered by faceless instructors and nameless graduate students, in hopes of finding reasonable objections. Yet it was a challenge she surprisingly relished.

"What happens," she continued, "until we get to utopia? Is it a straight line process, where all we have to do is to change one institution at a time? Or is it more unpredictable? For example, when we change the environment to increase the population of one species of animal, another species may die out. Consequently, when we start making institutions cooperative, won't we make other institutions more competitive? Or other nations may start to see us as an easily defeated adversary now? You yourself has suggested that cooperation cannot compete against competitive forces. It seems to me that cooperation must be an all or nothing event. Considering the contingencies of our situation, there can only be a second-best cooperative solution."

Feszj nodded his head. "Yes, you are quite right. Progress towards an all cooperative world cannot be linear. It involves all sorts of twists and turns, and fraught with many perils. But progress towards our goal we must. As I have shown, the inevitable utopian

society is not impossible if only more people get involved and never stop working at it. Remember, we aren't trying to change the institutions first. We need to change the philosophical underpinnings of competition. Once that happens, competitive institutions lose their legitimacy and weaken. And perhaps the best place to begin this process of institutional change is with the notion of private homes.

"When people come to learn that private housing is an extremely inefficient use of resources — wasting time, money, natural resources, and sacrificing community and interpersonal skills — people will increasingly turn to co-habitation and multi-family homes. When families pool their incomes and resources, they can afford larger and fewer better built homes. This shift away from single-family dwellings will naturally decrease the demand on heavy industrial output, as people start sharing lawn mowers, vacuum cleaners, pots, pans, televisions, et cetera. It will decrease resource depletion and pollution levels, but granted some people will be laid-off. Yet even though many people will have to leave their former jobs, not all industry will collapse. Increased social and community needs, for example, will drive technological advances towards renewable and cheaper energy sources — solar power and the like — and reallocating employees from one industry to another, more social conscious ones.

"As more and more individuals join each other in the creation of new co-habitation centers, these centers, too, will join together and grow into communities. Eventually, as these cooperatives expand in size, they will eventually develop internally sustainable economies. The free market economy will be broken down and replaced with a new system stressing the free exchange of goods across communities. This communitarian philosophy will lead to a subsequent decrease in crime, and the role of a centralized federal government will shrivel."

Feszj paused. He noticed the frown of deep thought on Cecelia's face. "Shall I continue?" he asked

She was deep in thought and irked by his insinuation that her comments were flippant. She considered rejecting Jesse's replies by stressing the prohibitive amount of time that would be necessary before reaching that point, but she surmised that Jesse would simply say that it is this constant state of being in a hurry, of instant gratification, of individualism, of competition, and of selfishness which dooms utopian projects. *Essentially, if I can't have it today, he would say, voicing the thoughts of some an abstract person, no one can have it in the future.* For some reason, that began sounding more and more true to her. Most people cannot conceive of waiting more than a week, much less lifetimes.

"I'm sorry. Did I offend you, Cecelia?" said Feszj.

How did he know? she asked herself. *Probably my face gave it away. Jesse is extremely sensitive and perceptive.*

"Well, it's not that I feel offended—," she began diplomatically.

Feszj interrupted. "You needn't have to explain. I understand and appreciate your perspective. Many people need to find fault with utopias."

"Now why's that?" She tried to be open-minded, but Jesse's frank comments annoyed her more and more.

"Because in your society, when someone finds fault in something, that person can now feel comfortable ignoring it."

"But why ignore utopia?"

"Because effective and successful utopias require people to give up individualism for the sake of community, give up prejudices for the sake of compassion, give up competition for the sake of cooperation. People must give up everything that made them what they are, so they can become what they ought to be."

The discussion moved too fast in directions Doctor Macy was unprepared to follow. Realizing her authority in the doctor-patient relationship was in jeopardy, she attempted to re-focus the conversation.

"Well, um, Feszj," said Dr. Macy, "I appreciate your opinion on the subject of competition and coop—."

"Opinion?" interrupted Feszj. In fact, he almost sounded angry. Doctor Macy made a mental note of that. "I take great umbrage at the notion that thousands of philosophical, educational, psychological, and sociological articles, papers, and research can still be regarded as mere opinion. If that represents your appraisal of research, you might as well consider it mere opinion the notion that the world is round."

"Jesse, there is no reason to be insulting—."

"Feszj. My name is Feszj. You are talking to Feszj." His voice strained to remain in control.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

Feszj sighed and visibly relaxed. "I am frustrated."

"By what?"

"By you."

"Me?"

"Of course. For hours, Jesse presented you with a description of our world. He laid out for you our views on cooperation and why competition is a tragedy to your world. Yet you still act as if none of that ever occurred. You sit in front of me so impassive and calm,

your tired eyes yearning for sleep and your growling stomach waiting for food, with a pencil in one hand and the future of Jesse's life in the other? Have years of competition truly eliminated all compassion from you?"

"Jesse, there is no need to be offensive." Jesse's comments evoked increased ire from Doctor Macy.

"I am further frustrated," Feszj continued, "by my inability to prove my existence, and by the apparent meaningless of what I say due to that inability. How do you live in this world? How do you remain so immune to all the suffering that occurs unremittingly all around you? How do you remain unencumbered by the misery inflicted upon millions of people, both near by and far away, every day?"

"We try not to think about it," Doctor Macy blurted out. Her irritation forced the words out before she could take them back.

Feszj paused, and then his stern face melted into a smile of appreciation. "Honesty."

"Jesse, I didn't mean it the way—." Feszj waved his hand at her to stop.

"No need to explain yourself," said Feszj. "It is good to be honest. But sometimes it has a bitter taste."

Doctor Macy still tried to explain her mistake. "That wasn't what I meant. It was a faux pas."

"If you say so."

Doctor Macy, beyond annoyance now, seethed at Jesse's cavalier rebuff. Feszj could tell.

"I'm sorry, Cecelia. I treat everything you say with the utmost respect. I made that glib reply to remind you of what it is like for a person and their words, words that are taken seriously enough to be spoken, to be treated as unimportant."

Doctor Macy was hardly placated. "You have no right to treat me in such a fashion. I've paid my dues. I've been through the humiliations and other people's contemptuous treatment; the last thing I'm going to do is put up with yours. And what have you done, Jesse? What hardships have you suffered to earn my respect?"

"Apparently," said Feszj, "being erroneously locked away in a mental institution does not classify as a hardship to you. Apparently being injected with a myriad collection of medications and feeling one's mind turn to mush, one's bowels turn to sludge, and one's gut wrench from nausea are insignificant life experiences." Doctor Macy sat back in the chair from the rebuke, looking away from Jesse towards a nondescript stain on her office wall behind the sofa. "It is truly disappointing that only a person who has suffered a life of 'paying dues' is eligible to talk to you as an equal. The very fact that he is a fellow human

being residing on your planet and living in your society ought to be adequate suffering to qualify."

Feszj stared at Doctor Macy, but she continued to stare at the mark on the wall and mused for a moment. *This was clearly not a good idea*, she thought. *Jesse has grown stronger all of a sudden though this Feszj persona*. She then turned her head and returned his gaze.

"You have made your point," she said, trying both to ameliorate the situation, and to cope with another humiliation. "You are an extremely strong-willed young man, as well as a powerful speaker."

"Thank you," said Feszj, the edge gone from his voice. He sat back into the couch. "But remember, the person talking to you now is Feszj, not Jesse."

She nodded, not wanting to verbally sanction the existence of Jesse's alter ego; although the damage was probably irrevocable by now. Still, there are more questions to clear up, and she might as well get as much information as she could before he was sent back to his room.

"Okay ... Feszj. You've explained the first incident. Perhaps you can explain the second incident — the episode in the bathroom."

"What occurred in the first attempt at contact similarly happened the second time. We were attempting to switch minds in order to assist the hapless student Jesse had just terrorized. However, we were only partially successful — gaining only partial motor control of his muscles and speech. That's why his eyes appeared glazed, his movements jerky, and his speech slurred."

"Seems straightforward enough." Doctor Macy hoped she didn't sound too uninterested. She was hungry and wanted to end this session. Jesse can wait. "Well, I think that about wraps up our time for today."

Feszj looked at her with a face twisted by confusion. "Cecelia," he said, "we just began talking to each other. Would you have it so quickly end?"

"Well ... " Doctor Macy pondered her next words, careful not to mention her hunger. "It is getting late, and I think you need some rest."

"Cecelia, you are still thinking of me as Jesse."

"Whatever. It has been a very arduous session for both of us. We can resume next week."

"But Cecelia, are you not at all curious about the world of Terah? Or about the community of Vilmar? Or even the future of your planet?"

"I don't think it would serve any purpose right now to go into such speculation." Doctor Macy's mouth salivated thinking about the lasagna at Alessandro's, a quaint Italian restaurant just off the grounds. "We can wait."

She got up from her chair and placed her note pad on the desk. As she walked past the couch, on her way to open the door and signal the orderly to escort her patient back to the ward, Feszj reached out and held her hand, causing her to stop. Instantly, she wanted to recoil; for even though Jesse clearly had her hand in his, it wasn't the touch of a teenager. He held her with a warmth and ardor only maturity possesses. There was a kindness and delicacy beyond his years in the gentle way he caressed the back of her hand.

She was neither in the mood nor the right orientation to appreciate such a sensation. She wanted to recoil; yet she didn't. She wasn't sure why, but she figured it was because doing so would disrupt the progress they had made, and the bond they had created. *But it was the end of the session. It doesn't make any difference now*, she thought. Yet her arm didn't flinch.

"All we are trying to do," said Feszj, feeling Cecelia's hand relax, "is return this world to its utopian origins. To try to rebuild the utopian societies that existed in your world's past."

The doctor stood still. She looked at Jesse; his eyes radiating uninhibited affection and yet absent of any sexual overtones, and teasing her with the fact that he knew something she didn't. It was a ploy, she assured herself, to keep her there and perpetuate the delusion, and went about dismissing it.

"Utopia never existed in our world. Not unless you're referring to the Garden of Eden. Or perhaps you're alluding to the myth of some Golden Age before the rise of Western Civilization? Or perhaps you're talking about some of the smaller communities which sprang up throughout history — all ending predictably in failure?"

"No," said Feszj, "not the smaller communities, not all of which have failed by the way. I am referring to the large societies of millions of people, not all of which are myths."

"Well, true, the belief in some Garden of Eden is believed by many religions, but—."

"No Garden of Eden," interjected Feszj, trying to get his point across. "I'm talking about real utopian societies that existed in the past, some as recently as the eighteenth century."

"What are you talking about?" Doctor Macy's hunger abated as her curiosity was piqued. She sat down on her chair, crossed her legs and leaned back, waiting to be enlightened.

"There were many cultures and civilizations on your world," said Feszj, hiding his delight, "which flourished long before history could immortalize them. All you have left are fragments and ruins and legends which tantalize and perplex. I described to Jesse some of the Pre-Columbian civilizations and what they accomplished long before Europeans and their hubris could lay claim to them as their own achievements. I told Jesse about how these ancient physicians performed complicated operations like amputations, excisions, brain surgery, and even bone transplants with surprising success. Their metallurgists understood smelting, welding, and soldering. Their feats of civil engineering were demonstrated by their intricately planned cities, which included irrigation canals, terraces, as well as an organized street grid. Because of such careful design, they were able to build a city of eleven square miles — a size unmatched anywhere in the Western world until the nineteenth century.

"You may wonder how this was accomplished. Simply put, they, unlike your European ancestors, were not distracted or had resources drained from scientific and social development by competitive yearnings like conquest and domination. The Pre-Columbians did not engage in warfare. They did not have a wealthy or rich upper class. They possessed no slaves. And most surprisingly to contemporary societies, they did not use money at all. The only way such a confluence of conditions could have existed is with a population which understood that property and resources must be shared communally. This required hundreds of thousands of people committed to the tripartite ideas of cooperation, community, and compassion."

"That's very interesting," said Doctor Macy, unimpressed. "But if they were so wonderful, what happened to them?"

"As the last ice age came and went, climates changed and rain patterns shifted, which made it difficult to maintain the agrarian needs of such large populations. The old beliefs and old religions couldn't bring back the nurturing showers. Inevitably, the citizens left the community in all different directions in search of greener pastures. In just a few short decades, what was once a thriving civilization disappeared into oblivion.

"But our story doesn't end there. These ancient utopians travelled and eventually settled in the more stable and life sustaining climate of North America. They and the indigenous people already populating the land recreated the utopian promise of these lost cultures. And though many of the technological advances from these cultures were forgotten, the ability to cooperate, to be compassionate, and to live communally were not.

"Reaching populations of over twenty million, the Native American population flourished in North America. That is, until the Europeans arrived, with their warfare, and

guns, and arrogance ... and diseases. So disastrous were these diseases that during the time between the first Spaniard setting foot in the West Indies and the time when English settlers first landed on the east coast of North America, upwards of ninety percent of the Native American population had been eliminated.

"Yet despite the tragedy, one could still find pockets of utopia as late as the eighteenth century. Benjamin Franklin himself stated that 'no European who has tasted Savage Life can afterwards bear to live in our societies.' What was so enticing about the Native American lifestyle? Again, according to Ben Franklin, there were no prisons, there was no police, no corporal punishment. Government was by a counsel made up of the eldest and wisest of the natives in the tribe. American colonists ran away to join the Native American civilization which welcomed these disgruntled colonists in such numbers that many colonies made it a crime to defect — some on penalty of death.

"What tragic irony. Many of your original colonists came to the North American shores to acquire freedoms not available in the old world, only to have those freedoms stifled once again. This in spite of the fact that many frontiersmen who grew up and lived with Native Americans, like Daniel Boone, became heroes.

"But perhaps the greatest failure of all was the complete disinterest the early American leadership showed towards Native American societal methods. They knew the colonists were much happier in the tribes than in the towns. It would have made sense to figure out why and adjust town life accordingly. But, of course, that didn't happen. People were forced to stay in the towns and the natives were decimated — first by disease, then by colonialist expansion and a thirst for conquest.

"It is a behavior reminiscent of some of your other totalitarian regimes. But, alas, what many citizens in your society fail to realize is that all governments can become totalitarian; all they need to possess is the power to rule."

"Might makes right?" scoffed Doctor Macy. "Isn't that a bit cynical?"

"Is it? Look around and you know it is true. Political might. Economic might. Military might. They are all the dominant forces in your world. That is because they see the world as a competitive playing field, where winning and losing are the only choices."

"You're overgeneralizing."

"Look at yourself. You are a lesbian, but you are unable to tell your colleagues of your orientation for fear that you might lose your job and your career. In some places, one can still be arrested for being a homosexual. Here we have police might, guided by political might, forcing people to not only behave but think only a certain way. What these forces are telling you in no uncertain terms, is that if you value any sense of bodily freedom, the

law is the only morality you need to know. Thinking independently will only get you in trouble."

"Sounds like Orwell."

"Exactly. For Orwell was not describing the future."

"Yes, but—." Then it struck her. Jesse knew that she was gay. *How did he know? I had been so careful in keeping my orientation a secret from the staff and especially the patients that—.* Then she mentally kicked herself in her head. She had just proved Jesse's point. *Because of all the coercive powers around me, I am not free to think and be who I am.* And even though she placed the question aside, her subconscious still mulled over how he knew of her lesbianism.

Feszj watched her with curiosity. "Care to share your thoughts, Cecelia?"

Should I tell him he's right? she considered. No, I'll wait. But hell, how does he know all this stuff? She changed the subject.

"You may be correct in the coercive nature of power in other countries," said Doctor Macy, "but in the United States and other countries, there is a justice system designed to maintain the fairness and equality of interactions between all members of society. Surely that helps curb and deflect the notion of might makes right."

"That is an odd statement," said Feszj, "coming from an competitor like yourself — someone who believes in the necessity of winning and losing to spur social and human development. The whole notion of fairness and equality undermines that contention."

"How so?" Doctor Macy asked with curt sharpness. "All fair competitions are regulated by rules and penalties, and are overseen by judges and referees. The whole point, at least of sports competitions, is to guarantee a level playing field for all to participate equally."

"Yes, a competitor would say that, but what is really equal? Just the environment? Hardly. What competition does is make environments *and its participants* as equal as possible."

Doctor Macy squinted in confusions. "But, of course. That's what I said."

"Not really," replied Feszj. "You see Cecelia, though athletes may come from different parts of the world, they all look relatively the same while competing in the activity for which they have been conditioned. They all train in similar fashion, follow similar coaching methods, eat similar diets, obey similar rules, wear similar clothing, and use similar apparatus. These competitive athletes become mirror images of each other, with only the most superficial of differences to mark their individuality."

Doctor Macy's head winced at that last comment. "Wait a minute. Before, you complained bitterly in our sessions that our society stresses individuality too much; and now here you are complaining that sports removes individuality." The doctor chuckled. "You really should be more consistent."

Doctor Macy was amused, but Jesse showed no response. "Winners and losers," said Feszj, "distinguish themselves in competition often with only the slightest of margins — perhaps one-hundredth of a point. Because athletes are so similar on all counts except for the margin of victory, this littlest difference must be touted as a mark of the greatest significance. This is done to convince you, the spectator, that these athletes are distinct individual entities — winning entities and losing entities. This is how your society manages to save the notion of individuality from the uniformity engendered by competition; and how it uses individuality to mask a world of uniformity."

"Hold it," said Doctor Macy. "I still don't quite understand. What is the difference between your version of uniformity and our version?"

"The difficulty you are experiencing, Cecelia, is from confusing conformity with uniformity. Conformity values values; uniformity values results. Granted, our culture defines for our population the general values under which they live. However, there is infinite variety with which they are permitted to go about their lives within these cultural values, and an infinite variety of accomplishments and goals that can be pursued.

"On the other hand, your society allows its citizens to determine for themselves the values by which they will live. However, to maintain order in the midst of such value relativism, your society itself must determine what is valuable and desirable, thus directing the behaviors of your citizens away from moral chaos to inevitably uniform accomplishments and achievements. The quest for results stabilizes a citizenry lacking in conforming values by locking them into behaving in predictable ways as they pursue very similar things using very similar methods.

"And though we may not have as many luxurious trinkets and objects as you have, we have a peaceful society filled with people who enjoy living. We conform to the values of cooperation and compassion; and this conformity leads to lives abundant with variety. Unlike your world, where competitive-based pseudo-individuality leads directly to uniformity and the resulting social ennui."

"Our world opted for a personal search for values," was Doctor Macy's haughty reply. "We believe it to be a more liberating approach, considering that dictating values is antithetical to free-thinking individuals."

"It is hardly liberating," objected Feszj. "For in order to squelch the endless competitive clashes over what are the best values to follow, your society must redirect people away from their value differences to results uniformity. There is no liberty or free-thinking; for as I said, to maintain the integrity and social stability of the society, you must yearn for the same things and trod the same path to getting them as everyone else. Uniformity is your only way of maintaining social peace."

Flustered, Doctor Macy fumbled for a response, but couldn't think fast enough. Feszj continued.

"Of course, this is not to say that there are not people in your world who respect the same values we do; these persons are much more plentiful than you might imagine. People throughout the world have always and will always imagine futures without wars, without famine, without humiliation. They imagine societies with people cooperating for the good of all, compassionate to the pains and sufferings of fellow human beings, and which believe in the sanctity of community life."

"Utopians," grumbled a doubting Doctor Macy.

"Hardly utopian. This is exactly what you and millions just like you constantly hear from political leaders, economic pundits, spiritual advisors, and everyone else placed upon a platform to proclaim the message of peace, love, and brotherhood. Yet your leaders, as well as your society's philosophical underpinning, expects too much from their citizens when on the one hand they want people working together in harmony, and yet on the other structure institutions like sports, economics, and education to teach exactly the opposite. It's almost as if your society has created a hazing system, and somehow testing the resilience of your population's innate humanity by resisting it every day of their lives. Is it no wonder why children are so confused, being exposed to a plethora of mixed signals, mixed values? Your society offers no moral consistency or value stability and the resulting death, destruction, mayhem, and madness is the high price it pays.

Incensed, Doctor Macy moved to a different tactic; rather than defending her society, she would attack his.

"Well, what about your world?" she shot back. "With it's single value system, what do you do with people who reject it?"

"Why should they? Who would reject a world where peace reigns? Where people have the ability and the facilities to challenge their minds and their bodies, while simultaneously helping others do the same thing? You see, Cecelia, people reject what they do not understand, but the members of our community fully understand what they are doing and why. There are no secrets in our world."

"It is this society," said an angry Doctor Macy, retaliating in almost a reactionary fashion, to her society's ridicule, "which allows people like you to express themselves."

"And yet Jesse is in here because he was expressing himself."

Once again, Feszj has demonstrated an inconsistency. And once again, Doctor Macy was taken off-guard and placed on the defensive.

"You are here, Jesse, because you are hearing voices." Feszj continued.

"Jesse is here," Feszj replied, "because what he heard was not what you wanted him to hear."

"Well, I can see this is getting us nowhere." She started to stand up.

"Please, Cecelia," said Feszj, reaching for her hand once again. This time she jerked it back. Jesse's face changed into disappointment as Feszj pulled back an empty hand. "I am enjoying our conversation very much."

"That's because you're winning," said Doctor Macy. She was irritated, but she sat down anyway and folded her arms across her chest.

"I'm not trying to win anything," said Feszj. "I am presenting our position of cooperation. We don't win anything if you become convinced of our argument. After all, it is your world which moves one step closer to paradise. On the other hand, if you are not convinced, you and your world remain unchanged, and so does ours. We gain or lose nothing by your decision. However, you have everything to gain and everything to lose by your decision. Therefore, think carefully and deeply on what Jesse and I say. You have a great deal at stake."

"Well, it sure sounds like you're trying to win the argument."

Feszj sighed and nodded in understanding. "It is the nature of the beast that we on Terah face. Your institutions, so predominantly infused with the vocabulary of competition, control the language of debate and determine the rules of engagement. Even the notion of debating is a competitive one. Now, we could ignore your vocabulary and try to present our views in a different language, but it would naturally sound nonsensical to you and you would thus immediately cease listening. Consequently, for the need to present an comprehensible position, we must use your vocabulary to present our world view. Yet because of that, we must submit to your control of the language, thereby forcing us to make our points that much stronger, and leave no reply or rebuttal unanswered, for it to receive equal priority and merit when placed in juxtaposition to your views."

Cecelia calmed herself. Now, she understood why Jesse's comments were so strident; but this made her wonder. Had she been listening, really listening, to what Jesse had said

about competition and cooperation? Or had her well-learned pro-competitive views blocked her from being objective, or at the very least, open-minded? *Almost certainly*, she thought.

"Okay ... Feszj. I can see your point. I've been to conferences myself where unpopular viewpoints were ridiculed and riddled with objections. Other times, I've seen papers so poorly received, no one asked any questions of the presenter. 'Why encourage them?' they would tell me."

"Yes," said Feszj. "And it's not so much the possibility that the arguments or presentations were poor or ineffectual in themselves. It is mostly because the presentations were poor and ineffectual when trying to fit into another's worldview. Worldviews are cherished, and are not lightly, or easily, replaced. Competition is one of the most cherished and, therefore, most difficult worldview to address and supplant. But still, we must try."

"But what about your language?" asked the doctor. "During the sessions, I've noticed you have never mentioned the word 'work' when describing your activities. Don't you work in your world?"

"We have the word 'work,' but it carries the unpleasant connotation of coerced and forced behavior. It is a very offensive word in our society."

"But surely you don't play all the time either," countered Doctor Macy.

"Why not?" asked Feszj. Doctor Macy, not anticipating this response, sat speechless, her mouth open waiting for words that never materialized.

"Let me explain," said Feszj, sensing her confusion. "The need for play is something inherent and innate in all humans — in all mammals for that matter. You see, unlike reptiles whose offspring must fend for themselves at the moment of birth, mammals, due to some fortuitous quirk of evolution, need time to wean. However, this need requires mammals to be in close quarters with nearly a dozen siblings, creating tremendous psychological strain. In response to this need, evolution provided an additional part in the mammalian brain that is not in the reptilian — a part of the limbic system called the thalamocingulate division — the part of the brain also associated with the rise in an activity peculiar to mammals — play. It seems clear from the evidence that the play instinct evolved as the need to tolerate groups of people in close quarters arose.

"Unfortunately, as your society's humans pursue avenues less associated with play, and more with work, the ability to tolerate close association with people breaks down, and violence or apathy results. We need to play; all humans need to play. It is how we associate, accept, and get along with other people. Giving people less time to play in order

to accommodate the psychological tribulations of a growing population assures that the society will, in the long run, crack from the strain. It is only a matter of time."

"But that doesn't make any sense," said Doctor Macy. Jesse cocked his head. "Sports has been on a tremendous rise in the last few years. It should follow, if you're correct, that society is becoming more tolerant and compassionate — which doesn't seem to be happening?"

"You absolutely right," said Feszj, with a large grin. "That is because sports are too much like work to have any effect on the level of play in society."

"Now, how's that?" questioned the doctor. She leaned back in her seat and crossed her legs.

"There are so many ways in which contemporary sports, a product of the industrial revolution, and work are alike. First of all, the sports you are familiar with are a relatively recent phenomena. They did not exist before the Industrial Revolution; and sports professionalism didn't really gain respectability until after your Civil War. And this link is crucial, for it was the work mentality of the Industrial Revolution which permitted and then thoroughly infected sports through the following centuries."

"But I still don't see how sports and work are linked?" Doctor Macy reminded Jesse.

"Well, first and foremost, all sports is based on competition, with its emphasis on productivity and the supposition that winning is an unquestioned end. An athlete is constantly in the process of making things that the sport demands, whether it be records, goals, times, points, et cetera. You have no say in this; it is your boss, and in order to play the sport, you must do as you are told.

"And in order to get the amount of social control necessary for the athlete to push him- or herself to constantly pursue high levels of productivity, a division of labor exists. You have athletes, the proletariat; and you have the coaches, middle management; and you have the owners, the bourgeoisie. In classical Marxist terms though, the division is much harsher. The owners remain the bourgeoisie, but now the coaches become the proletariat. No more middle management."

"So, where does that athlete fit in?" asked Doctor Macy.

"They are the product your society consumes for its entertainment. In the same way you buy movie videos, or pianos, or computers, athletes are the product you are purchasing for your entertainment. The athlete has become commodified. The athlete has a use-value, which means he or she satisfies a social need. But the athlete also has an exchange value, in which this social need has a price that the athlete is willing to accept in exchange for his or her use-value. The problem with professional sports is that once the

exchange-value takes precedence over the use-value, extrinsic motivation *becomes* internal motivation. The athlete is working for a living."

"But this is just professional athletes," objected Doctor Macy. "The general sporting public isn't commodified."

"Aren't they? Even you Little Leaguers are commodified to varying degrees. They have use value in that they entertain spectators; and they are paid in the form of trophies, banquets, awards, scholarships, and more. Of course, those who do not get paid for their services quickly drop out; you don't work unless you are paid. Isn't that right, Cecelia?" She nodded slightly. "Furthermore, there is another level of labor division into which the athletes themselves are placed. Every team sport has specified players for specified positions. This intense level of specialization and rationalization of production mimics exactly the roles workers play on assembly lines or in corporate offices. "All of these aspects of sport combined could easily explain why over ninety percent of children who begin playing sports in elementary school stop playing sports by the time they get to college.

"A ninety percent turnover rate," Feszj re-emphasized. "And this is the institution that somehow benefits your society?"

"Hmm." Humbled, Doctor Macy quietly digested what Feszj said. The notion that sports are more like work is now clear and easy for her to understand; even more so as she thinks back to the many years playing basketball. She remembered the sweaty practices, brilliant and miserable games, and the long grueling tournaments. And the one thing that stuck in her memory of images from those days was the amazing dearth of smiles. It amazed her how little fun she actually had when playing. *One could not enjoy the sport, she pondered, unless you were winning.*

"Well then," she began speaking again after pushing aside her remembrances, "what word do you use to describe your day to day activities?"

"You are correct, to a point. What we do instead of work is engage in the pursuit of Art. Art is, loosely put, the combination of work and play. It is a little like work because the activities must be performed to keep our society running. But it is more like play because no one is forced to do any of these activities. Our citizens engage in these activities because they both intrinsically valuable to them and are necessary for the well-being of the community. No one 'works' in our world, but things do get done."

"But there must be some jobs so demeaning and laborious that no one wants to do them?" insisted Doctor Macy.

"If any of those activities existed at one time or another, we have eliminated them. If a job is so laborious or so demeaning that no one wants to do it, then we design a machine to do it. If that solution is impossible, then we redesign the environment so the activity either becomes intrinsically satisfying or becomes obsolete."

"That sounds like a real pain in the neck to accomplish."

"Not really. The search for intrinsically enjoyable activities is a challenging task in its own right. But remember, we refuse to force anyone to do anything. Unlike your society, we do not structure ours on the basis of economic efficiency or expediency. To do so would violate our moral position to be compassionate. Remember that in art, the choices and restrictions one uses to help define the creative process and narrow its focus — making the creation more coherent — are internally determined. The artist has control over the medium and the materials. In the same sense, we decide what must be done to enhance the community and our lives. In work, on the other hand, all these restrictions and choices are externally determined. Your boss, or teacher, or policeman, or society tells you what to do and how to do it." Feszj took a deep breath. "Forcing people to work in jobs or do other things they hate is hardly a compassionate act."

As soon as Feszj finished speaking, Cecelia hated her job at the Institute. She had always disliked the bureaucratic requirements of the position, but now she really despised the whole institutionalism she must deal with every day. She might just stay in Arizona.

Actually, she doesn't mind the therapy sessions; those are what makes the job tolerable. They contain the challenges which inspire her to understand her patients and their psychoses, enabling her to treat these individuals. But Jesse has been, by far, the most challenging. Unfortunately, the challenge has been unceasingly evolving into a frustrating failure. *This unorthodox treatment may turn into a grandiose flop*, she worried. *What's going to happen if his hallucination becomes more ingrained. How will that make me look?*

She mentally retraced her previous comments, going backwards to something that bothered her; something she had learned in college that somehow dealt with this very discussion. *Something about the contingency of ideas? Language and ideas? The contingency of language? Language changes? Ideas change? Ah, yes. That's it.* A gleaming white smile appeared as a suddenly recalled notion lit up Doctor Macy's face. Feszj raised his eyebrows in anticipation.

"I believe it was Galbraith," she began, "who stated that the rule of ideas is only powerful in a world that does not change — ideas being inherently conservative by their very nature. They yield not to the attack of other ideas, which is the process you're

engaged in, but to the massive onslaught of circumstance with which they cannot contend. Therefore, Feszj, no idea you have for our world, no matter how great or humane or spiritually uplifting or well-presented, will stand the onslaught of our own peculiar set of circumstances — whether we are competitive or not."

Feszj was silent. And as the silence lingered, it grew more and more ominous. Feszj seemed not to have a response. Jesse, who had been floating in limbo listening to the conversation the entire time Feszj was speaking to Doctor Macy, began worrying. Though he was impressed as always with Feszj, this time — the first and only time Jesse can remember — Feszj said nothing in response. Dr. Macy glowered in perceived triumph.

"Face it, Feszj," she said. "Your ideas cannot withstand the contingencies of our existence."

Feszj mulled over her comments, chewing on his lip. As Cecelia watched, and Jesse worried trembled, and in spite of what she may have thought just a few minutes earlier, she believed she had finally won. It took her long enough, but the time had come. And it felt good.

In front of her sat a boy beaten — that did sadden her — but now ready to be built back up again sane, with his alter ego once and for all argued into non-existence. She was about ready to stand up and send Jesse back to his room when Jesse spoke.

"I have to admit you are quite right on that count, Dr. Macy," said Feszj. Cecelia beamed even wider. She retook her seat, wanting the opportunity to gloat some more. "However, just as much as we are at the mercy of past contingencies, so our future is at the mercy of whatever contingencies we create."

"What does that mean?" said Doctor Macy. "Your ideas cannot beat our contingencies." She still clung to her winning argument — a clever argument, she thought, but disconcertingly slipping away.

"What I am saying is that our ideas, simply by expressing them and making them part of your worldview, have become part of the contingencies that will affect your future. Though my ideas may not change your ideas now, in the future, the contingencies based on our cooperative ideas will."

Damn. How does he do it? He's only a kid. Cecelia shook her head in disbelief and irritation. You know, maybe if I just draw the Feszj part out and supplant Jesse? It was a wild thought, as well as being wholly unethical, and promptly discarded it.

"That's all well and good," she said, trying halfheartedly to hide her frustration and dejection and a creeping jealousy at another argument squelched, "but that's not possible here, or now." Her anger seethed, and kept just under control.

"Perhaps not, but believe in cooperation, and then give it time. There is no hurry, Let our ideas disseminate throughout your world and change will occur. Perhaps not in your lifetime, but slowly and surely it will."

Doctor Macy's face hardened; the relaxed acquiescence disappeared instantly. *Not in my lifetime?* she fumed in silence. "What's the point then?" she spit out. Feszj shook his head at the regression. He thought that she was finally coming around; but the individualism and motivation of self-interest ran deep inside her. Jesse could feel Feszj's frustration. "So close, yet so far," he said to Feszj.

Yes, he replied. She is still a product of her environment. It will take much more time for her to become a product of our environment.

"Cecelia," said Feszj, "you must understand that improving societies take a great deal of time."

She practically growled at Jesse, and continued venting.

"I'm no Marxist; someone willing to place their entire body and soul into the hands of the party, working perpetually for the withering away of the state that will never happen in my lifetime. Why should I sacrifice my life for the sake of people I'll never see and for a goal that may never be realized?"

"Why do you think you are sacrificing anything? Being a cooperativist ought to be a benefit."

"That's easy for you to say." Doctor Macy completely forgot that Feszj was an hallucination. "If things go wrong, you can always run and hide back underneath that nice protective dome of yours — your cozy utopian shell. If things fall apart in our lives, you aren't affected."

"That's not a fair statement, Cecelia."

"What's fair? You're fairness or ours?" Jesse's body filled with despondency and sank heavily back into the sofa. "It's as if you're playing some sort of game with us," continued the irate doctor. "As if we have become the only true entertainment you have. Jesse, and perhaps the countless other lives you have changed in your quest for utopian perfection, are simply playing pieces you control and manipulate for your own enjoyment."

She had more to say, but Feszj jerked himself to the edge the sofa. She quickly leaned back away from Jesse's sudden movement, making her lose her train of thought, and giving Feszj the opportunity to speak. "Do you know what a game is?" he asked, but did not wait for a response that was not forthcoming. "It is a place where players attempt to control the elements of chance. In a competitive game, for example, the winner is the one who was able to control more of these chance elements than the loser. That's why you

practice, so those haphazard motions that were once determined by chance have now become a skillful habit."

"What's the point of all—?"

"But in a cooperative game," he went on; not finished with the point he is trying to make, he prevented Doctor Macy from interrupting, "both players are able to jointly use their abilities to control a larger number of contingencies. Both you and Jesse and I are constructing together a way to institute changes in the environment that will help achieve a beneficial outcome for a larger number of your citizens."

"I don't see how this means—."

"You see us as somehow playing a competitive game against you. If anything, Jesse and I are both playing a cooperative game — where each of us brings to the playing field a set of abilities which will help each of us better control the elements of chance which surround us. The game will benefit those beyond the playing field as well, for the game we are playing has no boundaries and no time limits. It will be played by our children and our grandchildren, and it will continue to be played long after our grandchildren are forgotten by their progeny. It is a game in which anyone can join at any time, or leave at any time. It is a game which Jesse and I have been trying to demonstrate to you, hoping you too would like to join. For in the end, after all is said and done, it is a game in which everyone prospers."

Cecelia's temper hardly changed after Feszj's comments. If anything, it may have soured more. "You can define game any damn way you like. But it is still a game for you, isn't it? Everything is a game to you. Everything you've told me about this wonderful world of yours — your parties, your flute playing, your dancing — is just one big game. Is our society the only thing left for you and your world that has any mystery to entertain you with? I mean, being happy all the time must be pretty damn boring. No pain, no suffering. It's no wonder you come to us. Since you need those things so the happiness and the pleasure you experience is appreciated more, you design ways to live vicariously through our suffering."

"No, Cecelia," said Feszj plainly, though Jesse sensed some tension, "you don't know us at all. We are human, just like you are. We feel pain just like you do. We taste bad foods and sour drinks just like you do. But we don't see the need in constantly reliving those experiences. We already know these negative sensations and adequately appreciate not having to experience them on a regular basis. Just like the people in your world, who are constantly searching for a way out of their miseries. Here is the way out — with us —

and yet you still find fault. It's very hard to know what your society wants. It is hard to know what you want."

"Well, finally," said Doctor Macy, sneering. "You're finally admitting you don't know something."

"Please, Cecelia," said Feszj with a temperate tone that Doctor Macy thought sounded condescending, "there are many things I don't know about. However, we have been talking about a subject matter of which I know a great deal. Being one of our world's spokespersons, it is my responsibility to know a great deal about competition and cooperation."

"Yes," said Doctor Macy, her forehead crinkled and her eyes squinted, "that reminds me. You mentioned several times in our sessions how you don't believe in free will. Yet at the same time, people throughout your world are constantly apologizing for their behavior. If everything is determined, why apologize?"

"Excellent question."

"Oh, don't patronize me," she shot back.

"Sorry." Doctor Macy threw up her hands in frustration. Feszj wanted to smile, but didn't this time. He went on. "Our philosophy of determinism states that we are not responsible for what we do. However, we are responsible for what we have done. In your society, however, if someone is not responsible for something, they immediately feel absolved from having to apologize. Even though we are not responsible for acts we do, we can certainly feel responsible for what the acts have done, and can certainly apologize for any learned behavior that is harmful. We are not so arrogant to think that we are all so disconnected from each other that one's behavior does not influence another. As Herman Melville wrote — you do know Herman Melville?"

Cecelia nodded. "Of course."

"He wrote, 'We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with others; and along those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes and they come back to us as effects.' Brilliant words that expresses the interconnectedness of all things — past, present, and future. And though our actions are predetermined by our past influences, what we do and how we behave vindicates or excoriates these past experiences and influences. From them, we learn what experiences are desirable and which are not. In the idea of individuality and free will, all experiences and all actions are separable and distinct from one another, effectively absolving individuals of any connection to another's behavior. If a person shoots another, that's his or her fault, despite the fact that you may have made the gun, sold it to the shooter, gave that person bullets and training, et cetera.

As long as you didn't actually do the shooting, you feel confident that you did nothing wrong. Since the shooter had free will, your actions have no bearing on the shooting. so, as people die all around you, and prisons fill with inmates, you keep filling your bank account. Indeed, it is a truly comfortable way of living one's life.

"Free will, therefore, seems to make morality a third person project — it is *they* who should be moral."

"If we are not responsible for what we do, why apologize? There is no reason—."

"If you view the world as either predetermined or full of free will, and then leaves it at that, that belief of yours is the possible outcome. However, in our world, though if we admit that there is no free will, one *learns* that they are responsible for their acts, even though they had no will to control their actions. Unlike your world, we cannot sit around hoping we or other people will eventually become moral and not shoot other people, or if immoral, someone else will punish them. In a deterministic world, morality must be a first person project. We must learn to be moral, because we can never truly choose to be moral — and no one can justifiably punish us if we aren't."

The doctor shook her head. Her anger drained away and was replaced by bewilderment. "I don't understand."

"It is hard to explain without actually being a part of the community of Terah. Once there, watching how everyone interacts, it would make complete sense. It has taken months, but Jesse is gradually coming to grips with this philosophy."

"No," she said, "it's not just the determinism. It's everything that's so confusing. I still don't even know why you are here. Why Earth? Why now?"

"But Cecelia, we have never left."

"What?"

"Our world has been trying to promote the cooperativist perspective to your civilizations and cultures for thousands of years. We return time and time again presenting and re-presenting the promise for a cooperative way of life to generation after generation. Some people have done well in presenting our views, a few became well-known in describing and conveying the hope of peace, love, and brotherhood; but most are forgotten. That's because your people too easily forget the past, and, therefore, do a very poor job building upon previous moral advances. How many time does the message of cooperation, compassion, and community need to be explained before you finally learn it? Consequently, we have had very little success, and what little success we have had in guiding your people to a cooperative civilization has taken longer than expected. But still we try."

"Why?" asked the Doctor. "If the task is so gargantuan and so futile, why bother?"

"Because, Cecelia, it is the right thing to do."

Doctor Macy bowed her head, her head tired and hungry. But she had one more question to ask.

"And where does Jesse fit in? How is he doing?" What will be his legacy?"

"That depends a great deal on your diagnosis."

"Well," she said apologetically, "we'll see."

Now, it was Feszj's turn to drop his head from exhaustion, letting out a long despairing sigh. "We had such high hopes with you. Now, it seems nothing will change for Jesse."

"What were you going to do?" replied the doctor, retaliating sharply to avoid feeling guilty. "Have him run a community recycling center? Maybe a community garden? That ought to go a long way in changing the world."

"It is more than you have done, is it not?" Doctor Macy chewed her lip. "Besides, Jesse is still young. There are many fruitful years ahead of us. Time is our ally."

Doctor Macy remained cynical. "Sure. And in time, people will come around to your message. People will convince themselves that universal cooperation and compassion and community can be achieved."

"Yes, that was the goal." Doctor Macy sniffed in ridicule. Feszj spoke more forcibly and deliberately. "No more wonderful goal could there be on your world."

The doctor looked away, embarrassed at being chastised so easily and so poignantly. Feszj went on.

"But unfortunately, I feel our presentation has not been successful. Because of his continued incarceration in this place and the previous places, this was our last chance — you were our last chance."

Doctor Macy didn't like the sound of those words. They sounded too much like the words of a psychopath or someone contemplating suicide. "What do you mean?" she asked. She glanced around the room — reminding herself of where her office phone was and then plotting a bee-line path to the door, which fortunately has no lock.

"Jesse has become both too cynical and too compassionate for your world," replied Feszj. The amount of suffering that he is prevented from alleviating has eaten away at his soul much too long. He has come to feel the pain and misery of fellow humans, and yet can do nothing to end it."

"Are you saying Jesse is of no more use to you," the doctor asked. She wasn't sure if this question would antagonize Jesse, but she had to know.

"He can no longer do what we have asked him to do," was the reply.

"Wait a minute." Jesse butt into Feszj's thinking after hearing his last comment. "Is that what you're saying? Is the doctor right? What do you mean I can't do what I'm supposed to do?" Frightened, his fear of rejection and uselessness quickly swept Jesse's emotions into a fever pitch of confusion and betrayal.

I'm sorry, Jesse, but because of your situation, you are no longer able to help your world. We need to find someone else whose contingent situations are more conducive to unrestrained expression of ideas and actions.

"You mean, everything I went through for you was for nothing?" said Jesse, his anger bubbling out. "I go through all that trouble, get beaten up twice, kicked out of school, and locked away in a booby house, just to hear you say you can't use me anymore?"

Please relax, Jesse.

"And the drugs. Those needles stuck in my arms, thighs, and butt. Those pills that made my head feel like lead; and my body feel like it was moving in slow motion. And those tests, the endless battery of probing, prying, poking — all that for nothing."

If it weren't for his disembodied state, tears would have been flowing. The fact that he couldn't cry irked him even more.

There is more to it than—.

"You told me that I was going to help this world. You kept telling me how important I am, and how much more important I was going to be. You gave me all this hope, built me up. You even showed me what paradise was like, took me around, introduced me to everyone. I felt like I belonged, like I was somebody.

Jesse. I need to finish my conversation with Cecelia.

"I suffered so much for you because I believed in you. I trusted you. And now you're abandoning me?"

We can discuss this more at length after I'm done.

"Screw you! You've ruined my life, and you have the balls to still expect me to listen to you. Well, you can just go f— yourself!"

I can explain—.

"To Hell with your explanations! I'm getting out now!"

Jesse's body started twitching all of a sudden. First his fingers tapped the seat uncontrollably; and then his head jerked from side to side as if Jesse were on a roller coaster. Doctor Macy became alarmed.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"I may not have much time left with you, Cecelia. Just let me continue explaining as much as I can while I can, okay?"

"Okay," replied Doctor Macy, suspicious and concerned as to why the disclaimer was made. She didn't know what to do, because she didn't know what was wrong. So she just sat and did nothing but listen.

"Because of Jesse's rapid development of empathy," started Feszj, "we have learned yet again that to survive in your world, without going insane, it seems necessary that one must be somehow immune to pain and suffering. One must ignore the pleas of children slowly watching the darkness of death close around them as their stomachs shrivel up and their abdomens extend from starvation. It is disgusting to have to watch a society that on one hand claims moral superiority, and on the other hand acts so inhumanely by recoiling so far into itself in order to hide from the reality of the agonies which surround it. Yours is a society full of people so incapable of taking care of themselves that they love their pets more than their relatives; because the wonderful thing about pets is that they will love unconditionally, something your populace doesn't want to do."

The bodily jerking became more animated and pronounced. Feszj folded his arms across his chest to stifle their movements. He went on.

"Why? In a culture which thrives on rewards and incentives and grades and trophies and salaries and diplomas and little gold stars and winners and losers and all the other tangible components of a competitive lifestyle, unconditional love fails because you can't get these things from it. You can't get anything tangible from unconditional love. Yet to love someone else because there is something to be gained by it misses the entire point. That is why pets are so wonderful in your society. They give you unconditional love without the moral commitment of you ever having to do the same. Please stop, Jesse. You and your friends want to avoid dealing with your prejudices and fears, something which is necessary for unconditional love. Animals, for the most part, don't have those worries. They just love and forgive. Humans, on the other hand, are seemingly condemned to think about fellow humans and to choose how to behave around them. Please, calm down, Jesse!"

The seizures were getting worse. Jesse's legs moved in tortured attempts to stand as his torso fought to remain seated. Doctor Macy watched in amazed horror as Jesse struggled with the gruesome reality that his body was ripping itself apart. And Jesse's interjections to himself only worsened the macabre effect. As he started slipping sideways on the sofa seat, the doctor tried to restrain Jesse, hoping her touch would soothe the young man. In spite of the physical contortions, he kept talking to her and to himself.

"Alas, your society suffers through the cruelest of conundrums. Competition forces — Damn you! — your population to choose between their own survival and other people's survival. Jesse, please, relax! And what has become obvious to Jesse, has — I! — always been obvious to us, and never apparent to you — Let me! — is that your society has — Go! — chosen to be inhumane. Jesse, control yourself!"

The situation deteriorated rapidly and drastically. One of Jesse's arms ripped itself loose from the chest hold, and began slapping his own face. Doctor Macy leapt to grab the arm, and pinned it to the back of the couch. The speech fragmented almost beyond recognition. Cecelia thought she heard two different voices at once, each one fighting with the other for control. Was Jesse somehow fighting for control over Feszj? Was this a good sign? Doctor Macy wasn't sure. Should she let it go on, or should she call for the orderlies? Through it all, Feszj still tried to complete his remarks.

"You seem to have given up — Stop it! — the possibility of everyone surviving reasonably well just so a few can survive obscenely — Ruined me! — well, and others are allowed to suffer. Is poverty a price that has — Stop talking! — to be paid for wealth? One of the — How can you?! — necessities of being part of such a wealthy society? No, don't! Not now! Your mind could snap if we switch like this"

At this point, despite her considerable strength holding down his arm, Jesse lurched forward, flinging himself to the floor and sending Doctor Macy tripping backwards over her chair. She grabbed the arm for balance, but she just pulled the chair down to the floor with her.

Landing hard on her hip and shoulder, she rubbed her side as she scrambled to her knees and saw Jesse bent over, clenched fists grabbing and tearing clumps of hair out of his scalp, while smashing his forehead against the floor.

"Go away!" screamed Jesse. Doctor Macy guessed he was yelling at himself. "You've ruined everything for nothing!"

Doctor Macy shouted for the orderlies as she again restrained Jesse from hurting himself. By now, the forehead was badly bruised. Blood streaked down the sides of his face as combinations of skin and hair piled up on the carpet.

"Make him stop talking! Make him go away!"

One of the orderlies flung open the door and surveyed the scene. Doctor Macy had no time for someone being uncertain as to what to do.

"Grab his arms!" she ordered.

The orderly grabbed Jesse's blood stained hands, then found himself thrown to the side on top of Doctor Macy when Jesse twisted his body. With his adrenalin gushing into his

body, Jesse's strength swelled tremendously. It became obvious it would take more than the two of them to subdue him safely.

As Doctor Macy and the orderly extricated themselves from each other, Jesse struggled to his feet and careered around the room, banging into the walls and her bookshelves. He knocked off the wall her college diploma and her All-America plaque. Several picture frames, including one featuring her high school basketball team photo, cracked and splintered when they hit the floor. Other books and collectibles fell from the shelves, including a glass sculptured basketball player caught in the middle of a set shot. Sent to her father several years ago for Father's Day, engraved with the words 'I love you, Daddy' on the base, the package was returned unopened. It had gathered dust on her shelf ever since, and now it lay in pieces on the carpet.

Cecelia called for more help, and within moments, two more orderlies entered the room. Trained not to hurt the patients, they spoke softly to Jesse, trying to gently calm him down, but he couldn't hear them.

"Shut up! Shut up! Get out of my head!" he kept screaming.

The three orderlies surrounded Jesse, but Jesse bolted unexpectedly and knock down the man in front of him. Jesse then ran into Doctor Macy, who tried to stop him. Both stumbled to the floor, and Jesse landed on top of her.

"HELP ME!" he screamed in her face, and let out an agonizing wail. Jesse's face blazed with a crimson so deep, only the Devil's himself, she thought, could have matched that shade. Blood droplets, shaken loose from his writhing head, fell onto her cheeks and blouse.

The three men finally were able to restrain his arms and pulled him back off of Doctor Macy and pinned him down to the carpet. Doctor Macy crawled over to the sofa, drool dripping from her mouth, and propped herself up against it. As she sat on the floor, breathing heavily and feeling queasy from the traumatic exertion, a nurse appeared at the door with a hypodermic needle filled with a sedative. She stood by and waited until the situation was under control, but Doctor Macy impatiently gestured for her to inject Jesse now.

"Oh, God, no more needles," Jesse pleaded. "Please!"

Although Jesse's body convulsed violently with spasmodic sobbing, an arm was held steady for her by one of the orderlies. Doctor Macy turned away as the needle sank smoothly into the pliant flesh. In a few minutes, Jesse would be practically comatose with drugs effectively shutting down his brain. But before that happened, he cried out one more time.

"I WANT TO DIE!"

Fifteen

Cecelia Macy took the rest of the day off and went home soon after the orderlies had restrained Jesse and the nurse had given him a sedative. The incident disturbed her, though she didn't know why. She had experience with other patients who erupted violently all of a sudden. But Jesse was different. He didn't strike out at her or the other staff at the hospital. Jesse was lashing out at himself and his alter-ego, Feszj. That is what made Dr. Macy sympathetic. He wasn't trying to hurt her; just desperately grasping for help. Jesse wanted to be cured, but he couldn't do it alone. Cases like Jesse's are always the most heart-wrenching ones, especially when Jesse literally tried to rip his skull open. The worst part is that there is only so much medical science can do, and only so much medicine a patient can tolerate.

Cecelia noticed her hand visibly shaking as she fumbled with the keys and unlocked the front door. She went straight for her liquor cabinet when she arrived home. A couple glasses of cognac, she thought, might help calm her nerves. However, she wasn't counting, and before thirty minutes passed, she had gulped down over a dozen ounces of alcohol.

Why am I drinking so much? she asked herself. *It's just one case out of dozens in my load.*

She replayed in her mind the past hours events and studied them. Perhaps it was the closeness of breaking through to Jesse and undoing his delusions? *No, that's silly. I've been close before, and never have I had such an unexpected reaction.* Was she getting overly fond of Jesse, like a mother for a child? *No, I'm too much of a professional. I would have seen that coming long before.* She delved deeper, but nothing reasonably suitable or adequate presented itself. She was unable to explain her distress — which frustrated her even more.

Through all her thinking, she drank. Soon, her head spun, and her eyes blurred. The image of a fuzzy living room began juxtaposing itself intermittently with a dizzying array of colors, when all she could see was a whirl of infinite hues and textures. She had been

drunk before, but the extent of the visual distortions was unusual. She walked a bit unsteadily to her bedroom and hit the mattress hard, practically asleep before her head landed on the pillow. Her dreaming began immediately.

She found herself floating around in Jesse's room. She had no hands or feet; she was just there. Below her lay Jesse, heavily sedated and strapped to the bed. His head, wrapped with bandages, leaned to one side, drool oozing out the side of his mouth and soaking his pillow. His face was slack of any muscle tone, and his body was flattened heavily on the cot; his body fat spread out over the sheets.

As she floated above the young man, she suddenly heard Jesse voice speaking and apparently engaged in a discussion. Where his voice came from, she hadn't a clue. His lips weren't moving, although he was so doped up now, it would have been impossible anyway. Yet the voice enveloped her as if it was coming out of speakers hidden behind the walls. She also heard another voice, a more mature and resonant adult male voice, but one she didn't recognize. Moreover, since the voices were not speaking to her, she just continued floating and silently listen to the conversation.

"What a sorry excuse for a human," said Jesse.

"No, Jesse. You are a fine human."

"Bullshit! Look at me, sleeping in a pile of spit, strapped down like some sort of criminal. I'm flabby. I have acne. My nose is bent. If I didn't know it was me, I'd swear it was some mentally deranged sap who burned out on LSD or something."

Cecelia felt an odd and discomfoting sensation when she both looked at Jesse's limp body and yet also heard his lucid voice.

"I used to be thin, muscular, and healthy," Jesse continued. "I played sports, rode bikes, hiked trails, and climbed trees. But all that is now gone. All I have left to look forward to is a lifetime of psychotherapeutic medications and bouncing back and forth from one institution to another. The soonest I'll have even the faintest of opportunities to get out will be when I turn twenty-one. By then, my body will have become so dependent on the drugs, who knows what I'll turn into once I stop taking them. You see, the medication is supposed to put in balance brain chemistry which is skewed. But what does it do to brains that are already balanced?"

Dr. Macy cringed at that possibility. She had read about it, and knew what would happen.

"You'll be fine, Jesse," said the voice.

"That's easy for your to say. You're not constipated, occasionally incontinent, and now drugged into a coma. You live God-knows-where in the universe, far away from the miseries I've been condemned to suffer supposedly for the sake of my world's future.

"But no one down here cares. You've seen how they've reacted. You tell them all about how cooperation could change the world and make their lives better. You assail them with wonderfully eloquent logic and descriptions of all the benefits, but what comes of it? Nothing. Once they find out I'm hearing voices, they dismiss everything you say. They think I'm crazy, so they automatically think that everything that comes out of my mouth is just meaningless drivel from the mind of a lunatic. Even Doctor Macy."

Cecelia heard her name and her thoughts quickly refocused on the weeks of discussion she had with Jesse. Had she really dismissed his commentary — or was it Feszj's? — on cooperation's superiority to competition simply because of his status as a patient? Maybe. She was trying to find something hidden within his long confessions which would help her isolate the origin of the hallucinations. But like her colleagues, she had to admit that the origin remains as elusive now as it did at the beginning. Something was clearly going on in his brain; that much was determined with the EEGs. But no medication worked to re-balance his brain chemistry. Cecelia's mind began exploring other possibilities — possibilities no reasonable psychologist would ever admit in public.

Perhaps, she pondered, the reason why we could never find the origin to his hallucinations is because the origin is not within Jesse at all. Maybe ...

Cecelia stopped there. Travels to another planet? Aliens communicating through telepathy? It would be too outlandish to go down that pathway. She changed direction.

If I can separate his comments from his delusions, what do we have? She thought. Well, first of all, we have a kid who went from being a bratty and bullying thug from a dysfunctional family, to being a gentle, brilliant, and outspoken supporter of cooperation — one who tried to rebuild his family, and tried to bring his community together.

And what have we done for him?

Locked him away. Invaded his person. Intimidated him. Incarcerated him. Even physically abused him.

Was he ever really that much of a threat?

"Jesse," said the unknown voice, "change takes time."

"How much?"

"No one can determine that. It all depends on the contingencies of people's experiences and their willingness to accept changing from a competitivest view of the world to a cooperativist view. As I mentioned before, we are always so amazed at the ingrained

reluctance to change your society has — especially when that change that makes complete logical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual sense."

"Yeah. A change even you, the great Feszj, can't guarantee will ever happen."

"No one can guarantee a future that has yet to happen. The best one can do is to set up the environment so the contingencies which result from its experiences are the ones which will best serve society. And the only way that can happen is if people cooperate."

There was a brief lull in the conversation as Cecelia heard Feszj take a deep breath.

So this is what Feszj sounds like? Wait a minute. What am I saying? This is how I imagine Feszj sounding like. Get the distinction correct, C-C.

Feszj continued. "If there is one this I do know about the future, and one thing I can guarantee, it is that competition will never achieve any kind of ideal existence. You and your world's only hope is with cooperation."

"But you have no idea if an all-cooperative world is any more even a possibility for us, right?"

"Yes."

"So what's the point of it all, then?" shot back Jesse. Despite cautioning herself, her inhibitions dissipated in the dream-like surroundings, and Cecelia could not resist responding, if not to Jesse, then at least to herself.

Where have you been, Jesse? Feszj already explained that to us. To strive for a totally cooperative world and to help others achieve that end is the right thing to do.

"And I don't buy the idea that it's the right thing to do," continued Jesse, anticipating the objection. "What's right for you may not be right for us."

"Moral relativism?" mentioned Feszj.

"Sure, whatever you say."

"But is that good or bad?"

"What?"

"Moral relativism. Is that in itself a good or bad thing?"

"Who's to say?"

"Exactly the point, Jesse. In a relativistic world, who can say what is truly good or what is truly bad except when based on certain perspectives of certain events. Moral relativism is the result of the uncontrolled and poorly understood gamut of experiences. Relativism is too unstable a moral attitude to do anything but maintain moral confusion and, naturally, moral relativism. In essence, relativism is self-perpetuating. What is needed is a stable global social environment, where contingent events and experiences can be understood in its context and orchestrated to lead to a unified and consistent set of

outcomes. Only then will your society have the foundation for a single moral system. And again, only cooperation brings that opportunity."

Feszj's statement made Cecelia smile. *What wouldn't people give to be able to make assured moral choices that are consistent with everyone's world view?* commented Cecelia.

She started considering the possibilities. Perhaps it was the liquor; perhaps it was the feeling of freedom floating above the floor looking down on Jesse. Perhaps, according to certain dream theorists, the dream she was now having was her mind's way of struggling and dealing with all the arguments Jesse developed during their sessions. In any event, and for whatever the reason, she started taking Feszj's ideas seriously. In fact, she began viewing Feszj as an independent entity.

"But there is no guarantee," said Jesse.

"That is correct."

Jesse huffed in exasperation. "So, as I was saying before, do you somehow enjoy taking people and turning them into freaks? Do you garner some morbid fascination with shattering people's lives?"

Jesse, would you cease your cynicism and listen, grumbled Cecelia. Feszj is offering our world a chance at improvement, and here you are standing in his way. The least you can do is let him try.

"Jesse, as I said before, our society, as well as your society, needs you to help lead your world to—."

"We don't want your help!" screamed Jesse.

Give the man a chance! shouted back Cecelia. *After all he's shown you? After all he's taught you, you can so quickly turn your back on him? It wasn't his fault you were put away. It was people in your own world — your supposed friends and family which cast you aside, a drain on their status and sanity. They turned away from you, both repulsed and blinded by your new-found wisdom. Yet Feszj kept his world. He was there, always, as he said he would be. Have you forgotten everything he taught you? Everything he asked you to do brought you closer to people you had alienated yourself from years before. It wasn't Feszj which caused you problems. It was the individuals in your life unwilling to relinquish their tenuous and arbitrary power over you. You weren't intimidated, so they forced you into submission.*

Cecelia slowly withdrew into personal reflection, and the tone of her voice became much more melancholy.

Then they sent you to me, and I did the same damn things as all the rest.

"Don't you mean 'I' don't want your help? You said we. Was that a slip or an admission?" replied Feszj calmly to Jesse's outburst.

"Who cares! I never asked for any of this this. I never wanted any of this. I was doing just fine without you!"

Were you? muttered Cecelia.

"Were you?" said Feszj. "What were you doing before? Were you doing fine when you terrorized your classmate Rebecca for years? Were you doing fine when you were inhaling aerosols? Were you doing fine when you dunked Mr. Steinman's head in the toilet? Were you doing fine when you found pleasure in taunting your sports opponents, humiliating them when you won, and cursing them when you lost? Were you doing fine when you capitalize on a fellow student's mistake in class, thus assuring yourself the 'A' and assuring the other student something less? Or were you actually doing fine when you never paid any attention to any of these things?"

"What difference does it make? At least I wasn't miserable then."

"Maybe so. You were probably desensitized to all the suffering going on around you — a desensitization necessary because the reality of your world is far too painful. We, however, simply provided the environment where you became re-sensitized to the horrors of competitive life. We provided a place away from this insanity where you could re-evaluate your life in peace."

What people wouldn't give for that possibility as well.

"Before you showed up," resisted Jesse, "I knew where I stood in school, at home, and with my friends. Everything's changed now. Nothing is normal anymore."

"We didn't change your life in any great way. Some friends left; others replaced them. You relearned how to love your mother. And Mr. Monroe has amply demonstrated his gratitude to what we have taught him about teaching."

"Well—."

"We simply expanded your perspective, increased your vocabulary, formulated a new world view, and helped you examine your life in way you have been taught not to."

"But I was happier then."

"Sometimes, ignorance can be bliss. It can certainly keep one out of trouble. After all, if you don't know why something went wrong, you can't be blamed for it. On the same token, knowledge is more difficult to deal with, and requires much more responsibility, and even the rewards of knowledge aren't that great. But to see things clearly, to remove the scales from your eyes, to know what is going on underneath all the superficialities of everyday life, to know what makes the world tick — that is what ought to drive humanity.

"And in the final analysis, someday you would learn that after all the gloss and the lights and the pomp and circumstance are stripped away from the surface of societies and cultures, one thing will always remain — the human being itself. Too many times, your world has forgotten that everything that has been constructed was on the backs of fellow humans; and everything carelessly destroyed was due to competition between fellow humans. But the worst tragedy of all is that after all the constructions, all the demolitions, all the agony and torture and oppression and domination, the very first thing which is forgotten and lost from social memory is that everything cherished and loved, everything good and kind, everything moral and just in your world has only begun and can only be continued based on the unconditional friendship and cooperation of one human with another."

It was now Jesse's turn to sigh.

"I want to leave," said Jesse, in a voice full of resignation. "You said I could leave at anytime. You promised. I don't want your supposed help anymore."

"Why, Jesse?" Cecelia thought she heard Feszj gasp. "How can that be? How can an entire culture be so opposed and so stubborn when it comes to asking for or accepting help? You, and everyone you know, could live more easily and more gently with help. You could accomplish more when people work together and help each other. You could learn more when people pool their intellectual resources. From the very beginning, your life wouldn't even have existed without help from family, friends, institutions, and numerous other elements of the community. Yet you still claim that you would be better off without us."

"Those things never invaded my mind!"

All of those things invaded your mind, Jesse. Haven't you been listening to anything Feszj has said?

"Jesse," said Feszj, "you are a product of all your experiences and environments. To say that friends, family, and institutions never invaded your mind indicates that you have forgotten that fundamental premise of human learning and growth." Cecelia marveled at that monumental patience Feszj is demonstrating. "Whether or not something invades your mind openly, like I do, or subtly, like all your other influences, it makes little difference. They all affect you. They all dictate who you are, what you will do and become, how you will arrive at that point, and why."

Feszj is wrong, said Cecelia. It's not that we are too stubborn to change. It's that we are too damn forgetful to remember what was so beautiful and beneficial about cooperation in the first place. Every day we go outside, we have to re-learn how to work together, how

to talk to each other, how to behave properly. Morality is just too damn hard; so we placate our conscience by forgetting about it and doing whatever we damn well please. It is so much easier to be bad than good, for along the moral continuum there are many ways to do things wrong and very few ways to do things right.

Suddenly, Cecelia thought she had an epiphany.

Is that why we compete? So the winners can design and dictate a moral platform which assures that their acts and actions are the morally right acts and actions, thus aligning their consciences with their behavior? I guess this is why moral relativism is so powerful a force; any action can be aligned with almost any moral mandate. Maybe that is why Jesus was crucified. He refused to play this game of moral King of the Hill. He refused to compete. He was a conscience that couldn't be pacified.

Cecelia chuckled bitterly to herself. *In the end, competition has become so pervasive because an increasingly morally indiscriminate population wants to sleep better at night.*

"Still," said Jesse, "they never sweet talked me into doing all this cooperative crap. What a failure that was. It hasn't gotten me anywhere except tied down like an animal, imprisoned in an insane asylum. You're no help, Feszj. I didn't need your help before, and I don't need it now. You've ruined my life!"

Jesse, look at what Feszj has given you, said Cecelia. She knew no one could hear her, but she couldn't help herself. *A glimpse at paradise. A trip to ecstasy. What a person wouldn't give for just a moment of peace, tranquility, and ultimate sanctuary. You may not yet appreciate what Feszj has done for you, but I think I can.*

"We have tried," said Feszj, cutting off Cecelia's reverie, "to show you that the world in which you live can be so much better than it is. We have tried to demonstrate that you and all of your kind have the tools and capacities at hand, ready to change the world into the utopian garden you all claim to seek, but are too afraid to struggle for. Because you have been brought up in an individualist thinking society, the massive amounts of information, technology, and wealth which surround you continuously go to waste. This is because so few of you know how to interact constructively with each other, how to combine ideas and experiment with new theories, or even how to join forces to achieve something beneficial for all others. Your society has forgotten how to cooperate."

"So, I suppose you have the answers to all our problems?" said Jesse.

Always the cynic, said Cecelia.

"Yes, we do. But it would require a drastic change in motivations. It would require an elimination of individualist thinking, competitive ideologies, and bureaucratic lifelessness. Wars would quickly dry up because people would see the stupidity of it all. Once people

realize that through concerted group action, and solidarity, governments have no power. If everyone decided not to pay taxes, for instance, governments would cease to exist. Why do you think governments use businesses to extract taxes? Governments can control and coerce institutions to do their bidding much more easily than a human being.

"But there are still ways out. For example, grow your own food instead of purchasing food and you won't have to pay taxes."

"That won't do anything."

"Individually, maybe not. And that's why governments love either automatons or individuals. Automatons do what they are told. Individuals have not power enough to do anything other than what they are told."

"But that means we're stuck. Governments have complete control."

Again, Cecelia burst out her comments. *Think Jesse! What the hell has Feszj been teaching you? Didn't you hear anything he said?*

"Jesse, what is the one thing that binds us all together?" asked Feszj.

"What?"

You—! Community, Jesse! Cecelia was practically shouting at the top of her lungs.

"Community, Jesse," said Feszj calmly. "That's where the power to change the world lies. Pooling talents, and resources, goods and services. Sharing the use of one kitchen, one roof, even one lawn mower, rather than a dozen families each buying one kitchen, one roof, and one lawn mower all for themselves. It is a colossal waste of time, effort, and resources, all of which can be used for more humanistic purposes."

Jesse's change in demeanor perplexed Cecelia; it was nothing with which she was familiar. *All his self-confidence and biting discontentment was gone, she considered. He behaves like a confused little boy. But why? Perhaps he knew what to say before, when the future was brighter, and his anti-establishment attitude won him some respect. Now, however, with the possibility of never being released from the institute, everything he had believed in and fought for is meaningless.*

"Unfortunately," Feszj's tone of voice was more somber and it caught Cecelia's attention, "we are ever so gradually and painfully coming to realize the futility of trying to help your society. At this point, Jesse, we have two choices open to us. We can either leave you alone ..."

"Yes!

"... or you can come and join our world."

There was a silence.

"Huh? That's possible?" Jesse finally said.

"Yes. We can do it."

Jesse thought for a half a second.

"Go with you? No way! I'll stay right here, thank you."

What? Who in their right mind would give up a chance to live in an utopia?

"I'm surprised to hear you say that, Jesse. But consider carefully what remains here for you? The friends you have and will have in this world are transient, often fair-weather friends — people you can never be certain you can count on. You're teachers will have by now written you off as a kook, so your education will forever be tainted by being tagged and channelled into areas you may have no desire to visit — but you will have no control over that. When you eventually seek employment, more often than not, you will have to take a position in which you have little interest. Opportunity for travel and cultural experiences will be severely limited by a paltry income and job requirements forcing you to work overtime and through lunches, weekends, and holidays. You will retire at age sixty-five with a retirement income that will leave you practically destitute. But you won't need the money anyway. Your prime physical condition will have long past, and any desire for adventure and excitement will be tempered by encroaching medical ailments."

"Still," responded Jesse, this time with a tinge of anger, "it is still home. To me. Despite it's faults, despite it's problems, it is still home."

"What do you know of your world's problems, Jesse?"

"Sure, there are occasional wars. I mean, nothing's perfect. Besides, it is these little imperfections which make life more interesting."

"More interesting? Slight imperfections? You haven't really seen much of the world, have you?"

"No," said Jesse, embarrassed to admit his provincialism. "Just what I've seen on TV."

"Hmm," uttered Feszj, apparently considering his next course of action. "It is not wise to make decisions on such limited knowledge of your world. Permit me to take you to a few places with which to expand your visions, and augment your understanding of your world."

Moments later, as Jesse's and Feszj's voices faded away, she heard someone entering the room say, "Wait outside." She then saw a man walking into the room. It was Jim, the orderly. As the room began to dissolve from her vision, she watched him walk over to Jesse's limp body, flip it over on to its stomach, and pulled down the pants so Jesse's rear end was exposed. Before the image completely disintegrated into a mass of pointillistic

colors, she gagged in horror and revulsion as Jim took out of his pocket a crinkled tube of K-Y Jelly and unzipped his fly.

* * *

When she emerged from the fuzziness, she found herself floating inside a car dealership. A well-polished white tile floor met her eyes, along with a crisply polished minivan and a couple other smaller sedans. The showroom windows encircling the interior were marked with grease paint screaming "Marathon Sale!" The morning sun was just rising as a small collection of unshaven salesmen with oily hair and rumpled suits milled about the glass double-door entrance like a pack of wolves waiting for a lone or wounded sheep to appear.

"This is Dad's work," said Jesse.

"Yes," Feszj replied.

"You know," continued Jesse, after inspecting the scene more closely, "this looks a lot like the annual overnight 'sell-a-thon.' That's when all the salesmen stay awake until a certain number of cars are sold."

"Well, that is what the public hears, but what has been a well kept secret are the several cots in the basement where the salespeople actually do sleep. They don't shave or shower or re-apply make-up. Some of the salespeople put vinegar in the eye to redden them and heighten the sleeplessness effect. They are also instructed by Mr. Strich to sleep in their clothes so they look really sloppy, adding to the impression of tiredness. If they truly were awake the entire time however, their clothes wouldn't look as if they had slept in them. It is because of the expectations built up by the advertising that the customers misread the significance of the disheveled clothes."

"You mean it is all a sham? None of them are exhausted?"

"No. Despite a sales staff that looks terrible and sounds miserable, they are all wide awake, thinking clearly, and on top of their sales techniques. In fact, it is the customer who is vulnerable. Expecting to negotiate a great deal due to sleep-deprived salespeople, they are more easily duped into thinking they did. Your father, Jesse, has learned and is using his craft very well."

Caveat emptor, remarked Cecelia. *Anyone who thinks the dealership is losing money on a deal is not thinking straight.*

"But as you already know," continued Feszj, "Peter had his own personal motive to be away from his wife overnight."

"Louise."

"Yes. But after Arnie told Susan about the affair, she began suspecting that these overnight sales were just another time her husband had his sexual liaison. And because she had suspected it for so long, she lost interest in him. In fact, she hadn't cared much about anything for quite a while. Even her charity work seemed hypocritical. How could she attend to the needs and suffering of others if she couldn't take care of the needs of her family and the suffering she faced every day. The rage churning inside her warped the world around her and made life bitter and sour.

"You know," said Jesse, "she would often mumble, 'Why does everything have to be so hard?' I had always thought she was referring to me."

"But now you know better." Jesse didn't comment.

Cecelia found her attention being directed towards an elderly couple inside a glass enclosed room at the back of the showroom. A deal was in the process, but the salesman was having a hard time thinking straight, or so it seems. Slurred speech and tongue-tied, he suggested several prices, which the couple politely declined aside, claiming their budget would not permit it. Cecelia followed the salesman as he excused himself from the room and rushed back to Mr. Strich's office. Mr. Strich was waiting for him.

"Good job, Arnie. I was listening on the intercom, and you sounded so convincing, even I thought you were half-delirious."

"Thanks, Pete."

"Anyway, let's close this deal. What car do they want again?"

"Number 4487, in the used lot."

"Oh, that one." Peter considered his options for a moment. "We have to move that one out."

Jesse spoke up. "What did Dad mean when they *had* to move that one out?"

"The car has a substantial oil leak," explained Feszj "The automobile requires hundreds of dollars of repair work to replace the lower gasket and stop the leak."

"Why didn't the couple see the leak? They're usually hard to miss."

"The engine was steam-cleaned, so all evidence of leaks was washed away. Also, the dealership parked the car on grass so any oil that did leak out would not be noticeable."

So that's why, pondered Cecelia. She returned to the conversation between the salesman Arnie and Peter.

"Are they trading their car in?"

"They were going to. It's being evaluated by the appraiser right now."

Peter grinned as his brain calculated. "Excellent. We'll make our profit that way." He turned Arnie around and gave him some last minute instructions. "Hem and haw, but let them get down to about five hundred above cost. If they resist, offer them an oil change—"

"We do that anyway for used cars."

"They don't know that." Arnie nodded in understanding. "Anyway, if after all that, they still refuse, get me. I'll have plenty of information for them. By the time they leave, they'll be considering themselves lucky."

With a pat on the back, Peter sent off the salesman, getting into character along the way.

Peter, on the other hand, went in the opposite direction, down the corridor and away from the showroom towards the repair shop. Inside, he searched the bays until he saw Clarence. He strode over to him.

"Is this the car being inspected for trade?" He pointed to the sedan residing up on the lift.

Clarence hardly looked at Peter. Instead, he kept his head up, gritting his teeth, and examined the front exhaust pipe flanges and gaskets once again. "Yes, it is."

"How are the brakes?"

"Fine. Plenty of shoe life left."

"Any unusual tire wear?"

"Not particularly."

"Suspension?"

"Good shape."

Peter was frustrated. "Is there anything wrong with this car?"

Clarence turned and faced Peter. "In my expert opinion, for a car of this age, it is in excellent condition. The engine has been well-maintained; the body is rust-free and undamaged—."

"How many miles does this car have?"

"A hundred and ten."

Peter thought for a second.

"Automatic?"

Clarence didn't say a word. He just nodded, and moved down to the catalytic converter, as if he were trying to move away from Peter. All the while, Clarence cringed from what he was about to hear next.

"Let's do the transmission."

Clarence's shoulders sagged. "Fine," was his exasperated reply.

"Where are the car keys?"

Clarence reluctantly reached into his pocket and pulled them out.

Satisfied, Peter left the shop and headed back down towards Arnie, who met him half way.

"I went down to 500, offered the oil change, but nothing. However, I think they might be ready to leave.

"Hmm. Here." Peter gave the keys to Arnie. "Lose 'em. Then come back and we'll see what we can do."

"Roof?"

"Fine."

Arnie scooted down the hall and went out the side door.

"Roof?" asked Jesse. "What did he mean by 'roof'?"

"Arnie is throwing the car keys up on the roof."

"Why?" said Jesse, sounding shocked.

"So the couple won't be able to leave — at least not yet."

What a sleaze, remarked Cecelia.

"I can't believe it," said Jesse.

Peter headed towards the room with the couple inside. He arrived, leaned against the door frame, and pretended to look dazed.

"Hello. Where's Arnie?"

"He went looking for you," said the elderly gentleman, smirking in exhaustion at everyone's lack of sleep.

"Well," began Peter, "I'm Mr. Strich. You have a car in the shop being evaluated for a trade?"

"Yes," the gentleman replied.

"I need to show you something."

Peter gestured the pair to follow him, and led them towards the repair shop. Along the way, Arnie caught up with them and joined the trio.

"Have you been having trouble with your transmission?" Peter asked, innocently.

"No," said the elderly woman.

"Hmm." Peter said nothing more until they arrived at the car, still up on the lift, but this time with Clarence holding the transmission pan in his hand. He placed the pan down on the work bench and wiped his hands with a rag.

"Clarence," said Peter, "this is Mr. and Mrs. Mouton. I brought them here so they could see the pan."

Clarence gestured them over to the bench and started running his fingers through the transmission fluid.

"If you look closely," began Clarence, "you will see sparkling specks in the fluid. That's metal shavings from the transmission, probably from either the bearings, bushings, and/or clutch plates. This metal is constantly circulating throughout the transmission. Have you been having trouble with your transmission recently?"

The Moutons, now visibly worried, shook their heads.

"That's good," said Clarence. He ran his fingers through the pan. Suddenly, the pan made a scrapping sound. Clarence's brow furrowed as he searched the pan for whatever made that sound. He pulled out something, wiped off the fluid with his rag, examined the object, and then showed it to the couple. It was a small piece of metal.

"You're very lucky to have brought the car in at this time," said Clarence. "If this piece of metal got into the gears, it would have destroyed the transmission. The differential would have exploded through the casing surrounding the transmission, and I dread to think what would have happened to the engine."

"What does all that mean?" prompted Peter.

"Well, in the worst case scenario, the car would have been virtually worthless. It would cost more to replace the parts than the car is valued. On the other hand, since the transmission seems to be running well, we probably removed the piece just in time. But the shavings and this piece of metal can't be ignored."

"And your diagnosis?" asked Peter.

"Well, let's see. We'll need to break down the tranny, including the differential and clutch assembly, replace the worn parts, seals, bearings — we're talking somewhere between fifteen hundred and two thousand dollars minimum for repairs. Fortunately, it's a Chevy, and we have the parts here. We could have the car ready to go by the middle of the week."

"C'mon, Clarence," objected Peter. "That's a lot of money. If it's running well now—."

"It may be running well now, but who knows how many other pieces of metal may be still up in the transmission itself." Clarence turned and spoke to the couple. "We're lucky to have found this one in the pan, but that doesn't mean it's the only piece, or that all of them will end up in the pan. You're playing Russian Roulette with your engine, Mr. and Mrs. Mouton."

The pair looked at each other, confused and frightened. Peter said thank you to Clarence as he escorted the Moutons back into the show room and into the office. Peter took Arnie's seat, as Arnie stood behind him, and began to discuss the situation. The Moutons, however, were understandably distraught and paralyzed in indecision.

"Mr. and Mrs. Mouton," said Peter, "I'm terribly sorry about your car, but Arnie and I are here to help you. Our dealership doesn't just provide the best vehicles on the market, but also the ones that best fit your budget. Now Arnie tells me that you have chosen a car, has given you a price. What was it Arnie?"

Arnie wrote it down for Peter.

"What?" said Peter in response to the price. "We're not here to give cars away."

"I'm tired. You're tired," asserted Arnie. "You told me to move the cars out. That price will do it."

Peter sighed. Arnie timidly went on.

"And a complimentary oil change."

Peter dropped his head in disbelief.

"Peter, look what they have gone through."

Peter shrugged his shoulder in passive agreement. "Okay, fair enough. If my salesman put it in writing, that offer is yours to keep." Then Peter said under his breath, but within earshot of all in the room, "It's amazing we make any money at all during this weekend."

Peter reached into one of the desk's side drawers for a sales agreement. He placed it on the desk and began to fill it out. "The concern now," said Peter, "is the trade-in value of your car, considering the repairs that are needed."

Peter next reached into the top drawer of the desk and pulled out a small blue vinyl-covered book. Peter flipped through the pages of the book.

"Here," said Peter, showing the couple the page. "This is the value of your trade. Of course, the actual value is this minus, say, fifteen hundred dollars." Mrs. Mouton placed her hand on her husband's arm. "But I'll tell you what I'll do. Since we all want to get some sleep around her, and soon, I'll reduce the cost of your car repairs by half. We don't have to pass the labor charges for the repair on to you. Okay," Peter scribbled notes on a piece of paper, "here's the price of the car you're buying." More scribbling. "Here's the allowance for your car, minus seven hundred and fifty dollars, and that's how much it will cost. Let's draw up the papers."

The Moutons looked nervously at each other. The former pleasure of car shopping was gone from their faces. They mumbled that with their budget, they couldn't afford that amount.

"Well, how much can you afford a month?"

They gave an amount.

"You know, considering the situation you're in and we're in, we'll make it work for you." Peter stood up. "We can get you into that car, within your budget, in less than an hour. However, since our prep crew isn't working today, I'll throw in not only the oil change, but a free interior/exterior wash and wax package. We want to do right by you."

Peter held out his hand. Tentative, Mr. Mouton reached up, took Mr. Strich's hand, and the two shook closing of the deal.

"Well," said Jesse, "that wasn't so bad. Dad was just trying to help them out."

Have you forgotten the car keys on the roof trick so quickly, Jesse? Cecelia pointed out. Nonplussed, however, Cecelia began thinking the same way. On one hand, Peter seemed the consummate corrupt salesman. But on the other hand, he exemplified an amazing level of altruism to sell that car. She didn't understand the two-faced nature of Peter.

"Of course," Feszj, "that is how a good sale should appear. And the Moutons will leave the dealership thinking they got a wonderful deal, got rid of a clunker that narrowly averted disaster, and will probably tell all their friends the good news, thus assuring Peter additional business. But it was all a well-crafted illusion."

"What do you mean?" asked Jesse, unsure if he wanted to know.

"Think about what really happened. Peter just sold this unfortunate pair a car that he knew was in need of major service, and received in return a car that needed no repairs whatsoever."

"What are you talking about?" Jesse defended his father. "You saw all that metal in the pan." Cecelia was thinking the same objection.

"Those tiny flacks of metal," replied Feszj, "that floated around in the fluid is normal — part of the wear and tear of a transmission. They indicate nothing more than perhaps the fluid needed replacing."

"But what about that large piece?"

"That, Jesse, was a magnet, often placed in transmission pans to attract and catch those very shavings that are floating around. You did notice how Clarence wiped it off? It wasn't a courtesy; he was removing the shavings stuck to the magnet so it would appear to be a regular chunk of metal."

"So he ripped them off?" Jesse sighed as the last little bit of respect he had for his father disintegrated.

"I'm sorry, Jesse, but he did, and in more way than one. In the salesperson's desk, there are two book for automobile valuations. The NADA book, which the salespeople use to determine the cost of cars they sell; and the Kelly Blue Book, which they use to determine the value of cars for trade-ins. The reason why is because the NADA almost always values cars higher than the Blue Book."

What a nasty trick.

"Then, when the Moutons start talking about financing, the manager will raise their interest rates just a little bit over the rates the banks are giving the dealership. The extra interest received by the dealership is more pure profit, which goes into everyone's commission."

"Plus a variety of other techniques. Your father ordered the speedometer spun back about fifteen thousand miles on the car the Moutons just purchased. The tires looked new, but they were actually retreads painted black."

"Enough," shouted Jesse. "I don't want to hear any more. The amount of deception is unbelievable. Why does he do this?"

"Why does he do this? To pay for his son's baseball camps, and college tuitions, and clothing, and housing, and food, and video games, and cable television, and computer software, and on and on and on. Your father, and all too many like him, swindle people in order to provide themselves and their families with not just the best possible lifestyle they can attain, but one they think they deserve. considering the amount of wealth in your country, they are probably justified in thinking so.

"But don't feel bad, Jesse. Remember — car salespeople are in a difficult position. They may sell on average about five cars a week, if they are good, of which two sales will fail due to numerous reasons like inadequate credit or repossession. Out of these three, the average commission might be only one-hundred and fifty dollars — not surprisingly low due to the extensive competition that exists between the vast number of car salespeople. The greatest irony of competition, however, is that as these dozens of salespeople fight it out for the chance to hook a scarce customer — which they rip off to improve their already skimpy salary and chancy income flow — the auto companies and their executives make money no matter which of their salespersons sells the car.

"Consequently, as the company fosters their own employees to struggle among themselves to survive, those above the fray — the individuals who dictate the terms of competitive engagement — are the true winners. They are the ones who no longer need to

compete, yet receive all of the benefits of everyone else's competitive endeavors. That is the truly tragic irony of a competitive marketplace and culture.

"Well, maybe," said Jesse, unable to follow the argument well enough to appreciate it, "but how does Dad get away with all this? Why do people let it happen?"

"Well," said Feszj, beginning slowly to organize his thoughts, "People know very little about the technology or mechanics of the cars they drive and what they need repaired when the situation arises. Now admittedly, not everyone can know everything. That is an unavoidable situation in large societies with rapid technological changes. People must, therefore, place their trust in individuals who do know how to solve the problems. But in a competitive society like yours, a lack of knowledge results in something much more insidious and incomprehensible: for the most part, your citizens place their trust and faith in fellow humans who, in their own competitive best interests, rip you off.

"Surprised? You shouldn't be. After all, as any good neoclassical economist can attest, the whole fabric of your competitive society is based upon the assumption that humans always pursue their own self-interest."

"But they can't continue doing that. They'd go out of business."

"That is the theory. But as we just remarked, people are not technologically savvy. They will accept the word of anyone who even remotely exudes an air of authority and wisdom. Consequently, as long as the authority appears altruistic, who will know? That is one of the reasons why neoclassical theories of the self-correcting marketplace fails.

"One would like to believe that there is a place for moral behavior in the business world, but the all-pervasive notion of self-interest makes the hope practically futile. It violates the basic law of classical economics — that self-interest fuels the market. Even morality and altruism is viewed as a calculated result of self-interest.

"However, the fact that we want Peter to behave morally is beyond the scope of his self-interest. It might be claimed to be in our self-interest that we aren't ripped off, but it doesn't explain why, when we have no stake in the outcome, we still feel morally indignant when someone else is ripped off. Self-interest would seem to argue that we ought to be happy it is not happening to us. But we aren't. We are appalled.

"The fact that we find Peter's actions repulsive indicates that we intuitively dislike the results of competition. Otherwise, we would congratulate him on his successful display of self-interest. Plus, your society's obsession with competition, with its almost perverse passion to morally justify itself, clearly demonstrates the incredible resistance there is to a competitive social structure. Unfortunately, you are unable to do much about it because you are confronted with two equally dominant forces — self-interest and moral

righteousness. Due to this confrontation, you become paralyzed, and the system continues largely unabated."

"And since we cannot choose," said Jesse, trying to recap the discussion, "the choices are made for us."

"Exactly. Invariably by people who have accepted the ideological stance of competition."

"Where are the forces for cooperation?"

"They are there, but cooperativists will never force anyone to choose cooperation, much less choose cooperation over competition. A person must come to accept it on their own, freely and in their own terms. Considering the dominance of competition, however, people are hardly given a free choice not to compete. That is one of the reasons why competition survives so heartily."

"So," said Jesse, continuing his consolidation of thought, "competition forces us to choose self-interested behavior over moral behavior..."

"Yes."

"... because in a competitive cultural framework, it doesn't pay to be moral. You cannot survive being moral."

"Which is why in a cooperative society, since everyone helps each other achieve goals and objectives, one can survive whether one is moral or not."

Whoa. This statement caught Cecelia off-guard.

"Wait a minute," said Jesse, equally unprepared. "Are you saying that a person can be immoral in a cooperative society?"

"One can."

"So how does the society survive?"

"The society won't. It will eventually collapse if this happens. That is why, unlike competition — which places the self-interest of the individual above that of other individuals and the community, cooperation places the self-interest of the community above that of the individual."

"But what happens if ..." Jesse's voice trailed off, overcome by anxiety.

"Cooperation is incapable of stemming the tide of competition. It is a form of non-violent persuasion or resistance, one might say in your world. We can only hope that once a person understands our way of life, that person, too, will find our presentation convincing enough to encourage him or her to participate fully in helping to preserve our community."

The showroom suddenly blurred out of existence, replaced by a creamy blend of colors. She heard Jesse's voice ask, "Where are we going now?"

"You'll see," replied Feszj.

* * *

As the image cleared, Cecelia began feeling uncomfortable sensation over her body. She realized almost instantly, before her vision focused, she was being violated by someone having sex with her. The putrid scent of stale beer breath filled her nostrils.

She struggled to push off her assailant, but none of her limbs responded. It was odd. She felt her arms and legs move, but but her original sensations never changed.

Then a horrible thought crossed her mind. For some reason, she feared that she might be in bed with that cretin orderly, Jim. She kept her eyes closed so her thoughts couldn't be validated. Despite the constant pounding of his pelvis against hers, she did feel her skin crawl and her spine shiver with disgust. But being powerless to do anything about her situation tortured her much more.

With her eyes closed, she could hear thunder rumbling outside and the rain roaring down on the roof. Unfortunately, these sounds weren't loud enough to drown out this man's wheezing, moaning, and his incessant guttural "Do you like it, baby?"

Eventually, however, as she passively lay there, she found that not knowing things like where she was — though she assumed she was probably in a bedroom somewhere, what was going on around her, and who this person really was on top of her was too powerful to remain unknown — more powerful certainly than the regret with which she might have to deal once she found out. She screwed up her courage to peek at her overweight stranger, and was slightly relieved to see a sweaty and filthy man wearing an oil stained T-shirt with holes worn through under the armpits. At least it wasn't Jim.

With the aid of a dim unshaded light bulb, she looked around as saw a sparsely furnished room. The painted walls yellowed from age and dust, and chipping at the ceiling line. Cobwebs filled every corner, and the ceiling was etched with numerous cracks of every size.

It's amazing nothing is leaking in this roach motel, Cecelia mumbled. I hope there's no lice in the bed.

As she suffered through the unwanted intercourse with her drunken companion, a blast of lightning shattered the air around her and violently shook the room. Cecelia then heard a

child, probably from another room, scream in terror. Seconds later, a three year old boy burst into the room yelling "Mommy! I'm scared!"

Trying to get into bed with the couple, the child had already climbed on top when the man reared up off of Cecelia, roaring in ferocity, and flinging the child off him. The kid bounded across the bed and on to the floor.

"You f— brat! I'll teach you some manners!" said the enraged man.

Cecelia heard the voice of the woman pleading out in desperation. "Please, Billy. Don't hurt him again." The woman sat up in the bed.

"Cover yourself up, bitch, and get back down. I'm not done with you yet. I'll be back after I take care of your little brat."

Billy staggered after the little boy and swung at him. The boy ducked causing the man to stumble and almost fall. The child ran to his mother, who started cradling him in her arms.

"You piece of shit," the man bellowed at the boy. "How dare you run away from me! I'll teach you some respect!"

She held up her hand to stop the incensed man from approaching. But the arm was batted away.

"Billy, no—!"

The woman was quickly silenced with a fist in the mouth, snapping her head back against the wall. Pain seared through Cecelia's face and neck. She looked down and saw blood dripping on the woman's breasts, the bed sheets, and the little boy's face and arms as he wrapped himself around her body.

Billy ripped the boy out of his mother's grip, prompting the boy to start begging forgiveness. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" he beseeched. Despite her injury, she followed, hoping to retrieve her little son before anything worse happened, and was rewarded with the back of Billy's hand to her temple, sending her flying across the bed and off the other side.

The pain in Cecelia's skull was excruciating. She looked up from the floor when the boy let out piecing screams of agony. The man was carrying the child, having gripped the child by the neck of the T-shirt and the waistband of the briefs. Through the flailing legs, Cecelia glimpsed one of the boy's testicles being pinched outside of the underwear.

"Don't you never come into this room again without knocking, ever again? You hear?" With that statement, he sent the child's head into the door.

"Learn to knock!" Billy said, bashing the boy's head into the door again and again, rattling the bedroom window with very hit. Blood trickled from the boy's head, its skin split by the impacts, and stained the door.

Cecelia couldn't believe what she was seeing. *Get up!* she yelled at the woman. *Kick him in the balls! Get a gun! Knife him! Anything!* But there was no response; she could not hear Cecelia. Although obviously useless, Cecelia could do nothing else but continue exhorting the woman to fight back.

"Have you learned your lesson?" said Billy, throwing the kid to the floor. The child landed flat on his belly and face, knocking the wind out of him and breaking his nose. The little boy doubled up on the floor, gasping for air, desperate to wail in pain; but the child, staring at his mother through blue eyes, was only able to squeak out a heart-wrenching "Help me, Mommy." Cecelia's eyes flooded with tears.

The woman was about to crawl over to her son when the man pointed a menacing finger at her. She stopped, frozen in fear, and collapsed to the floor in convulsions of sobbing.

She's worthless, thought Cecelia. *She's in too much fear.* By this time, Cecelia realized that her efforts were fruitless as well and, with abject despair, resigned herself to the hopelessness of the boy's situation.

"Get back to your room, kid," yelled the man. The child could hardly breath, much less move. "Move, Damn it, or I swear, I'll kick you back to your room."

No!

The child tried to wriggle along the floor towards his room, but not fast enough.

"I warned you, kid," said the man. "This is going to be all your fault." He wound up and, with a massive boot to the child's rear end causing a sickening smack, sent the little boy scrapping along the linoleum tile floor and crashing into the wall on the other side of the hallway, less that three feet away.

"Let's go," said the man before he walked out of the room. Cecelia heard another thud, and another, as the man kicked the kid back into the child's room, following through on his threat. Cecelia then noticed herself leaving the woman's body and began floating down the hallway, guided by the blood-smearred trail on the floor and watching the vile inhumane abuse. Her only comfort, though she didn't care at the time, was that the pain of the woman's injuries was gone.

The man finally, and mercifully, reached the child's room. The child no longer moved as he remained on the floor, though Cecelia could still see some breathing. The man, apparently getting tired of kicking the kid, picked him up by the collar and waistband again,

and flung the child towards the bed situated against the wall, but missed. The child fell short, the body snapping off the mattress and on to the floor, his head whacking against the tile. Billy cursed to himself, walked over and grabbed the kid, carried the limp body back to where he had made the previous attempt, and flung the little boy towards the bed a second time with much more effort. This time, Billy overshot the bed, sending the boy crashing into the wall, leaving a red stain on newly cracked plaster. Like a rag doll, the little child dropped into the bed, his limbs now twisted in obscene distortions.

Billy dusted his hands off, satisfied with the resolution. "Now, back to my date," he said to himself, and strode unsteadily down the hallway towards his girlfriend's bedroom to complete the lovemaking that they started.

Cecelia, however, stayed in the child's room — a barren place, lit up by a tiny night light. A disappointingly few toys were strewn on the floor, one of which was now being examined by a dust-covered mouse. The rain had slowed to a trickle; an occasional drop popped at the roof. She looked at the boy, his face slowly turning blue and black from the bruising and covered with a crusty film of dried blood. Fresh blood drained slowly from his nose and mouth and on to the unwashed bed sheets. What was once a thin, naïve little boy with a cherubic face, Cecelia now stared at a mangled body of scarred flesh and broken bones.

"Why did you show me this?" said Jesse. His sullen voice startled her. She had all but forgotten about their presence.

"I showed you this," said Feszj, "to demonstrate the tragic effects of how competition destroys community. It should be obvious to you by now that an individualistic society grounded in competition condemns people to compete against others, alone, just to demonstrate their worth — as if being a human isn't worthy enough."

"But the poor do get help," argued Jesse. "They get food stamps and welfare."

"Yes, your governments can give them money and other aid to survive, like a government ought to do, but you can't give them worth — something solely determined by other fellow humans based on their place in society — when their worth equates to material possessions."

"But a person doesn't have to believe that their worth is based on their possessions."

"That's right, Jesse. But even if we admit that it is possible that these social misfits can go against everything they have ever been taught about and have ever witnessed concerning the obvious disparities between success and failure in society, and claim that they have value because they are moral human beings, this is exactly the expected mentality that results from competition.

"Compare what you have suggested with the line that one learns more from losing than winning. Or the line that it's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game. Whereas competitors in society are spurred on by the possibility of achieving the values of wealth and power, the acceptable value for failures, as you have shown, comes from losing with dignity. Losers are expected to be good sports, and not complain about the unfairness inherent in the competitive system, not to point out the inequities of abilities and talents that are brought to the playing field, where all that waits is simply the public validation of one's superiority. A loser must never point the finger towards the winners, which were the immediate cause for one's loss; and a loser must never point a finger at the competitive system which perpetuates these outcomes, which provides institutional sanction for winners. Instead, a loser must point the finger at oneself, the only place left to point.

"Consequently, the poor, the failures, and the losers are convinced that because they do not succeed, they are personally inferior. If only they tried harder, you say. If only they trained more, or did things differently, things might have been different. Animosity against the system is thus deflected away from the winners who possessed abilities enhanced by their background, training, genetics, environment, and a slew of other influences, including the competitive system, which assures the constant generation of winners with similar influences.

"An individualistic culture leaves people to their own devices, so everything that happens to a person is that person's fault or achievement. They win or lose based on their own actions. Such, of course, is clearly an ideology that benefits the successes of society — those who succeeded supposedly on their own, feel individually responsible for their success, feel no connection or sympathy for the many other people trampled in the process, and make no mention of the backs they climbed over and shoulders they stood upon to get where they got."

Yes, Cecelia admitted, fending for oneself is the way of life in our society.

"This woman," Feszj went on, "was, therefore, doomed to find no value in her life in the competitive material sense, so she had to glean value from perhaps the only thing she could do — have a baby. Unfortunately, because fending for oneself is a way of life in your society, she had to figure out — mostly on her own — how an unmarried woman was to raise a child by herself, with often no assistance from neighbors or friends.

"She did the best she could with what she had. She gave her son love and affection, time and attention. But she was never satisfied with her abilities — society having taken away any reason she might have to value herself — and was always upset that she could never give her child what society demanded he have — things. Books to read, toys to

develop his mind, and a litany of other requirements for growing children. Society wasn't there to give these necessities to her, despite the horrendous injustice this does to the child. Why should the successful worry about the kid? One less competitor to worry about.

"So, she is once again condemned to look elsewhere for the necessary funds to provide her son with these needs. She looks to get married, or at least hook up with a boyfriend which will help support the child. But these relationships, spawned out of desperation, failed miserably, until the final disaster we just witnessed.

"Community was absent from her life. Support was inexcusably non-existent. And at the very point when she saw a light at the end of the tunnel, and got her son the help that government has to provide as community support disintegrates, her need for a father, something your society thinks every child should have in order to be properly raised, doomed it forever. After all, children do not need fathers or mothers *per se*, only the availability of father-figures and mother-figures."

"Why did community's disintegrate," Jesse asked.

"Oh, there is probably no single cause: the industrial revolution — forcing people, including children, to work sixty-plus hours a week, sacrificing the community of home and families for the community of a dingy and loud factory; the automobile — giving people the opportunity to run away from their homes and the people around them; the suburbs — giving people the opportunity to run away from their neighbors even while on the same street; not to overlook the conflict of disparate cultures and religions. Perhaps even the rise in technology; for your culture seems more and more to turn to technology to accomplish tasks that in the past, people had to cooperate to achieve.

"But through it all, the social and cultural ideology of competition grew as your quest for individualism and privacy grew. Yet the greatest irony in your society is that the more people tried to escape conflict and competition with others, the more they competed with each other to achieve that escape. Thus, in the end, unwilling to voluntarily deal with crises and situations, competition became your society's inevitable solution to resolving conflicts, compelling people who wanted simply to leave their troubles behind to deal with conflict. The person who believes in individualism is just that kind of person, one who places him or herself in continual conflict with others just to defend one's right to be left alone.

"Competition doesn't make us stronger," said Feszj. "It makes us more dependent on competition."

There was a long pause. Cecelia noticed that the boy's bleeding had stopped. Then Jesse spoke again.

"How's the boy?"

"The boy has a cerebral hemorrhage and internal bleeding, and died a few minutes ago."

My God.

"Why didn't you do anything about it?" Jesse was frantic and harsh.

"We already have."

"What do you mean?"

"His death was a tragic shame for your world," said Feszj, skirting the question. "He turned out to be a wonderful young boy."

"What are you talking about." Cecelia thought the same thing.

"We removed the boy before he died. He now lives with us. His name on Earth was Kyle. We call him Kai."

"Wait a minute. Are you talking about that little black boy I met, the one who pulled my arm to join the human pyramid?"

"The same," said Feszj.

"You're right," said Jesse, sounding relieved. "Kai is a great kid."

"As I said, your world is very wasteful."

"It's not the whole world," objected Jesse. "It's just this one ass hole."

"One among many, Jesse. And hundreds of thousands of children around the world suffer at their hands. And not only people, but governments as well abuse their children: imprisoning, torturing, and killing them to keep them away from tourists; or looking the other way when children as young as three years old are conscripted into slave labor to sew together the leather covering over soccer balls — balls shipped overseas for the amusement of American children.

"You see Jesse, there is so much you don't know about the seedy inhumanities existing around the world. Of course, national boundaries don't help the situation. For the sake of national sovereignty, people and our responsibility towards them are kept apart. After all, their welfare is their government's responsibility, not yours.

"All in all, the Western countries have done a very good job in promoting national sovereignty. It fragments populations, automatically making neighbors antagonists, which is good for the West, because it sells them the arms to fight among themselves. Furthermore, large countries which separate into smaller ones lose access to resources, thus making them poorer. Again, the West comes to their aid with loans and other assistance, increasing a new country's dependence on the West. By fragmenting the world, and exacerbating or creating rifts in populations, the West becomes the dominant

players in world politics. Your Civil War ought to have made all this clear. It also explains why the West doesn't want Third World countries from getting the Bomb. It equalizes the power structure between the haves and the have-nots, and permits the poorer nations to demand fairer treatment. The balance of power shifts threatening the hegemony of the West. It is inevitable, and only a matter of time."

Jesse remained silent for a moment, taking in all this. Cecelia considered the apocalyptic nature of Feszj's statement. *Just like the little boy in the street who, after being bullied by other kids for so long, obtains a gun and exacts his opportunity to bully. If he can't gain respect just for being himself, then he'll force respect with a universal symbol of power. One doesn't have to respect the person anymore; just respect the scepter he waves in his hand.*

"Do you know what happened to his mother," Jesse asked, after his thoughtful silence. "And that guy?" he added with a snarl.

"The mother woke up the next morning," began Feszj, describing the scenes to be while they all watched the little boy's body grow colder, "long after Billy had left for work, and discovered the cold, stiff corpse of her son. She carefully peeled his face off the sheet, stuck to it by coagulated blood, and pulled him off the bed. She wrapped her arms around him, and rocked her dead son for over an hour, singing children's songs, stroking his hair, kissing his forehead, and murmuring repeatedly 'I'm sorry.'

"After that, she brought the boy to the bathtub and removed his clothes, revealing the blue skin of death underneath. She then bathed the child and cleaned off all the blood, dried him off, returned him to his room, and dressed him in the best set of clothes he had — a blue flannel shirt, jeans, black socks, and a new pair of sneakers she was saving for his first day of Head Start pre-school only a week away.

"Fully dressed, she brought him and his favorite book — a gift she received from the midwife who was in attendance when she gave birth to her son — to the back yard. She placed him in the front passenger seat of a rusty and dented car, left propped up on cinder blocks by a previous boyfriend. She then took her garden hose, slid it into the tail pipe, and stuffed the rest of the opening with dirt. The other end of the hose was brought to the passenger window. The hose, along with clothes wrapped in a plastic bag, was wedged into the rolled up window. She got inside the car and started the engine. She pulled her son to her, and began to read."

Cecelia suddenly heard the tender but hollow voice of Kyle's mother take over from Feszj. "Congratulations! Today is your day. You're off to Great Places! You're off and away!..."

"She read the book twice," said Feszj, continuing his narrative. "In the middle of the third reading, the book dropped from her hand, and she fell asleep. It was all over in about an hour."

"What about the murderer?"

"He found the bodies later that afternoon, returned to his house and brought back a beat-up old typewriter he had in his closet, and typed out a suicide note, saying that she was sorry for having beat up her son, and that couldn't live with herself, and other comments to that effect. He then called the police, who read the note and accepted it. Case closed."

"That's horrible."

"Yes, it is. But it is from a world of your own making."

Cecelia saw the image of the morbid little room beginning to fade away. Yet the scene yielded one final agony for her, because the last thing she heard was a muffled "Do you like it, baby?"

* * *

Cecelia next arrived inside what appeared to be the dining room of a home, though not a wealthy one. There were no screens on the windows, which were all open to expose the bright sunshine reflecting off the deep green tropical-looking plants. The uneven wooden floor was polished smooth and dark from use rather than wax. The long wooden dining table had a top which was sanded flat and possessed deep grooves from the drying wood cracking and separating. The walls were made simply from wood planks, though there were no gaps.

Cecelia heard voices coming from other places in the house, and as best as she could tell from the muffled sounds, it was Spanish. She surmised that the house was probably situated somewhere in Central America, and the family, though not living in splendor, had to have been at least a middle class, if not upper middle class, family for the area.

The laughter continued. Cecelia smiled. It seems almost idyllic in its simplicity, until she saw a silent dark image run by the window. She held her breath trying to hear more, maybe the cracking of a twig, or the shudder of leaves. She heard the sound of someone running across matted grass, and then another image passed by the window. This time, she was prepared and caught a better glimpse before the person disappeared. He was dressed in a green khaki fatigue shirt, and carried a rifle in his hands. He looked like military.

All of a sudden, she heard what she assumed was the front door of the home being smashed inward, followed by the thunder of countless boot-clad feet clamoring through the house. The innocent laughter changed instantly into shrieks of terror and pleas of mercy. Shortly after the strangers had burst through the front door, into the dining room came six grimy-looking soldiers — one not much older than a teenager — dragging behind them the terrified occupants of the house — three children crying uncontrollably and an elderly woman, the matriarch of the house probably. She looked old, but Cecelia figured she was probably only in her mid-fifties. The old woman cradled an infant in her arms.

Cecelia noticed that she was being drawn into the body of the old woman. She intuited something terrible was about to happen — worse than what happened previously — and did not want to be in the midst of it. *No!* she screamed, but was unable to prevent herself from being sucked into the old woman. Once inside the body, Cecelia felt dull pains on her back and legs. More acute pain resulted from being prodded by the muzzle of a machine gun.

Cecelia heard the old woman both coo to the small confused child and plead with the captors for the safety of her family. They would have nothing to do with her placations. Instead, they ripped the infant from her arms, and shoved it into the high chair standing next to the table. She instinctively reached for the baby, but was jabbed in the stomach with the butt of a rifle. She collapsed to the floor, gasping for air, only to be pulled up roughly by the arms and placed in a chair at one end of the table.

Cecelia looked around her, still queasy from the pain in her gut. She saw that the children were already sitting around the table, sobbing and petrified with fear. Cecelia figured the children ages to be about four, eight, and twelve, with the infant, sitting in a high chair at the opposite end of the table from her, being less than a year old.

She watched in confusion as five of the six soldiers raided the cabinets looking for plates and silverware. The sixth, apparently the leader of the small group, directed the others in their rummaging activities around the house with commands she did not understand and then oversaw the placement of the dinnerware in front of her and each of the children. Soon, one of the soldiers discovered a large wooden salad bowl, and after a moment of thought, the commander ordered the bowl to be set in the middle of the table.

What was going on? she wondered. *Did the soldiers want to be fed? This seemed like an odd way of going about it.*

With the commander standing apart, each of the other soldiers took a position behind a person at the table. Then, from the scabbard at his side, the leader drew out a grayish black

machete. Cecelia's eyes popped open at the massive size of the blade, and the silver sheen at the edge. She heard her heart pounding against her ribs.

Oh, God. Get me out of here, she pleaded to the unknown entity guiding her through these situations, each one more hideous than the last.

The sobbing around her increased as the terror multiplied. The old woman stood up and tried to intervene in what might happen. The soldier behind her grabbed her hair and pulled her back down to the chair. Cecelia's scalp stung viciously as the man, stinking with sweat, held on.

The group sat in their seats, transfixed by the ominous blade. The commander made a speech about something, to which the family erupted to protest the mistake his was about to make, Cecelia assumed. He yelled to silence them. The baby, however, continued to cry. Infuriated, the commander grabbed the baby's hair and, with its little legs wedged against the tray, stretched its head and body upward. With a massive swing, the commander sent the machete slicing through the baby's neck, wedging the blade into the back of the chair. The baby's body flopped down into the seat, blood gushing and overflowing onto the table and floor. The baby's face contorted in spasms of agony as its life drained out.

The woman and the children screamed in horror, and tried to escape the room. The old lady fought the hands clutching her hair, sending stabbing pain into Cecelia's skull. The two older children had the hair grasped the moment the baby was decapitated. The youngest child, his hair being the shortest, pulled himself from the grasp of the soldier guarding him and slipped under the table. The guard quickly reached under and grabbed the young boy's ankle, pulled him out from underneath, and held him dangling over his chair. The little arms swung wildly, trying to beat off the soldier, and yelling for his grandmother to do something to help. But Cecelia knew there was nothing the grandmother could do.

Cecelia breathed rapidly and furiously to keep from vomiting, and her mouth went dry as cotton. She had never seen anyone decapitated before, except in the movies, and it looked nothing like it. There was blood everywhere, flowing out of the stump like lava from a volcano. Seeing the tissues, ligaments, bone and muscle hanging from the neck made every muscle in her body spasm.

Yet the worst and most grotesque part — the part she will never forget — was the baby's mouth moving but saying nothing. For a moment, she couldn't understand why, but then it made sense. There was still oxygenated blood in the head that kept the brain alive to experience everything that happened, even if only for a few final seconds of its

existence. The excruciating pain that young mind must have suffered caused the baby to scream; but without lungs, the scream was silent.

The commander placed the baby's head on the plate in front of the high chair, and ordered the man behind the high chair to take the baby's body and allow the blood to drain into the bowl in the middle of the table. After he issued his instructions, he walked over to the boy still dangling, still struggling futilely. With the boy's back was to him, he waited until the child rested from his attempts to escape. At that moment when the child was relatively stationary, he lopped off the boy's head, which bounced off the chair to the floor and rolled against his grandmother's feet. The old woman, crying miserably, pulled her feet away in absolute revulsion. The soldier carried the twitching body over the bowl and let the blood pour into it.

Cecelia was morbidly thankful that she didn't have to see this boy's mouth. Cecelia now smelled the scent of feces. Apparently, one or both of the other children lost bowel control — fear overwhelming them.

The old woman whimpered pleas of mercy and constantly blessed herself. The two other children battled valiantly against their human restraints — the eldest boy almost got off his chair, despite the hair being torn from his scalp — until they and their chairs were shoved into the table, cracking a couple of ribs. Still they fought, grabbing and scrapping the skin off their assailant's hands which held their hair. Again and again, the children were shoved into the edge of the table until all their resistance had been bludgeoned out.

By this time, the second head was placed on the plate in front of the slumping torso. The commander walked around to the other side of the table and stared at the eight year old girl. Cecelia had seen that kind of lecherous look before, and her stomach turned once again. The commander said something to her, to which she nodded eagerly in response. The grandmother spoke out to warn her granddaughter, but was rapped hard against the side of her head for her concern.

The chair was pulled away for the young girl and she got up on the table, and lay down on her back, her legs hanging off the edge. The commander lifted up her skirt, pulled off panties filled with shit, wiped his hands on her dress, and proceeded to rape her. Cecelia figured that the leader offered her her life in exchange for sexual gratification.

She's young, naïve, and a fool, thought Cecelia. But in this situation, I'd probably do the same thing. A person clings to any hope to avoid death.

The young girl grimaced in pain but held it in as the commander, followed by the rest of the small contingent of terrorists, had their fill of her lost virginity. It was an ugly surreal picture: an eight-year-old girl — lying on the table between the heads of her two

younger siblings — being raped, her dress soaking up the blood which saturated both the table and her vagina.

As soon as the last man had completed his rape and buttoned his fly, the young girl started to sit up. One of the soldiers behind her, however, snatched her hair and yanked her head back down to the table with a thud. Before she could react, the commander sent his bloodied machete flying again. The girl's ear-piecing screech ended abruptly and sickeningly, with the machete getting stuck in the wood of the table. The other soldiers grabbed the body and head and held them over the bowl letting the blood fill it up.

Cecelia was beyond horror and emotion. She watched in a dazed, dreamlike trance, as if she were hallucinating. The room was streaked with blood, the floor slick with it. Out of nowhere, flies suddenly appeared everywhere and feasted on it, crawling over the bodies in the process. Cecelia's head began jerking. The retching smell of gore filled her nostrils.

The last boy, having been squashed against the table repeatedly, held his sides in anguish. The commander moved next to him. The boy looked up into the soulless eyes, and begged one last time: "No, por favor." The commander just grinned through his blood speckled face and started swinging. The boy yelled for his grandmother's help as he raised his hands to block the blow. The blade carved into the arms of the boy. Cecelia's ears deafened at the boy's blood-curdling cry of agony.

"Damn!" the commander cursed, *in English*. This caught Cecelia's attention, but not for long. The commander placed his hand on the boy's back and shoved the child to the table and, with one final swing, ended his life. The head spun on the table, blood spitting out in all directions, as the soldiers lifted the last body and filled the bowl until it overflowed.

The grandmother, filled with guilt at her incapacity to save her grandchildren, babbled incoherently and watched in helpless resignation as the gruesome scene was set. The heads were arranged in the plates in front of each body, and the right hand of each body was placed on top of the head to keep it upright. The baby's hand wouldn't stay on, however. The commander sent a soldier off looking for something. He returned a few minutes later with a nail. With the butt of his pistol, the commander hammered the nail through the tiny hand and into the skull to hold it in place.

Then, the commander paused to survey the horrifying display of ritualistic slaughter. He nodded his head in approval, and smiled at the old woman. He could see, and Cecelia could tell, that the woman was by now in complete physical and mental collapse; her head

held up only by the soldier behind her. He spoke to her with the most heartless lilt, gleeful at what he and his men had done, and walked gently over to her.

Please, get me out of here! I don't want to feel this!

The commander bent over and positioned himself face to face with her. Cecelia could smell the bad breath and see several blackened teeth. The woman remained quiet. Cecelia guessed that the woman had nothing to say, nor anything left to live for, and merely waited for the final act. The commander looked puzzled. His work had apparently been so effective and so thorough in its theatrical presentation, it destroyed the woman. She was beyond intimidation or fear. She lived beyond reality.

Realizing there was nothing more he could do to her, he motioned the soldier to push her forward so her head rested on the table. She obediently responded to the pressure on her back and delicately laid down her head so it faced away from the commander. She closed her eyes and waited for the inevitable.

No! No! No! Get me out of here!

Cecelia's heart was bursting through her chest. Her breathing was rapid and shallow causing her mind to spin into dizziness.

Please, God! Help me!

She felt the cold, wet blade touch her neck slightly. The commander was preparing for his final swing, and couldn't help letting the old woman feel the blood of her grandchildren on her flesh.

Lights exploded in Cecelia's eyes. *I don't want to die!*

She felt the blade disappear from her skin and heard the man grunt in exertion.

NO!!

In an instant, as she panted heavily, inhaling and exhaling deeply, her neck constricting from the inevitable, everything went black. In that moment, Cecelia assumed that it must be what death is — the final nothingness, a soul aimlessly afloat in absolute darkness. But she wondered. *To live an eternity in this? Hell couldn't be more miserable than this last and cruelest trick of Nature.*

But she felt no pain, not even the impact of the blade. She started to reassess her situation. *Did I die before the blade struck?* No, she dismissed that notion. She must have exited the old woman's body before the moment of execution. But Cecelia felt she understood why she was forced to experience this woman's last minutes on Earth: taken to the brink of oblivion changes a person's view of the world and makes one truly appreciate life ... and the lives of everyone else.

However, despite the respite from an early grave, the empty void she inhabited grew increasingly unsettling and frightening. The experiences her associates described when they were on cave tours and the lights were turned off, enveloping people in utter blackness, now made complete sense. Although surrounded by other people, they still felt the desolation of total solitude. No voice reassured, no touch comforted. Being so used to light and sight, without them for the first time, one is all alone.

She had seen research which indicated many people preferring the quiet of sensory deprivation chambers, finding it soothing and refreshing. But these individuals had the comfort of knowing they could leave at any time, and that people were outside waiting for them to emerge. They never felt deserted, nor apart from community — quite a different sensation than when the light and darkness are beyond one's power to control.

"Why?"

Jesse's voice, said Cecelia, though the voice was frail and brittle. He was probably also battered by what he saw.

"Why were they killed?" responded Feszj. "Or why did I show you this?"

"Both."

"Well, to begin with, the family was butchered for no other reason than to set an example."

"Huh?" Jesse may be befuddled, but Cecelia knew what Feszj meant.

"When the mother of the children arrived home," Feszj went on, "what she saw destroyed her. She screamed for hours — in the house, in the streets. Neighbors came to her aid, but she remained inconsolable — her mind having snapped."

"Why? What did she do, what did they do, to deserve such horrible treatment?"

"Nothing. Retribution had nothing to do with the terror. Granted, the father had been a newspaper editor, but he disappeared over six months previous. Ever since then, the family itself had no direct connection to any of these terrorists, nor was the family involved in any aspect of politics whatsoever. The main purpose of this sadistic display of insanity was to remind everyone in that village that no one was immune from the government, that no one could feel safe or escape. Once the other townspeople viewed the ghastly spectacle, though their minds didn't disintegrate, they realized that their existence was of no value. Their lives were in the hands of others to do with what they pleased.

"This act, and so many other acts like it, doesn't just demoralize the population, it dehumanizes them. Compassion for life becomes irrelevant. The population had become simple objects and toys — mere playthings and pieces of some game to be used or abused, tossed about and discarded, based on the whims and caprices of the players. In the same

sense that you have no emotional empathy for a tennis ball every time you bash it across the court, political leaders, their lackeys, and other people from all walks of life have no emotional connection with these individuals whatsoever."

"But how does all this relate to competition?" asked Jesse. "This looked more like madness."

"Ahh," started Feszj, collecting his thoughts. "Socially-derived madness, like this incident, is just the furthest point on the social behavioral spectrum. The beginnings of anti-social behavior comes from learning that impersonal treatment of fellow human beings is acceptable, if not necessary. The greater the impersonality we perceive others with, the greater the possibility of treating others without remorse or compassion.

"This thinking is most pervasively taught through competition; for if competition is to be effective, and if competitors are to achieve their unilateral goals, there must be a certain level of impersonality between competitors. A person cannot compete well and performance would suffer if one constantly feels guilty whenever that person has forced another to fail at a task. Therefore, one must become emotionally detached from any competitor. Consequently, social bonds between people quickly fragment when challenged by goals driven by self-interest. But we've talked about all this before."

"But why were they competing against this family? If they didn't do anything, why was this family assumed to be competitors?"

"But Jesse, these soldiers weren't competing against this family. This family, as well as countless other nameless victims, became just the means to an end. To elaborate on my previous sports analogy, this family was just the tennis ball, completely at the mercy of others and bounced from one political ideology to another. Only the ideologies are competing. This poor family was simply caught in the crossfire.

"The carnage we just witnessed, therefore, demonstrated the ultimate finality of competition — where human beings themselves become simple objects which have no justification for existence except as it promotes one or another competing ideology. They have literally become chess pieces of the more powerful, suitable for sacrifice with hardly a thought as to their humanity. But if eliminating these objects helps to enhance the competitive stance of one group and its leaders over another, so be it.

"But this heartless perception of humans is expressed in many ways, though perhaps not as graphically as here. Organizations, for example, become institutionalized once their primary objective moves away from what they were designed to do — like education in schools, or medical treatment in hospitals, or public welfare in politics — and self-interest takes precedence, a self-interest deemed acceptable in a market economy. The whole point

of the institution, before it deals with its original mandate, is first and foremost, to maintain its own existence. This self-interested mentality seeps down into the minds of the employees. As both business and behavioral rules inside an organization become entrenched into the workers's psyche, the petty hierarchy of status created by these rules guarantees that a vested interest in them continues. Consequently, inter-office politics intensifies and formalized internal cultures arise, all of which leads to a collapse of efficiency. Employees work, first and foremost, so they and their jobs can be kept in existence. Satisfying the needs of the people whom they are supposed to help is secondary.

"Is it any wonder why so many bureaucrats behave so poorly when dealing with people? Why so many bureaucrats seem so caught up in themselves? Why so many bureaucrats turn job-related trivialities into all-consuming preoccupations? Employees will carry grudges for decades if their co-workers receive chairs with arm rests and they didn't. Yet they could care less for the homeless person less than fifty feet below their window trying to stay warm in a cardboard box in the middle of winter."

Cecelia recalled with shame the time she insisted the facility move her office and research labs rather than let a new researcher get an extra 3 square feet of floor space. The fight took several weeks filled with memos, telephone calls, headaches and ulcers, and the eventual move cost the institution thousands of dollars. More shamefully, during the entire picayune escapade, she did nothing that she was paid to do. Her research ground to a halt.

It happens all the time at the Institution, was the only comfort she could glean and rationalize from her memories. But Feszj is right. Bureaucracies take so much out of a person. The most difficult part about one's job is not the work, but the people one must work with, including all their petty ambitions. Committees, conferences, papers, budgets, grants. Every possible hindrance in the way of doing that which I'm actually paid to do — treat the mentally ill.

"There is no time for compassion, no place for community," remarked Feszj. "The trivialities of the working world with its unending pursuit of trinkets, and certificates, and degrees, of high back chairs versus low back chairs, desk tops with ten square feet rather than nine, cubicles with six-foot high partitions rather than four-foot ones. Life has become a quest for power, for dominance, and for status of the most insignificant objects of human importance, all generated by the transient glory — and lingering destruction — of competition."

The blackness bubbled with color. *Good*, she sighed.

"That is what Earth is all about, Jesse," said Feszj as the images in front of Cecelia's eyes sharpened. She half-listened to him, eager and happy to leave the darkness. "The horrors you and many like you have immunized yourselves against. Yes, there are many wonderful scenes around the world of kindness and happiness, but they are few and far between — a despicable statement on a world supposedly advanced and morally enlightened — all because you have thrown your lot in with competition rather than cooperation. It was a choice your world had made, and the results are obvious."

Soon, Cecelia once again floated in Jesse's room. Jim was no longer around, and Jesse still lay on the cot, on his stomach. Evening encroached on the room as the light from outside dimmed, and the sun fell behind the building. The colors in the room blended into varying hues of blue and gray.

"So Jesse," continued Feszj, "when you speak of staying here on Earth, have you forgotten, or are you purposely forgetting all the inhuman treatment people in societies and cultures throughout the world cause their fellow humans?"

Jesse grumbled.

"Listen carefully, Jesse." Feszj sounded more strident. "By staying on Earth, you — by necessity — become a part of this cruelty, either as one of the torturers or as one of the tortured, simply by doing nothing to stop it — a cruel reality fostered and sustained by a competitive world view."

To win, or not to win? Is that the question? puzzled Cecelia to herself. Isn't there an alternative in this world? Isn't there a way not to play this competitive game? Or if one is forced to play, isn't there a way one can change the rules from a competitive base to a cooperative base? Or are we forever condemned to compete?

Cecelia smiled a virtual smile to herself.

Jesse, it should all makes sense now. The errors our society has made, so clear to me, should have become equally clear to you. The question is why are you still fighting this? Can't you see the beauty of his argument? Feszj took apart the notion of competition on so many levels it can't possibly stand up anymore. He demonstrated its scientific fallacies, its sociological faults, its psychological costs, its moral failures. Feszj nailed down the lid and buried what was left of the ugly and deformed body of competition. It is time to accept that, and move on. What more do you need?

"But the worst situation of all," continued Feszj, "is whether or not you can ever go back to the world knowing what you now know about cooperation and competition. Everything you do and everywhere you look will cause you to cringe and wince because deep in your heart you can't help but know it could all be immeasurably improved. The

worst thing about moral enlightenment, Jesse, is realizing that the pain and suffering of fellow humans need not exist."

"God, Feszj, you make it sound so hopeless," said Jesse.

"It is hopeless if all you wish to do is go back to the way things were before we arrived. That can no longer ever happen. Because in order to survive now in your society, you would have to forget everything you have learned with us. But could you? No. You can never go back. On the other hand, you can stay and try to change the world, but due to the contingencies of your situation, the world may not be ready for you to change it. That is why we are offering you this opportunity to join our world. Perhaps later, when hundred or thousands from your population take up the message, and the cooperativist movement fully blossoms, maybe then you can return."

"But even with all it's faults, my world is at least familiar to me."

Give it up, Jesse.

"Yes, that is true. Familiarity can be very comforting. But like the medications you are taking, and the new hospitals you have visited, you will grow to find Vilmar, or any other place in our world you choose to live, quite familiar. And unlike in your world, where personal feelings and attitudes about change must almost invariable be dealt with in solitude, you will have an entire community at your disposal to help you adjust."

Jesse was weakening. "But what about my mom and dad?"

"As for your parents, they haven't yet told you, but they have filed for divorce — and both of which are asking custody of you. I may not be omniscient, but if there is one thing I can foresee, it is a nasty, vitriolic court battle where both your mother and your father will stop at nothing to get what they want.

"But if you come with us, you will be able to visit them at any time, even converse if you like, in much the same way as we're doing now. But remember, you may no longer need your biological parents. You may not even care to return to them at all. Our entire world waits to become your family and friend. Though you have only met a tiny fraction of our population, everyone here cares about you, even those you may never meet. This is our way. It could have been your world's way, as well. It is a shame."

"But I don't belong to your world."

"Everyone belongs to our world."

Jesse thought quietly. Feszj continued.

"We can bring you with us. You can leave your despoiled planet behind for now to rest and strengthen yourself. You have seen our utopian world; you've met our people. All that you have seen can be shared and will be shared with you."

"But I'll be leaving everything I know—."

"Hello, Jesse," entered a strange female voice.

"Sunas?!"

Sixteen

Once she heard Sunas's voice, she sensed her mind slipping away from the scene and, a little at a time, detected tiny pockets of feeling, but not of her bed. Her vision phased between two scenes — one of Jesse's bedroom at the hospital, and the other of what seemed to be a good sized pasture, coated with glistening green grass. The blazing sunlight, streaming through a cloudless sky, danced and flickered off the leaves vibrating in the wind. Her ears soon picked up the song of birds twittering in the branches above.

Was that a flute in the background?

Soon, she had complete kinesthetic sense of her body. She sat on the soft cool ground, her back leaned against a tree, all the while being buffeted by the warm breath of air coming from the glade.

"This is nice," she murmured, placing her hands behind her head. From her vantage point, she inspected the scene around her leisurely. Suddenly, her eyes stopped aimlessly meandering and focused on an object sitting just above the tree line on the opposite side of the field. Her eyes latched on to a beautiful, white and black flecked, snow-capped mountain, rising gloriously into the blue sky off in the distance. Transfixed by its grandeur, she stood up to get a better view.

"Beautiful," she said, cooing in awe. Involuntarily, she started walking across the field towards the stunning natural spectacle. However, she went no more than a few paces when she heard the gleeful cackling of adolescent voices emerging from the trees via some unseen path at the opposite end of the field. A half a dozen teens split her attention away from the mountain. She stood still, gazing at both scenes, not knowing what to do next.

"Are you having trouble deciding which is more miraculous: the natural beauty of Mount Tever, or the natural wonder of a group of children playing cooperatively?"

The voice behind her made her jump. Cecelia jerked around and saw, sauntering towards her, a middle-aged black man in maroon-colored cotton leotards. In one hand was a knobby walking stick worn shiny in spots. In the other, a satchel with the tip of what looked like a wooden flute sticking out from the top.

Doctor Macy trembled in a combination of fear and exhilaration as the man came closer. In a moment, he stood directly in front of her, his soft and kindly eyes a few inches above hers.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you."

"You must be Feszj," she said, holding out her hand to shake.

"Yes I am, C-C."

Before she could utter anything in resistance, Feszj ignored her hand and embraced her. She struggled to free herself and pushed him off.

"Please, I'm not ready for that. I don't even know you."

"Come now, Cecelia," remarked Feszj, looking at her with clear, penetrating eyes. "You know me quite well. You have learned much about this world through Jesse. You and I have even chatted."

"Still—."

"I understand. I'm sorry."

Staring into his shimmering and sincere eyes, Cecelia felt a tinge of guilt and waved Feszj's comment aside as if the apology wasn't necessary. She stood next to Feszj as they both turned their attentions out over the clearing towards the game-playing adolescents. After a few moments of reflection, Cecelia broke the silence.

"Your world is beautiful," she said.

"Thank you. I'm glad you appreciate it." His voice was rich and resonant.

"Is there good hiking here?" she asked, unable to contain her curiosity. Quickly, her words overran her thoughts. "Are there lakes to swim in? And streams to walk through? And that mountain over there, can I climb it?"

Feszj smiled broadly at the barrage of questions, almost child-like in their innocence. "Here," he said, "there is all of that and, more importantly, the time to do it."

A wave of sublimity overcame Cecelia, and she smiled in its warmth. Then realizing her intoxication, she shook her head, as if she were trying to fling dust off her head.

"But you know," she began again, trying to contain both a snicker of amusement and a pang of disappointment, "I'd be really impressed, and this place would be really wonderful, if it weren't just a dream of mine."

Feszj laughed. Cecelia stared at him in surprise.

"Forgive me," he said, "but I find it humorous that Jesse started off doubting our existence as well, also claiming that he was dreaming."

"What Jesse believes or doesn't is for his psychologist to determine."

"All right then, what do you believe?" asked Feszj, taking a more serious tone. "I will tell you nothing different from what I told Jesse. Here I am, standing before you in the flesh, with the world around you exactly as Jesse described it. The sensations are crisp. The shadows are sharp and clear. What more would you like from reality?"

"I would like more than a juvenile fantasy about some far-away planet."

"But this is all I can offer. You want me to present you with more reality than exists."

"I'm sorry, Feszj, but you have to admit the premise is too farfetched to buy into so easily."

"That 's fine." Feszj seemed to concede the point. "In fact, you don't really have to believe you are on a distant planet talking to an alien being at all. You don't have to believe anything that you see around you, just as long as you believe the credibility of the arguments for cooperation.

"You see, Jesse not only didn't believe the existence of this world, he didn't accept the arguments against competition. We had to show him around and have him feel the warmth of cooperation, see and hear the joys of compassion, and understand the benefits of community. We had to present him our world so he would also take our discussion seriously.

"You, on the other hand, have already heard many of our positions through Jesse. Taking you through all the arguments again would be a waste of time, not only because I'm sure you have better things to do, but because you are already convinced of the arguments anyway."

Cecelia raised her hand. "Wait a minute. Back up. What did you say about me being convinced?"

"That's right. We know that deep inside, you are a cooperativist, just like us. After all, we heard your comments when Jesse and I were speaking."

"You heard that?" Goose bumps crept across her body. "Why didn't you say anything to me then, or respond to my comments?"

"If we did, you would have let your rationalism temper you stream of consciousness."

"And that's a problem? Rationalism is what makes discussions possible."

"Maybe so, but it doesn't make any decisions for you." Cecelia's brow furrowed in puzzlement. "Think about it. People might claim that a rational argument convinces them that competition is good or bad. But even before the argument convinces them, they have to *want* to accept the argument, they have to *want* to be convinced. In other words, a person has to be psychologically prepared to change their world view before their views will ever change. And you have demonstrated to us by your comments that your

unconscious is ready to accept the arguments against competition and those for cooperation — arguments your supposed rationality suppresses every moment you live."

"Despite what you may claim," said Cecelia, in a stern manner, "it is rationality which organizes our thoughts, and in turn, organizes our actions."

"But rationality doesn't spur those actions."

"Chicken or the egg." Cecelia shrugs off Feszj's response.

"Don't write off the distinction so easily," said Feszj, "because there is a lot at stake. For once you claim that rationalism is the preferred way of thinking, if not the best way, rationalism, by default, becomes the only way you organize your thoughts, and everything else becomes aberrant thinking. But more critically, you give up your humanity and your connection with other humans and become a machine."

"Oh, that's nonsense."

"Is it? Remember, being rational jeopardizes your morality, because an *is* can never become an *ought*."

"Now what's that suppose to mean." Annoyed, Cecelia started to think that Feszj liked to argue for argument's sake, or just to hear his own voice.

"The problem with your society," began Feszj, "is that it has constructed its environment around the idea that rationalism is the center of progress. So what have you done? Your society has rationalized progress, as well as imperialism, and exploitation, and slavery, and child labor, and a whole host of other social ailments. The resulting irony is that your environment is now organized to sustain oppression and prejudice and discrimination while one is free to talk rationally all you want about the problems. In the midst of rational arguments which treat fellow humans as abstract entities, the actual *will* to treat humans morally has lagged far behind."

"Hold on. We don't torture people anymore. There is no slavery anymore. We are a lot more civilized now than before."

"Are you? Sure, slavery may be banned, but it still exists. The illegality of torture may be written into the law books, but torture still exists. What you fail to see is that while you have a cooperative, moralistic rhetoric, you have a competitive, amoral reality. And as is so very obvious, people learn what is right and wrong, moral or immoral, not so much by what is said but by what is done. The medium is the message.

"So, your question again: Is being rational any better? You see, you and most everyone else maintain a rationalist front, but it is impossible to think truly rationally in all but the simplest of situations. There is too much information to consider in more complex situations. Consequently, we all use values and our emotions to determine what

information we consider, and how strongly we should weigh the merits of the chosen information. Unlike rationality, which is externally-driven, these influences on our information stem from internal sources — our values, our psychology, and our emotions.

"This being the case, true rationality cannot exist. We are all sub-rational creatures. Only computers are rational — they have no internal biases. So, the more you deceive yourself into believing that you are a rational creature, and that you can be impartial, the more injustice you actually accomplish."

"But wait." Cecelia was feeling herself insulted. "Rationality is based on logic and scientific principles for determining truth. It assures testable hypotheses."

"Cecelia," said Feszj, kindly, "every paradigm of reality has its own rational method for determining what is true. Science sees reality one way; religion sees reality another. The problem, therefore, is that rationality of all realities is inter-paradigmatic. In other words, you can only use the internal logic of the paradigm — in science's case, the scientific method — to prove the validity of the paradigm's reality. All you have are self-justifying criteria. In the end, the scientific model becomes too ungainly for decision making because, as I said before, there is too much information to assess to make a truly rational decision.

"Therefore, your society maintains rationality primarily for appearance's sake which, unfortunately, justifies people in remaining aloof from each other. In the meantime, in the guise of impartiality, each person superimposes masks on everyone else. This guarantees that people appear to each other as strangers. At the risk of repeating myself, the only way people can function in a competitive society is by viewing their neighbors as objects needing to be overcome because they are interfering with a person's quest for excellence. This is necessary so people will feel less guilty when they beat their fellow competitors in the acquisition of knowledge, wealth, prestige, sexual favors, and anything else gained through competition. As you said, one must justify competition so he or she can sleep well at night."

Cecelia winces at the memory. Feszj went on.

"Furthermore, your populace wears particular emblems and symbols to represent these competitive gains, especially clothing. Elaborate clothing protects you, not only from the cold — something which can just as easily be accomplished by the simplest of attires anyway — but from your consciences; because clothes catalogue the humans we abuse and compete against not as humans but as objects, like mailman, soldier, baker, waitress, executive, criminal, et cetera.

"So, in a society so fractured by apparel and emblems of status and etiquette, in a society so terrified of their own consciences, in a society so lacking of deep interpersonal interactions, the next best resource to human comfort lies in environmental cues which stimulate certain memories, even if on an unconscious level. Eventually, competition becomes one of these cues, because it does one thing that nothing else does — it subdues one's conscience.

"That's why your people laugh when we refer to competition as a pathology or a social disease. That's why many people keep playing even though they may understand all about the social and psychological harm it causes. Because of the all-pervasiveness of competition, the way it has infused itself into almost every aspect of human existence, and the way it makes one immune to the darker side of life, there is little left in a person's psyche to fall back on for emotional support if competition were removed. Therefore, people refuse to part with competition. In essence, they have become addicted to it.

"Of course, new attachments and cues can easily be created. But those individuals and institutions in a position to make positive changes in the environment of the population, don't. Why ought they? They have finally reached a point in their existence where they no longer have to compete. They have risen above the lower creatures, pitting human against human in the quest for any token accolade or reward. And all the while this competition goes on in the lower zoo, the elites of society inculcate their ethical standards onto and into the maggots squirming to survive below — ethical standards that will maintain the elite's hegemony. After all, people will willingly give up anything, even their own notion of what the ideal life would be, to survive.

"But underneath all the war paint, the coats of armor, or the three-piece suits, we are still all humans. As such, we all feel pain and suffering and humiliation. That is the connection which competitive societies attempt to sever. And the more that competition infuses itself into its institutions and the daily life of the populations, the more the talk of cooperation, compassion, and community becomes empty and hypocritical."

"But Feszj, if all rationality is sub-rational, as you say, how does your society function any better than ours?"

"Good question. The answer is that we must strive for the highest level of rationality possible—."

"Hold on. You're going too fast." Cecelia surprised herself in her passion to understand. "I recall you saying something to the effect that your citizens are free to be much more emotional, and not rational."

"Be careful in how you interpret what I say. Our people are allowed to be more emotional in our interactions, because we understand that a better form of rationality exists in the realm of the community — in the collective decision-making process — because, all things being equal, it brings to bear on a problem a wider range of experiences and knowledge than the individual could ever muster."

"One might think that group decisions are more rational, but conflicting goals turns the process into a massive headache."

"True, it may seem that collective decision making is more inefficient due to the possibility of a variety of conflicting individual goals, but that inefficiency doesn't exist with us. First, because we have been making decision collectively for so long, and on a completely consensus basis, we have become adept at doing it; and second, because our collective belief in cooperation provides a uniform moral foundation, something which your society lacks. Since it is the community which creates and provides the moral foundation to the population, and individual decisions are made within the context of the larger sphere of the community, each compliments the other. Unlike in your society, where the individual fights for moral precedence, unwilling to admit that morality comes from the community."

"Fine, Feszj. I'll grant you have a point in some of that, though I can't quite thoroughly comprehend everything you've said. But back to a previous statement you made, not everyone is a cooperativist."

"We're all latent cooperativists at heart. For if you can learn competition, you can learn cooperation."

"But I've spent years competing," protest Cecelia.

"We understand, but it's never too late to change or to learn something new. Besides, by believing the arguments, you're half way there. The only thing left to do is apply what you have learned. After all, rationalism give you the reasons to act. Belief gives one the will to act."

"And how do I do that?"

"One starts by resisting. Refusing to be a part of the competitive mind set. Avoiding competition and competitive events. Don't encourage competitive ideologies with your presence or participation. Hopefully, as more people accept the arguments, their suppressed cooperativism will spur them on to move for change, and competitive activities will cease — to be replaced by cooperative ones. No one and nothing say you cannot reconstruct your environment based on cooperation."

"Are you claiming," asked Cecelia, "that we are born cooperative. You should know that the psychological literature isn't clear on that issue — unless you know something we don't."

"No," said Feszj, "we claim neither that humans are innately cooperative or competitive. However, it is much more likely that a species would survive if it worked together for its mutual benefit. This desire for survival is clearly instinctual, but as your animal research has shown, there are many ways to survive. And the most common method is to avoid competition and embrace cooperation."

"So in the end, animals, to the limit their instincts allow, choose to cooperate or compete; and it is a choice that is determined by the contingencies of the environment. Humans have the greatest ability to learn about and alter their environment. Consequently, all humans, young and old, have the capacity to be cooperativists. All that needs to be done is construct the right environment."

"But what about human aggression?" Her question rushed out of her, having held it in waiting for Feszj to complete his statement.

"Human aggression, if this an innate propensity exists, has nothing to do with either competitiveness or cooperativeness. Aggression can be adequately and easily channelled into beneficial and non-competitive activities, like mountain climbing, constructing and repairing windmills, or research. In fact, any activity in which something is to be accomplished, requires aggressive action. People can still be aggressive in cooperative actions — they simply are not being aggressive towards each other. The issue, therefore, is not aggression *qua* aggression, but where aggression is directed, and that requires learning."

Well," said Cecelia, "that may explain away aggression, but it still doesn't explain competition. Maybe I don't want to change? What if I want to always be a competitor?"

"Why? After everything I've said, why would you still want to compete?"

Cecelia paused, caught in a logical trap. If the arguments were indeed valid, then there is no logical reason not to promote cooperation over competition. And she hadn't come up with any effective rebuttals. *Perhaps*, she thought, *I can use his argument against him?*

"What if I choose not to cooperate? After all, if decisions are made by the will, then logic only works so far."

"That's quite correct," said Feszj. Cecelia became uncomfortable by his ease of acceptance. "You may choose to continue competing, but knowing what you know now, it will be an uncomfortable choice. And even though the logical part does not make decisions, it must still have to rationalize your decisions in light of what you now already

know. It is at that point when people start becoming psychologically troubled — when the will and logic start to diverge. Spiritual peace begins when the will acts in ways logic can easily accept and justify."

Feszj let out a broad smile towards Cecelia. "Besides, in choosing to compete, you would not be true to yourself."

"Well Feszj, that's all very nice, but it's also all bullshit," said Cecelia, almost breaking out in a guffaw.

"So you say."

"Oh don't give me that." Feszj's demeanor curdled Cecelia's temperament. "What's make you so confident that I'm a cooperativist? I've played basketball almost my entire life ..."

"... And fought your way up the educational and business ladders. You needn't have to re-tell your life for us. We know all about your past, Cecelia."

"You do?" An unusually cool breeze blew by and chilled her.

"Yes," said Feszj, almost apologetically. "We know about your abusive father, your lesbianism, even your manipulation of friends and colleagues for personal gain and success." Cecelia's face blanched. "We also know your conversion to competition started soon after the tragic death of your mother and the near mental collapse of your father. At that time, you decided that you needed to be the strong one in the family, and by doing so, help your father recover from his depression. So you did everything he asked of you just to appease your father's desperate needs.

Cecelia's neck bristled at Feszj's commentary. "You make my cooperation with Dad sound like a sin. You of all people."

"Cooperation allows each participant to have a say in and willingly accept their position within the relationship. Obviously, you weren't cooperating. You were forced to compete."

"I was forced?" said Cecelia, trying to brush off the assertion as if it were too silly to believe.

"He never recovered from his depression, did he?" asked Feszj. Cecelia said nothing. But her mouth went dry and her eyes teared. Deep inside, where all her past bitterness churned, she realized Feszj knew. "We know that, for years, your father methodically excised from you the cooperative inclinations you had strongly held as a child. And whenever you resisted the ugly necessities of competition, and those uncomfortable notions of cooperation reared up, he clamped down even more and crushed it out of you."

As she swallowed repeatedly to keep her throat moist, she rapidly searched for solace by changing the character of the conversation, drawing upon the rationalization she had for years used on herself to deaden the anguish and mask the truth. "Hey, I enjoyed playing sports. It was probably the best thing that ever happened to me."

"Many people enjoy playing competitive sports and games in your world."

This caught Cecelia off-guard. *Why would he admit that?* she thought. Something was waiting in the wings of his argument, but she couldn't see it. So she bit. "Then why do you want to take these pleasures away from us?"

Feszj paused to take in a deep breath. As he considered his words, both Feszj and Cecelia watched the kids in the field form a tight circle, their hands at shoulder height with palms to palms. Then, the circle expanded slowly as the teens pushed each others hands, performing a unique form of standing push-up.

"Stop me if I'm repeating myself, for I may have said this before, but as the competitive foundation in your society constantly expands, more and more of your citizens are having to view their neighbors and friends as fellow competitors; and the more and more people feel like competitors to each other, the less inclined they are to trust or have faith in one other. People, in the end, have alienated themselves from each other. This creates a void in the human psyche — a void which used to be filled by comraderie and friendship."

"So," said Cecelia, eagerly, "people turn to sports to fill that void. Am I right?"

"Yes, you are."

"So sports do perform a noble purpose."

Got him! she thought, waiting for him to concede the point. Feszj only grinned.

"Do they really?" he said. Cecelia could have sworn he was gloating, but over what, she had no idea. "Don't you see how the void was formed Cecelia? Don't you see the vicious spiral of competition?"

She shook her head. Feszj sighed.

"There is a critical flaw in any competitive society," began Feszj. "In such a society — a society which lacks unifying bonds between people because of the individual competitions that constantly occur — people seek out many avenues to re-establish friendships or be a part of a group. And in a competitive society, one of the most socially acceptable methods through which one can join a group is sports.

"Granted, people don't have to play sports to be part of a group, but an overwhelming and growing number of activities that do bring people together are competitive. Small activities like card games or board games form tiny associations. Tournaments create larger

crowds. Then there are the spectators who throng together to watch sports with the unconscious desire to simply be part of the crowd. The activities get larger and larger until vast competitive enterprises like politics and corporate business bind huge populations together, despite the increasing level of anonymity of the persons within — so desperate are they to merely be in physical proximity to others due to their stifling alienation. Unfortunately, whether or not the participants of these grand competitions have a desire to compete, people compete anyway just to be accepted and feel part of a group. Engaging in socially-approved activities, as competition certainly is, boosts one's status with peers and authorities."

Cecelia fidgeted with her feet as she felt the argument closing in on her.

"People play sports not because they like sports, although this may be what they have convinced themselves into believing. People play sports to become an accepted part, not just of the team or the spectators, but of the greater whole of society — a society which places competition on a pedestal, a society that sees competition as a cure-all for a whole congeries of social ills. Think about it. If men shun sports, they are ridiculed and branded as nerds or fairies, effeminate and somehow not a man, an outcast for the mainstream cultural milieu. There is tremendous social pressure placed upon boys to become athletes, or at the very least, competitors."

"But what about women?" Cecelia saw a way out of the logical pincers "There is a great deal less pressure on women to compete."

"That may be the case now, but as competition becomes increasingly pervasive, that too is changing. More and more, women are encouraged to play sports because of all the wonderful things sports do — and by extension, competition does — supported primarily by biased conclusions to inconclusive and sometimes sexist studies."

"Flaws? Biases? Sexist? What are you talking about?" scoffed an incredulous Doctor Macy.

"As a psychologist, you should know that results from all research mean nothing until a researcher puts his or her interpretive stamp on it. For example, several years ago, a study came out showing that high school women who play sports have a lower teen pregnancy rate, lower drug use, and do better in school than non-athletes. Many groups, including the Women's Sports Foundation, cheered the results as a validation of the need for women to play sports."

"Sounds reasonable."

"Yes, it sounds reasonable, especially in a society desiring more justifications for competition, which itself is odd. After all, if competition were really that wonderful, why

is there so great a need to constantly reinforce that concept? It wouldn't seem to need any justifications. This is just one example of competitivists 'doth protesting too much'."

Cecelia mulled over that observation as Feszj continued on.

"In any case, the report focused on the character flaws of women and how those who played sports had fewer visible flaws. Less teen pregnancies, less drug problems, and the like. Yet similar statements are rarely made for male athletes. One never hears, for example, someone claiming that sports reduces the tendency for men to have sex with women. On the contrary, it is socially expected that men become more virile as athletes. Many current and former athletes proudly flaunt their sexual escapades.

"Furthermore, it is sometimes the case in colleges athletic programs that female athletes are required to take etiquette classes, so they can learn to walk, dress, behave, and in general look more like a non-athletic woman. Yet men do not have to take sensitivity classes so they can learn to behave more like civilized human beings — which is a shame considering for instance that twenty percent of professional football players are felons." Cecelia's eyes widened, stunned by that statistic. Feszj went on. "As usual in your society, it is the woman who must control herself and bend to the will of the patriarchy.

"More importantly, what one needs to ask, something which the WSF naturally failed to do, is whether sport really is the cause of all these benefits? Are there not possible alternative reasons? Perhaps female athletes accept authority better than non-athletes and thus are more likely to do what they are told to do, like using contraceptives during sex, or behaving in class? Is this because they learned to obey authority through sports, or because they already obeyed authority and, thus, were more likely to accept their subservient role under a coach and sign up for sports? Sports could simply have a higher proportion of obedient girls than the general population."

Cecelia nodded grudgingly.

"Or another possibility: perhaps these athletes, after all their practices and games and travel, have little time left to engage in other less desirable activities? This would easily explain why female athletes get into less trouble."

Cecelia had to admit that this was a possibility, but didn't overtly acknowledge her tacit acceptance. She remained stone-faced. Feszj appeared unconcerned by her lack of reaction.

"Did you know that female athletics contain a higher proportion of lesbians than the general population? That would, of course, lower the teen pregnancy rate among female athletes. Plus, female athletes, on average, have lower body fat content than the general population of women. Body fat levels affect menstruation. Lower body fat percentages

lead to infrequent periods and, if the percentage is low enough, to amenorrhea — a complete cessation of menstruation — which naturally leads to lower pregnancy rates. Ironically, engaging in sports may permit women even more opportunity to have sex without the stigma of pregnancy."

Cecelia, hearing the original research conclusions stripped away one after another, tried to salvage what was left, feeble though she knew her attempt was. "But these athletes have demonstrated better academic performance at school. If they lack time for other activities, like you say, they should also lack time for study. Yet they still out-perform their peers. How do you explain that?"

"As I said before," answered Feszj, pausing just long enough to take a breath, "these athletes may just be better at accepting authority, and will do what they are told and not cause trouble in school. It is a truism that students who behave in class achieve higher grades on subjective measures of academic performance, like essays, than students who don't behave, despite the comparable quality of work.

"Also, any exercise regimen, like jogging, bicycling, swimming, et cetera, will increase oxygen absorption and, thus, oxygen flow to the brain, allowing the individual to concentrate better and study longer with improved memory. It has nothing to do specifically with sport; any cooperative game or individual activity that is cardiovascular in nature can do just as much."

"But that doesn't hold water," objected Cecelia. It was her turn to smile. "There are many men who play sports who are also miserable in academics."

"Great point!" With a gleam in his face, Feszj raised his finger to Cecelia for emphasis. "You could have also mentioned the reprehensible and sometimes behavior of male athletes as another paradox. They exist, and these glaring exceptions bring up another major flaw in the study."

I can't take this, thought Cecelia, her chest deflating once gain. *I'm hardly challenging him, hardly putting up a fight. I'm just feeding him points and issues one after another that make his argument stronger.* Cecelia pondered her situation and came up with a striking observation that even she hesitated to accept. *Does competition have a winning argument?*

"If sports effectively increase school performance, as is implied by the study," said Feszj, "then there would be no need for grade requirements for athletes, because logically, they ought to be the brightest and most obedient students. But that obviously isn't the case. The opposite seems to be true, at least for men. So there must be something else going on that would explain why female athletes do well, whereas male athletes flounder. And one reason is professionalism."

"Professionalism?"

"Yes. You see, most children are encouraged to specialize and plan for a career very early in their lives. Most of these occupations require higher education, so the children have incentive to study and pass their courses. This also explains why students who engage in spelling bees, geography bees, or on scholar bowl teams — all academic competitions — do not have grade requirements for participation. However, some students see career opportunities in professional sports, where no explicit academic course work and no college degree is necessary. After all, in any given season, about half of NBA players never graduated college. These forward-thinking students go to school merely as apprentice athletes preparing for the big time.

"With this in mind, when opportunities for sports professionalism begin to increase for female athletes, more and more women will start seeing academics as a necessary evil and their grades, just like we have seen in male athletes, will drop. They will do what little they have to in order to pass the grade requirements and keep themselves on the team."

"But back to the second point," interjected Cecelia, "how does professionalism cause violence?"

"It is not so much professionalism as much as it is the poor education that many athletes receive in their quest for professionalism. Education is directly correlated to violence; better educated individuals are less violent. And even though athletes may have high school diplomas, or even college degrees, what they actually learned may have no relationship to the symbolic validation of the education they received."

Cecelia already felt tired. There didn't seem to be any angle for which Feszj hadn't considered. She was ready to throw up her hands in defeat when Feszj brought the point back home.

"But you're probably wondering right now what all this has to do with the flaws of competition?" She was too tired to nod. Feszj went on. "To return from our digression to our original point, after all is said and done, after everything is taken into account, what becomes clear to us is the tragic flaw of a competition-based society.

"Yours is a society in which everyone must prove they are worthy of being a member. One proves his or her worth by amply demonstrating to the those granting social-approval that he or she accepts the status quo social/political hegemony perpetuated by competition. You said it best yourself. People are condemned to compete — so as not to feel alone."

Although mentally drained following Feszj's lengthy discussion, she made one last effort to disagree. "But didn't you say before that competition breeds alienation?"

"Yes."

"So how—?" Cecelia stopped mid-sentence and mid-thought and reviewed the situation, then exhaled wearily, her shoulders sagging, as she understood. Feszj saw her enlightenment.

"Exactly," he commented. "One's alienation from other humans caused by competition makes that person hungry for the associations that, more and more, only competition provides. Just like an addiction, the more one competes, the more one has to compete. The highs and lows of self-esteem are inextricably linked to the ebb and flow of the competitive outcomes that surround them.

"Competition breeds more competition by first gradually making alternatives to attain comradeship scarcer and more socially-unapproved — like in the form of gangs — and eliminating them. Consequently, in people's search for friendships, they look to sports. People will stomach competition for even the tiniest opportunity of being next to another human being. Unfortunately, competition continues the alienation process and people demand more and more sports as a solution. In the end, all that is left is a vicious spiral into social chaos and moral disaster."

Feszj placed his soothing hand on her arm. "And just like all the rest, you rationalized for yourself a love of competition because you found solace in it."

Cecelia whipped her arm from Feszj's touch, rose from the ground, and started walking away.

"Where are you going?" asked Feszj, rising to accompany her.

"I don't know. Anywhere. I just have to move."

They walked around the edge of the field, as the frolicking teens and their laughter remained in the middle. Cecelia stopped to watch them, and a question vexed her.

"Don't they have anything better to do?" she criticized.

"Are you annoyed that they are enjoying themselves?"

"I'm annoyed," she said, raising her voice, "that they aren't doing anything productive."

"What you value determines what you find to be productive behavior or not. Apparently, you value things and objects which inflates a person's ego and status, as well as the competition required to reach those artificially scarce ends. You value the domination of one individual over another because of the increased stature one receives from that domination. It's one of the perquisites. And if someone isn't producing things or objects to your expectations, that person spends their life looked upon as being a societal parasite and a waste of oxygen.

"But here, what we value is cooperation, community, and compassion, and the elimination of pain, suffering, and humiliation. Cooperative games are as important here as competitive ones are in your world, but the things that are learned — the many perspectives of life, the views of the world — are all completely different. Those kids out in that field will comprehend more about social interactions and interpersonal relationships with their little game than your society will with an entire Olympics full of competitive sports."

She became frustrated with Feszj, with his quick answer for everything. "I'm a college graduate, with an advanced degree, but Feszj you are making me feel as if I know nothing. You make me feel so stupid."

"I am sorry you feel that way, Cecelia, but I am not the one making you feel stupid. Rather, your degrees, your diplomas, your certificates, and your office full of books — they are the things that make you think you are smarter than you might actually be. You have learned many things, but there is so much about life, about community, about love and forgiveness, about humanity and compassion you haven't learned at all.

She stopped walking and glared at Feszj. "Why are you doing this to me? Do you like humiliating people like me and Jesse? Are you trying to ruin my life just like you ruined Jesse's?"

Feszj looked at her. A sad, soulful expression covered his face. "We need your help on Earth."

"Help you on Earth?" she jeered. "When you were talking to Jesse, you made that possibility sound hopeless."

"Jesse might have been wrong for us. Perhaps he was too young. Perhaps he was too unsure of himself. And because of the contingent circumstances which assailed him, he was locked away and became instantly impotent to aid your world. But you, Doctor Macy, you're different. You are confident, educated, an eloquent speaker. People will listen to you, because you can get their attention. You know the rational and irrational sides of humans. You know what makes people tick. If only we can focus your talents."

Feszj stroked Cecelia's hair, which she allowed him to do, as he continued speaking. "So whereas Jesse's enterprise to help your world was quickly squelched and turned hopeless, it is not so hopeless with you. Competition may have failed you, but cooperation will not; because when people cooperate, no one loses." Cecelia acceded to his comments and nodded. He went on. "We have great faith in you, a fellow cooperativist."

Her face quickly hardened as Feszj's last two words jarred Cecelia's psyche. She rolled her eyes in disgust and stormed away. Feszj gently called to her.

"Please, Cecelia, we and your world need your help."

"Not again," she mumbled, but stopped walking anyway. Feszj came up behind her and spoke to her softly.

"We have followed your life from very early on, and know that you originally wanted to be a cooperativist. You yourself have tried to bring humanity into the competitive arena. Yet contingencies forced you to alter your view of the world, just as they altered Jesse's. But you can still change. In your heart, I believe you want to change. You never liked being a competitor. It is frustrating, and overly-demanding of your time and loyalties. Your family life suffered, your friendships suffered, your social relations suffered, all for the sake of winning the game of life. But what have you won? A house with four bedrooms rather than three? A car that has a bigger engine? Designer clothes rather than cheaper brands? A few weeks off to go camping in Arizona? Is this all what life means to you now?"

"What do you really know about me?" she shouted, but still with her back turned to Feszj. Her voice was pinched, and Feszj could tell she was trying to hold back the tears.

"We know that you learned almost all of what you are — your joy of loneliness, your need to compete — from your father."

Cecelia straightened her shoulders, her back stiffened both out of pride and reflex. "He made me what I am."

"Do you know what he made of himself?"

"No." She sounded disappointed. "We stopped communicating."

"You're being euphemistic. He never returned your letters, had his phone number changed and made unlisted. He even moved out of the house so you couldn't find him."

"I could have found him if I wanted to," she rationalized.

"Close your eyes and imagine the scene I am about to describe."

"Is this a trick?" Cecelia squinted her eyes, suspicious.

"In a sense," Feszj replied.

Wary, she shut her eyes and waited.

"Imagine, if you will, a one bedroom apartment in a poor section of town," he began. As he spoke, images swirled in Cecelia's mind and molded to the scene Feszj described. "It is a small dark place with flowered wallpaper coated with cigarette smoke from former leasees. The window shades are drawn casting an eerie yellowish glow throughout the room. Dishes sit piled in a sink half-filled with murky water. The furniture grew a gray fuzz of dust." Despite the dust and age, she recognized the furniture as once residing in her own living room. "And on every piece of furniture with a flat surface stands one of your

trophies. The walls are covered with plaques and glass-framed awards from your sports and academic career. Beside them all are color faded pictures of your mother.

"An overweight old man with a pale face with red splotches — his hair thinned down to a few strands on top and remnants of gray knotting hair, looking like leafless bushes covered with dirty snow, ringing the scalp — sits in a sagging brown recliner. His frayed flannel shirt is missing buttons to close it and cover his chest; and his shoes have holes worn through the soles. His pants are too short in length for his legs and are too small for his waist, so they remain unclasped. The man pretends to watch TV — going through the motions — but his eyesight and his grip on sanity are failing him; so he spends the majority of his waking hours struggling to keep in his memories the son he never had, and the wife and daughter he once had."

The vision was complete in Cecelia's mind and through the deplorable deformities, she knew the broken man. "Dad!" The tears welled up in her eyes.

"There he sits," Feszj went on, "without family and castigated by friends — both of which were long ago put off by this recalcitrant and embittered curmudgeon. He lives a hermit-like existence, stewing in anger and hatred at a world which lost its appreciation for him, and now blames it for all the misery he has endured.

"And if someone looked closely enough, that person would see in his hands an old toy, discolored by age and the constant touch of oily and grimy hands. It is a tragic irony that in a room filled with trophies and awards, with basketballs and softballs gathering dust in the closet, the one item he truly caresses and seems to cherish most is a decades old Barbie doll."

"No!" Cecelia pried her eyelids open and a gush of fluid cascaded down her face. "I can't watch any more of this," she said. Her voice cracked, but she tried to maintain her dignity nonetheless.

"We know your bitterness is exhausting you," said Feszj, ending his description, "just like it exhausted and devoured you father. You are becoming tired of the hatred you carry. You thought you knew what you wanted, but disillusionment is the only thing you amassed. Despite everything you may have been taught to the contrary, competition is forcing you to reduce your expectations of happiness."

"Competition is all I know." Feszj could tell by her small convulsing shoulders that she was crying. "It's all anyone knows."

"That is why we are here." Feszj spoke in as comforting a way as possible. "To help you resist. To help you formulate and express the reasons why your world ought not to compete."

Cecelia turned around to face Feszj, sniffing and wiping her eyes dry. "Why do you care?" she sneered through the whimpering.

"It is all we know how to do," said Feszj with a disarming and empathic smile.

She looked down at the ground, embarrassed. "And what do I get out of it, besides a good feeling inside?"

"Never do it for your own sake. If you do so, you will almost assuredly fail. For you see, in this mutual quest — an oftentimes solitary mutual quest — there is no joy in being a pariah, a social outcast, a gadfly in the company of thick skinned giants. You must do it for how much it will benefit everyone. Not only that, you must do it simply because it is the right thing to do."

"You make it sound so easy."

"It is easy to do the right thing. But in your world, it is sometimes hard to live with the consequences."

Cecelia tried to say more, but there was nothing else for her to say. Throughout much of the conversation, her frustration with Feszj's always ready replies finally overwhelmed her. Finally, with a mind filled with scarring visions she never wanted, her anger burst out.

"This is all complete nonsense! This world doesn't exist!" screamed Cecelia at the top of her lungs, as if she were trying to blast away all the sounds and images and feelings of this dream and to replace it with a semblance of sanity.

Her eyes were squeezed shut so she didn't see the game playing halt in the fields as everyone looked in the direction of the yell, including a young and handsome man around sixteen with sweaty black hair. At his side was a buxom woman with dull red hair bleached by the sun. The young man nodded his head in seeming understanding.

She began walking away from Feszj again, but stopped on her own this time. There was no where to go.

"You're right, Cecelia," said Feszj. "This may all be nonsense. But answer for me this question: In which world would you rather live?"

She remained silent thinking about the question.

"Why am I buying into this fantasy?" said Cecelia pitifully, turning around. "Am I going insane?"

Feszj approached her, and hugged her. She put up no resistance, letting his genuine affection comfort her. Before she realized it, she was hugging him in return.

"You believe," said Feszj, as he gently released her, "because you truly want to believe."

Opening her eyes full of tears, Cecelia began seeing everything around her getting grainier.

"What's happening to me?" She then realized she was being slowly sucked away from the world.

"Believe," Feszj went on, letting the question hang, "and one day, you too may be a member of our community. You too may one day dance with me and the other members of Vilmar and our world of Terah. Teach your people to cooperate, change their environment so that they can convince themselves that this is the right thing to do. Do all this, and one day you too will call your home, paradise ... and our paradise, home."

Dr. Macy grabbed Feszj's arm, then flung herself around his body, as if that would keep her from returning to Earth.

"I don't want to leave." She squealed like a child desperate for love.

"It is time for you to go back," said Feszj.

"What you ask is too hard, too difficult," she wheezed, her breathing becoming labored.

"Yet still, we must try. Remember, we'll always be there for you."

"But how? How do I convince people?"

"You can't. You can't convince anyone. They must convince themselves."

"But how?" the desperate doctor asked again. She was losing her grip — the sensations vanishing from her hands — and heard ringing in her ears.

"Remember," said Feszj with a smile and a wink, as he and the world faded away into a spinning pinwheel of colors, "It's all in the presentation."

She eyes cleared of color to see her darkened bedroom around her. The phone was ringing.

"Whoa. What a dream," she said, shaking her head clear and rubbing her eyes. She looked at the clock. It was almost midnight. She crawled across the bed, groggy from sleep, cursing the person who would call her at this time of night. She stretched for the night stand and picked up the receiver.

"Hello?" she said gruffly, hardly trying to sound awake.

"Dr. Macy? This is Nurse Mallard." The voice was frantic and breathless. "I'm calling from the institute. You need to come in."

"What the hell for? It's almost midnight."

"We just found Jesse Strich in his room, dead."

Stunned and speechless, Dr. Macy dropped her arm and the receiver fell to the bed. She sat up on the edge of the mattress. Then, without warning, a voice filled her head.

Remember Cecelia, we'll always be there for you.

"Jesse?"

Her voice choked itself off. Fear enveloped her. Her spine shivered and her blood ran icy. She fainted and collapsed to the floor.

Vita

Jeffrey James Gorbski was born in Hartford, Connecticut on August 20, 1960. The North Rockland School District (New York) provided the bulk of his secondary education, graduating from North Rockland High School in June 1978. He entered the SUNY system, graduating from SUNY at Brockport in May 1983 with a Bachelor of Science in Music and minors in Physical Education and History. He then enrolled at the University of Connecticut for Master's study, graduating in May 1987 with a Master's of Music Composition. In the Fall of 1990, he began studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in pursuit of the Doctorate of Education in Sport and Cultural Studies. His doctoral degree was bestowed in May 1999.

Mr. Gorbski is currently seeking employment in higher education.