

A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION OF
DREAMS, MEMORIES, AND REFLECTIONS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS THROUGH
THE USE OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY/BIOGRAPHY

A Dissertation

by

ANTONIO RIVERA ROSADO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION OF
DREAMS, MEMORIES, AND REFLECTIONS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS THROUGH
THE USE OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY/BIOGRAPHY

A Dissertation

by

ANTONIO RIVERA ROSADO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Approved by:

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Co-Chairs of Committee, | Stephen Carpenter Patrick Slattery |
| Committee Members, | Valerie Hill-Jackson Toby Egan |
| Head of Department, | Dennie Smith |

May 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

A Narrative Approach to the Philosophical Interpretation of Dreams, Memories, and Reflections
of the Unconscious Through the Use of Autoethnography/Biography. (May 2011)

Antonio Rivera Rosado, B.A., Interamerican University of Puerto Rico;

M.Ed., The University of Texas at El Paso

Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee, Dr. Stephen Carpenter
Dr. Patrick Slattery

The purpose of the present study aimed to develop a comprehensive model that measures the autoethnographic/biographic relevance of dreams, memories, and reflections as they relate to understanding the self and others. A dream, memory, and reflection (DMR) ten item questionnaire was constructed using aspects of Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian Theory of Dream Interpretation. Fifteen dreams, five memories, and five reflections were collected from the participant at the waking episode or during a moment of deep thought. The DMR analysis was used as the prime matter for creating a narrative document that uses autoethnography and autobiography to deliver a philosophical story about the unconscious reality of the participant. The results of the dissertation study produced a ten section narrative document titled *The Shadow of Joaquin* that portrayed the benchmarks of the life of the participant that led him to the completion of a doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. At the final section of the narrative document the postmodern philosophical theory of Labor Percolation is proposed by the researcher as a direct result of the DMR analysis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| ABSTRACT | iii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | iv |
| LIST OF FIGURES | vi |
| LIST OF TABLES | vii |
| CHAPTER | |
| I INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW | 1 |
| Introduction | 1 |
| General Statement of the Study | 2 |
| Significance of the Study | 2 |
| Purpose of the Study | 3 |
| Review of the Literature | 6 |
| Summarized Debate Between Howard Gardner and Elliot Eisner | 6 |
| Unconscious Interpretation Theory | 9 |
| Curriculum Theory | 15 |
| Qualitative Research Venues | 17 |
| II PROBLEM | 21 |
| Research Method | 21 |
| Research Design | 21 |
| Population Sample | 23 |
| Measures | 23 |
| Procedure | 24 |
| Timeline | 25 |
| III SOLUTIONS | 26 |
| Dreams, Memories, and Reflections Analysis | 26 |
| Dream Analysis | 26 |
| Memories Analysis | 50 |
| Reflections Analysis | 55 |
| The Shadow of Joaquin: A Poem of the Unconscious | 63 |
| Song I: Dreaming | 63 |
| Song II: The Caribbean Sea | 87 |
| Song III: Christian Renewal | 113 |

| CHAPTER | Page |
|--|------|
| Song IV: The Plague..... | 137 |
| Song V: Boxing Gloves..... | 161 |
| Song VI: In The Early Morning Rain..... | 167 |
| Song VII: The Colony..... | 210 |
| Song VIII: Moon's Mystery..... | 231 |
| Song IX: A Visit To Madam Le Mystique..... | 245 |
| Song X: The Gathering..... | 266 |
| IV CONCLUSIONS..... | 298 |
| REFERENCES..... | 307 |
| APPENDIX A..... | 309 |
| APPENDIX B..... | 310 |
| VITA..... | 313 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Figure 1 Lacanian S/s algorithm | 309 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | | Page |
|---------|---------------------------------------|------|
| Table 1 | List of Primary Characters..... | 310 |
| Table 2 | List of Secondary Characters..... | 310 |
| Table 3 | List of Places and Organizations..... | 312 |

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This dissertation research is composed of an array of philosophical views that relate to understanding the human unconscious, several qualitative research approaches that support the avenues of approach of the study, and the rationalization for utilizing prose and narrative as a form of educational curriculum. From a structuralist perspective, these different methodological and philosophical parts of this formal dissertation research are combined into a cohesive document that functions as a unified entity. While the schools of thought of structuralism, post-structuralism, post-modernism, and educational curriculum serve as the philosophical basis for conceptualizing the knowledge that is drawn from the study of the unconscious, the qualitative research methods for interpreting the data are an amalgamation of Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian dream interpretation theory, autobiography/ethnography, and narrative inquiry. The final product of the present research utilizes the interpretation of the dreams, memories, and reflections of the participant/researcher as the prime matter for the creation of a narrative document that is presented in an autoethnographical/biographical form and is characterized by the use of prose. In addition, the literary style of magical realism is yoked to the narrative form in order to exemplify, link, and enhance the unconscious nature of the autoethnographic/biographic work.

This dissertation research follows the style of *Teaching and Teacher Education*.

General Statement of the Study

This study presents the concept of autoethnography/biography and self narrative in regards to the author (whom in this case is the researcher). In order to accomplish this task, the present study focuses on the broad scope of the historical events, dreams, prior experiences, memories, and cultural discoveries that have lead the researcher to pursue doctoral studies at Texas A&M University, but that began thirty and five years ago at his time of birth. An analysis of dreams, memories, and reflections is juxtaposed with the narrative inquiry as a method to better understand the often unreliable nature of the human psyche. This discussion not only involves the life of the researcher as a single entity (self), but the contextual circumstances (family, personal faith, friends, academia, relationships, and experience) that surround the researcher in his daily walk through life (others). The present document utilizes the fields of autoethnography and autobiography as they directly relate to the “self” and its relationship to “others” as it is conveyed in this creative dissertation. Chang (2008) describes “self” as the starting point for cultural acquisition and transmission in which an individual is center stage and “others” as strangers who operate by different frames of reference. The relationship of the terms above described exemplifies the human factors that have been an influential force in the researcher’s life.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study is directly linked to the nature of its essence as a philosophical research project. As a philosophical form, the present project deals with the notion of the unconscious side of the human psyche and its influence over human rationalization of itself as single entity and its social environment. The present document contributes to the general

research community as a model for distinctive qualitative techniques of research that allow the researcher to utilize personal creativity within the framework of an educational society that is strongly influenced by empirical methods of inquiry. According to Richardson (1997), the knowledge of the social context guides people to understand their own experience through social imagination. More importantly, I make the argument that the postmodern use of an imaginative approach to portray a story deconstructs the assumption that it must be necessary to follow a preconceived, rigid, and totalitarian approach to investigating phenomena. The present project opens the door to allow the creative forces of the psyche to utilize human imagination in order to create new venues of knowledge, power, and intelligent reason.

Purpose of the Study

Despite the growing interest by school districts, school administrators, researchers, and teachers in regards to qualitative research, teacher classrooms continue to rely on quantitative forms of data to measure student achievement, student behavioral traits, and student socioeconomic status amongst other important variables. According to Greene (1995), the issues that are found in our schools cannot be simply measured through a set of statistical computations since the educational communities are often combined with economic distress and other realities that are often difficult to define. Those “masked” realities can be brought to light by students through the use of a philosophical interpretation of their inner selves and expressing it in a creative writing form through the use of autoethnographic/biographic work as it brings important personal feelings and emotions into the light of day.

I will now provide a list of the reasons as to why I have chosen a doctoral dissertation with a format that involves the philosophical interpretation of dreams, memories, and reflections

as the basis for creating a narrative document that uses autoethnography and autobiography with a creative writing (prose) format.

Knowledge base: As a philosopher and scholar, this autoethnographic work will greatly enhance my knowledge of various structuralist, post-structuralist, and post-modernist philosophers. I am a believer that educational philosophy should be an integral part of any educational curriculum whether it is found on a K-12 setting, university setting, or on a research project. The knowledge that is gained through the study of educational philosophy greatly enhances a student's ability to achieve higher thinking skills as it allows him/her to arrive at intelligent conclusions based on the analysis of information of varied data sources.

Self-narrative: From an educational perspective, I bring forth an argument that places this autoethnographic/biographic work at the center stage of classroom teacher education. The creation of meaning is paramount to any school system or research design. Through the use of self narrative students are able to search within their inner selves the feelings that surround their immediate reality. As those feelings begin to emerge, the teacher gains important knowledge about the variables that are affecting (whether positively or negatively) the student at the specific place and time that they occur. At the moment in which those variables are identified, the personal life of the student becomes meaningful for himself, his/her peers, and his/her teachers and administrators as well.

English literacy: The greatest pieces of literature, poetry, prose, ethnography, fiction, non-fiction, short-stories, essays, and narrative amongst others are highly correlated to the creativity and imagination of the novelist, story teller, or poet. As a current doctoral student specializing in curriculum and instruction, I find the juxtaposition of this philosophical approach (interpretation of dreams, memories, and reflections), the use of English literacy, and qualitative research in the

form of autobiography/ethnography to be in perfect harmony with each other. For classroom teachers it is of paramount importance to have a clear understanding of the needed balance between educational curriculum and content area knowledge. This creative writing dissertation serves as a clear example of how curriculum practices, research venues, and creativity can positively impact k-12 classrooms. From this perspective, the autoethnography of the unconscious is a perfect example of how a doctoral dissertation for a student in curriculum studies can be constructed.

Creating a student centered classroom: One of the primary functions of quantitative research design (true experimental designs, correlations, descriptive, causal-comparative) is to find statistically significant differences between a set of variables (gender, socio-economic status, race, grade level). However, if statistical significance is not found, the study in itself is not considered to be meaningful. As a plausible rival hypothesis, I suggest that instead of searching for the variables that make students different from each other, research can also serve as a tool for understanding the areas that unite students as a body. I propose to utilize creativity processes such as autoethnography, prose, poetry, song, music, dance, philosophy, and painting to bring students closer to each other in interesting and meaningful ways.

Impacting k-12 classrooms: From a methodological standpoint, autoethnographic/biographic academic work is considered a reader friendly method of inquiry. According to Chang (2008), the voices surrounding an ethnographer separate themselves from traditional writing as they are easier for readers to respond, adjust, and understand. K-12 classrooms can benefit from autoethnographical work as it allows the student to be a participant in the decision making process, an active member of the classroom learning community, and an individual that enjoys the process of writing about himself and his social environment.

Educational philosophy as a challenging task: The utilization of dreams, memoirs, and reflections of prior experiences to portray the journey of the personal life of the researcher is a process that is challenging and yet thoroughly enjoyable. The amalgamation of methods, philosophies, and styles of writing that are present in this autoethnographic/biographic work have all together enhanced my qualities as a poet, writer, researcher, scholar, and philosopher. I welcome this challenge with the understanding that it is preparing me for a future career as a researcher and university professor.

Review of the Literature

In synthesizing the literature in regards to the philosophical, educational, and research basis for the present project, it appears most logical to place this discussion in the context of what has been perceived as an ongoing debate. From one perspective there is a belief that a novel can be used as a dissertation in educational research. From another perspective, an argument is made in which a novel does not fit the category of educational research. The argument (disagreement) began at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) with a developmental psychologist (Howard Gardner) whom does not adjudicate a novel any research value, and an art educator (Elliot Eisner) who firmly believes that it is possible to use a novel in educational research. The following transcripts were taken from the *Research in the Teaching of English* (1996) journal:

Summarized Debate Between Howard Gardner and Elliot Eisner

Gardner: And it's hard...in principle to object to the notion that you should broaden what can count as research. But...I don't understand how a novel can count as research. Essentially in a

novel you can say what you want, and you are judged by how effectively you say without any particular regard to the truth value. And it seems to me the essence of research is effort, however stumbling, to find out as carefully as you can what's happening and then to report it accurately. Why would you possibly make that sort of effort in a novel where you can't really tell whether it's accurate or not?

Eisner: Questions of truth are not irrelevant in assessing the worth of a novel. He noted that we talk, for example, about novels being "true to life" all the time and that you can say in a novel what you cannot say in a set of integers or in propositional language, in literal discursive form, in other words. If you want to know what it feels like to be in a prison, if you want to know what it feels like to be in a particular third grade, you need a form that will do it justice. If you want to know what it feels to be an associate professor when you are 54, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is a good way to find out. We do say about images that this helped me understand something that I didn't understand before. And I don't want to excommunicate those forms which we in fact do use in our culture in order to advance our understanding because of our preoccupation with certain forms of verification.

Gardner: I study a prison, and I make my best observations about what happens there, and then I write six novels, and five of them are completely out of whole cloth. They have nothing to do with what I saw there, but I write them in an authentic kind of manner. How do I as the judge of that novel submitted as a dissertation make a decision about its acceptability since they are equally convincing?

Eisner: I think you would have to make judgments on the basis of whether that novel has referential adequacy, in my terms. That is to say, if you went out to look at such places, whether you would see what in fact the person has described as existing there.

Gardner: “It seems to me that what you’re doing subrosa is you’re going out and having other people do research to find out whether or not the description is in fact true.

Eisner: In inferential statistics you’re not supposed to be able to generalize to the populations unless the sample was drawn from the population in which the data were collected and analyzed, but we do that all the time. We make inferences to populations without ever knowing whether or not the features of the population to which we’re making an inference correspond to the population from which the data were sampled in the first place. So we do that all the time as a matter of getting on.

The argument between Gardner and Eisner did not end at the 1994 AERA meeting, it continued at the same conference in 1996 (scripts are not included in this review of the literature), and it continues today in the year 2011 as I pursue a doctoral dissertation in education in curriculum and instruction. An important observation that arises from the conversation between the above mentioned scholars is that it appears to be easier to defend a style of research that has been used for many decades and it is considered the “gold standard” across the collective academy of scholars. On the other hand, an attempt to persuade the minds of a community that has utilized a strict and objective process (style) to obtain a set of results (findings) often proves to be a challenge. Similarly, Gardner’s best offense in his argument is characterized by explaining how a novel does not fit the criteria of quantitative research. As a plausible rival hypothesis, I would like to point out that quantitative research does not also fit the criteria of qualitative research since it does not characterize the individual aspects of a student or person.

In interpreting the scripts of Howard Gardner and Elliot Eisner, I must conclude that I have come to a compromise between both positions. On one side, the present research does utilize a traditional quantitative research tool in the form of a questionnaire, has an introduction

and literature review, has a methods section, and has a results section. Furthermore, the data gathered in the questionnaire is analyzed and interpreted under rigorous standards. After the data has been analyzed the research takes a turn into a creative setting where a narrative document is created using the interpretation of the data as the source of inspiration. Even though the present research primarily utilizes qualitative research as the investigative venue, both quantitative and qualitative research venues share many characteristics and have varied associations.

As a continuation of this revision of literature, lineal evolutions of the educational philosophies that are integral to the current research are brought into light. It is not within the scope of this study to write every theory that has been proposed by the philosophers and theorists that are cited. The present paper utilizes the proposed philosophies that directly relate to the current research in regards to the unconscious and educational curriculum.

Unconscious Interpretation Theory

Sigmund Freud and the Interpretation of Dreams: Freud was extremely interested in the nature of dreams and studied its influence on human behavior. According to Freud (1900), in pre-historic times dreams were believed to be related to the supernatural world and were described as divine inspirations given by gods and demons that served as omens for future events to come. In addition, according to Freud (1900), it was also believed that dreams were a representation of the psychic activity of a person, but the activity only existed while the person was asleep. Aside from historical interpretations of the meaning of dreams, Freud developed a method of dream interpretation that will now be discussed. In the book titled: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud analyzes his own personal dreams in order to exemplify his new theory of

dream interpretation. Interestingly, Freud only utilizes the dreams of healthy people since he did not consider the material (dreams) he had gathered from neurotic patients appropriate.

Freud does not offer a specific “guide” to the interpretation of dreams; instead, he begins by illustrating a model on how he interprets one of his own dreams in order to show the reader about the process. In his method for dream interpretation, Freud writes the dream on a piece of paper and diligently dissects every section of it. After the dream is segmented into parts, he individually analyzes the sections in relation to the context that surrounds that dream in the physical world. The dream analysis takes the form of a rationalization of the events that have occurred in his life that are related to that dream and to the people and events that are present within the dream.

According to Freud (1900), the interpretation of a dream is not flawless in any way or form, and after a dream has been interpreted, additional problems may arise if the interpretation is further pursued. Furthermore, Freud (1900) further enhances his theory of interpretation of dreams as he suggests that all dreams represent the fulfillment of a wish on the part of the dreamer and maintains that even anxiety dreams and nightmares are expressions of unconscious desires (p.176). Also, according to Freud (1900), the process of “censorship” in dreams causes a “distortion” of the dream content, and what may appear to be a set of incoherent portions in a dream, through the process of psychoanalysis, may express a coherent set of ideas.

Even though Freud does not utilize a specific field guide to dream interpretation, he points out that the images found in dreams have a predetermined meaning. Freud (1900) states: “The dream content is, as it were, presented in hieroglyphics, whose symbols must be translated, one by one, into the language of the dream thoughts” (p.287). Freud discusses the following

classifications in regards to the interpretation of dreams as they will serve as the basis for dream interpretation in the present study:

Condensation: Condensation refers to the hidden thoughts found within the images of a dream. According to Freud (1900), the degree of condensation within a dream is indeterminable since further thoughts may be found within that dream.

The work of displacement: Elements that are found within a dream do not have a literal meaning as the “true” meaning of the element is displaced somewhere else.

Regard for representability: When an abstract dream thought is exchanged for another concrete thought. For example, a colorless and abstract picture exchanged for one that is pictorial and colorful.

Representation in dreams by symbols: Symbolism does not appertain especially to dreams, but rather to the unconscious imagination.

Absurd dreams: Absurdity is only observed in a dream until it is analyzed and its meaning is interpreted.

Affects in dreams: An affect experienced in a dream is in no way inferior to one of like intensity experienced in waking life, and the dream presses its claim to be accepted as part of our real psychic experiences.

For Freud, the ultimate value of dream analysis may be in revealing the hidden workings of the unconscious mind and surfacing them into consciousness.

Carl Gustav Jung: Even though Carl Jung was a personal friend and student of Sigmund Freud, in time he parted ways from his friend and mentor and developed his own theory about the unconscious. According to Boeree (1997), Jung divided the psyche into three different parts. The first part is the ego, an area that is identified as the conscious mind. Related to the ego is the

personal unconscious, an area that is not in a state of consciousness, but that may be found in the consciousness of a person if those memories can be brought to mind. The third part of the psyche is the collective unconscious. Interestingly, the collective unconscious is a network of experiences that we share as a species, but we are never at a complete conscious understanding of it. Examples of these experiences often take the form of love at first sight, near death experiences, déjà vu, dreams, fantasies, and literature amongst others.

As an eminent student of Sigmund Freud, Jung was also a firm believer that dreams can be interpreted as they are psychic representation of the unconscious. According to Jung (1912), the parting of ways from Freud occurred at the same time he had a confrontation with the unconscious. In order to interpret the dreams of his patients, Jung (1912) states: “The interpretations seemed to follow of their own accord from the patient’s replies and associations. I avoided all theoretical points of view and simply helped the patients to understand the drawn-images by themselves, without application of rules and theories” (p.170).

Carl Jung theorized that the collective unconscious is constituted by unlearned tendencies able to experience diverse situations in a specific way and are named archetypes. According to Boeree (1997), archetypes are not a form of their own, but they organize what is visible and what is done in the unconscious. The following are several of the most important archetypes that have been theorized by Carl Jung:

Mother: it is reflected into the world or a particular “mothering” person. It may be exemplified by Eve, Mary, the church, the nation, a forest, or the ocean. Jung suggested that a person whose own mother failed to satisfy this archetype will spend his/her life searching for the comfort of the church, or nation etc.

Mana: a spiritual power, often represented by symbols of a good harvest, fish, healing, the penis, semen, seed, fertilization, and fertility.

Shadow: it is the dark side of the ego, the evil that human beings are capable of doing. The shadow is amoral, as it knows no good or evil. The symbols that represent it include the snake, dragons, monsters, and demons.

Persona: a representation of a person's public image. The persona is the mask a person puts on to show the outside world. Sometimes the persona can be mistaken for a person's true identity.

Anima and animus: The anima is the female aspect present in the collective unconscious of men, and the animus is the male aspect present in the collective unconscious of women. Together they are referred as syzygy. The anima is personified by a young girl, and the animus as a wise old man.

Self: the most important archetype. It represents the ultimate unity of the personality and is symbolized by the circle, the cross, and the mandala (drawing used in meditation that draw your focus back to the center).

Hermaphrodite: represents the union of opposites.

Trickster: represented by a clown or magician, and it hampers the hero's progress and creates havoc.

Animal: humanities relationship with the animal world.

According to Boeree (1997), Carl Jung suggested that there is no fixed number of archetypes. In addition, archetypes may overlap and melt with each other depending on the images of the unconscious reflected through dreams.

The present paper will utilize Jung's archetypes of the collective unconscious as a method for interpreting dreams, memories, and reflections.

Jacques Lacan: Lacan studied the field of linguistics through a psychological standpoint. In order to achieve a complete understanding of what the true meaning of the dreams were, Lacan claimed that the unconscious is similarly structured to a language. The common denominator between a language and the unconscious is the presence of “signifiers” such as: ab-c, 109-10, de-f, 111-12, gh-i, 113-14. In a language, the signifiers are combined to create the written word, but in the unconscious it works in a different manner. According to Bachner (2001), the signifiers in the unconscious are constantly sliding, shifting, and circulating. The system in itself has no permanent stability since there is no anchor that can hold down the signifiers. Since the signifiers are in constant play, there is no way in which a definite definition can be provided. Lacan also believed that the unconscious was a chaotic realm of constantly shifting drives and desires, and in order to become an adult, the person attempts to anchor down the signifiers in an attempt to bring order to the chaos. Furthermore, Lacan believed that the possibility of anchoring down the signifiers of the unconscious is only an unreal image. In addition, Lacan utilizes an algorithm for illustrating how signifiers are related to the signified: S/s. Lacan exemplifies the S/s algorithm as pair of signifiers (gentlemen, ladies) standing over the signified (two doors). See Figure I.

Lacan (1966) explains: “the point is to show how the signifier in fact enters the signified—namely in a form which, since it is not immaterial, raises the question of its place in reality” (p.78). The signifiers represent a divergence, and that divergence cannot enter through the door since it is divided into two different images. In simplified terms, Lacan argues that the signifiers are similar to two different destinations that are related to each other. The problem with the destinations is that they cannot be visited at the same time (enter through the door). At the end, the signifiers do not become the signified in the same manner that the unconscious is not completely understood or anchored.

Consequently, Lacanian psychoanalysis is encompassed by three different orders. According to Bachner (2001), the first order argues that language in itself is a Symbolic entity since the subject is always the subject of the signifier at the unconscious level. The second order is called the Imaginary; the place of necessary illusion. In this order the subject is unable or fails to observe the absence of reality in the symbolic and fails to recognize its true nature believing that its transparency is real. The third and final stage is known as the Real. The Real can be easily understood as the place that always “is” since everything that is absent from it can be considered symbolized. In Lacan’s theory, the Real is significant to a person’s union with the mother’s body in a state of nature. The Mirror Stage constitutes the Imaginary, in which a person begins to grasp the idea of the “other” as it formulates the notion of self. The Symbolic allows the person to take a position in regards to the relationship of the self and others.

Curriculum Theory

William Pinar: Pinar speaks in a manner that questions the relevance of the curriculum that is commonly accepted as part of our current public educational stage. The present study utilizes Pinar’s position on educational curriculum as a justification for the proposed research, specifically in regards to the creative writing aspect. According to Pinar (2004), curriculum studies, or *currere*, should involve the concept of curriculum as a complicated conversation, should be intellectually independent, and should be configured in an interdisciplinary format. The notion of having an intellectually independent curriculum is placed center stage as the basis of the justification for the present research as it utilizes a personal reconceptualization of educational curriculum. In regards to educational curriculum Pinar (2009) asks: “Is teacher education so organized around institutional outcome that only the ‘best’ teaching practices in

adherence to ‘standards’ allow academic knowledge and the subjectivity labor required to make that knowledge subsidiary? (p.19).” From an analogical point of view, the above stated question exemplifies the notion of the use of a traditional dissertation as the only method for conducting research in a program leading to a Ph.D. in curriculum studies. Put simply, if educators are to utilize intellectually independent curricula in their classrooms, teacher education programs, as well as graduate schools of education must implement varied modes of educational approaches in order to fit the specific needs of the student body.

William Pinar establishes an important groundwork in regards to autobiographical educational curriculum as he strongly criticizes the absence of creativity within it. According to Pinar (2004), curriculum theory is a form of autobiographical theory for stating facts that enhance the educational experience of teachers and students as lived experience, and also speaks from the subjective experience of history and society. For Pinar, a student of educational experience may be placed in a “biographic situation” at any moment. Pinar (2004) defines biographic situation as a structure of lived meaning that follows from past situations, but which contains contradictions of past and present as well as anticipation for possible futures. In addition, Pinar (2004) states: “If we employ, for instance, the bureaucratic language in which teaching becomes not an occasion for creativity and dissent and, above all, individuality, but, rather, the implementation of others’ objectives, the process of education is mutilated (p.25).

Pinar’s *currere* serves as a method for the study of relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interest of self understanding and social reconstruction. According to Pinar (2004), *currere* is constituted by four steps or moments that point to both temporal and cognitive movements in the autobiographical study of educational topics. The first step is the regressive, in which past or existential experience is used as a source of data. During

this stage the past is reentered and memories from the past are changed. The second step is the progressive. This step looks towards what is not present at the moment and imagines possible futures. The third step of currere is known as analytical. During this step, the student examines the past, present, and future, and creates a subjective space of freedom in the present. The purpose of this process is to bring the past and the future into the present. The final step of currere is synthesis, and it has been described as the moment in which a person comes in contact with the constituting forces that are present inside. In other words, it is an illumination of the self. According to Pinar (2004), the method of currere reconceptualized curriculum is an ongoing project of self-understanding in which a person becomes engaged in pedagogical action with others in social reconstruction.

Qualitative Research Venues

Phenomenology: The present study can be considered an amalgamation of methods since its contents fit within the specific criteria of a group of qualitative research traditions. The first research tradition that is discussed in the present paper is phenomenology. According to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007) phenomenology is the study of the world as it appears to individuals when they release the knowledge they have about a phenomena and revisit their immediate experience of the phenomena. Creswell (2007) states: “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p.58). The present study exemplifies phenomena in the shape of dreams, memories, and reflections as they are analyzed in order to gain new understanding of the self within the context of those experiences. More importantly, according to Creswell (2007) the participants of phenomenology

research must have experienced the specific phenomenon that is being studied in order for the researcher to create a unified understanding of that phenomenon.

Narrative inquiry: The second qualitative research tradition that relates to the present study is narrative inquiry. According to Creswell (2007), narrative studies tell the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, historical, and social context, and including the important themes in those lived experiences. The narrative approach to inquiry is characterized by the use of prose as method for delivering a story that encompasses the lived experiences of the participant.

Autoethnography/Biography: The third research tradition is autoethnography/biography. According to Green, Camilli, and Elmore (2006), ethnography is useful for discovering the meanings different actors are creating in a situation. The main purpose of action is to first determine what the problem is, and second, to determine how to address that problem. Green et.al., (2006) argue that ethnography provides an opportunity to explore actions within their context of reference and describe the complexities of human behavior. From an educational perspective, ethnographic research can be used as a tool for understanding the cultural differences and similarities that encompass the lives of students from minority groups. Furthermore, Green et.al., (2006) point out that ethnography gives students and researchers an opportunity to explore process as it is happening in the form of inference and interpretation of human action and interaction. Also, Finders (1992) adds: “fieldwork involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different,” (p.60). In this case, an educator can observe the “classroom culture” of his/her students and compare it to a different “classroom culture” within the same school or school district. After the observations are made, the ethnographer can begin an analysis of the

perspectives and behaviors that have been observed. The analysis of the observations can provide similarities and differences between groups.

Autoethnography is a field that allows the voices of those who are normally silenced in a society to express themselves in a real and vivid manner. According to Richardson (1997), if we are to advance the case of the non-privileged, we must listen to their voices and their disenfranchised stories. Within a classroom environment, autoethnography can be used as a powerful tool with students who have been discarded by the educational systems they are in. According to Ellis (2004), autoethnography attempts to see the world through the eyes of the participant as they experience life as a daily routine. According to Pelias (1999), our stories narrate our lives, reach out to others, and make us as they are made. In addition, Reed-Danahay (1997) states: “our modern selves have the necessity to narrate our lives and those of others within a coercive environment (p.330). If educators can see through the eyes of their students, they might understand the limitations they are facing and will be able to determine meaningful ways in which they can provide educational guidance.

Imagination has the potential to create new meaning that can be used for the benefit of mankind or just the immediate well being of a student. According to Green (1995), when educators teach and learn about a student, the student must be aware that he is leaving something behind while at the same time reaching towards something new; and this kind of knowledge is linked to imagination. Green (1995) continues by stating: “to imagine things is the first step on the belief that things can be changed” (p.17). In addition, Eisner (2002) points out: “the arts provide a kind of permission to pursue qualitative experience in a particularly focused way and to engage in the constructive exploration of what the imaginative process may engender” (p.1).

The power of imagination has no limits, only the limitations that are placed by societal rules or personal boundaries.

The present study utilizes self narrative to portray a story about the researcher/participant in regards to his relationship with himself (self), his society (others), and his immediate environment. According to Chang (2008), the concept of self is characterized by rationality, emotion, and inspiration, while the concept of others can shift with time, distance, and perspective. This important aspect of autoethnography/biography will be taken in consideration under the notion that the participant's relationship with self and others is constantly shifting. In addition, according to Roth (2005), the relationship between autoethnography and autobiography is webbed to the notion that without the individual there is no society and without society every person would have to survive on his own. As gregarious individuals, we embrace the uniqueness of our individuality within the complex cohesiveness of our society. Also, Ellis & Bochner (1996) state: "ethnographic voices speak a story of a self looking for a point of orientation in the representational constructs of other" (p.174). Furthermore, according to Chang (2008), autoethnography is a qualitative research inquiry that benefits the autoethnographer with self-reflection through transformation and in depth self cultural analysis. The self-reflection process is characterized by the use of a dreams, memories, and reflections analysis that emphasizes the autoethnographical/biographical reality of the self and others.

CHAPTER II

PROBLEM

Research Method

Research Design

The present study is characterized by the use of personal dreams, memories, and reflections of the lived experiences of a doctoral student at the Graduate School of Education at Texas A&M University. A dreams, memories, and reflections (DMR) ten item questionnaire was developed utilizing aspects of Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian Theory of Dream Interpretation. In addition to the questionnaire, a DMR journal was utilized to record the dreams during the waking episode and will be kept near the bed for easy access. Memories and reflections were added to the DMR journal as they surface or become relevant within the daily living context of the researcher/participant.

Dreams: The dreams of the participant were utilized in this analysis and interpretations were derived from its analysis. A “dreams” labeled section of the DMR journal was utilized to record the dreams as they become available through the nightly process of sleeping. The dreams were recorded immediately upon awaking to a conscious state. An important aspect that was taken into consideration during the process of recording the dreams is that they were clearly recorded in an expedited manner in order to avoid the loss of important details as they often dissipate within a short period of time. In addition, dreams were not edited in any way or form and were written in the DMR journal as they happened during the dreaming episode. In addition, the plot of the dreams and related symbols were written as soon as possible in an attempt to avoid the loss important information. Every dream was labeled with the appropriate date and time in which

it occurred in the DMR journal. In order to avoid the loss of visual connections, images from the dream were drawn or painted after the written recordings of the unconscious episode. By recording and analyzing dreams, unconscious signifiers are brought into the conscious reality of the participant culminating in new discoveries of the self and others.

Memories: In addition to the interpretation of dreams, memories from prior experiences were recorded in the DMR journal and were labeled as such. Since the amount of relevant memories within a person's life can prove to be abundant, only memories that have proven to have an altering or significant effect on the participant's life will be utilized. It is important to take into consideration that a person's memories are surrounded by the context of that person's life within a specific time and place. As personal memories are recorded on the DMR journal, they were considered to be in their unconscious stage. Further analyses of those memories were conducted in order to retrieve the zones of those memories that are stored within the unconscious self.

Reflections: The final area of study takes the form of reflections. Reflections were also recorded in the DMR journal and appear in a labeled section similar to dreams and memories. The value that surrounds the use of reflections is directly correlated with the entangled paradoxes, challenges, and serendipitous findings that affect the life of a philosopher. Unforeseen situations emerge from daily activities and decisions are often made without proper analysis of possible outcomes. At this moment reflection becomes an integral part of understanding the unconscious aspect that is derived from the decision making process as it searches for a deeper understanding of the rationale behind the actions taken throughout our daily living. The reflections based on those dramatic situations often reveal areas of the unconscious into the light of day. Similarly to dreams, and memories, the reflections were recorded and analyzed as they become available.

Population Sample

Due to the nature of this autoethnographic/biographic work, all the research will be conducted on the dreams, memories, and the reflections of one participant (who in this case is the researcher). It must be noted that even though the dreams, memories, and reflections under study may have traces of countless cultural encounters with significant persons, the research does not involve the lives of any other human being than himself.

Measures

In order to provide a thorough interpretation of the meanings of the scripted dreams, memories, and reflections, a DMR questionnaire was created primarily using Freud's Method for Dream Interpretation as it is described in the book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). Jungian and Lacanian psychoanalytical aspects that are relevant to the study are also included in the DMR questionnaire. As stated earlier in the review of literature previously, the dream analysis method used by Sigmund Freud dissects the dream into smaller relevant sections that hold a cohesive message and then the separate parts are analyzed in order to reveal the hidden meanings. A similar approach to the one used by Freud (1900) was used in the present study, but instead of attempting to solve the unconscious problems of the researcher/participant, the present project measures the autoethnographical/biographical unconscious reality of the participant.

This DMR analysis was constructed specifically to harness relevant information that pertains to the unconscious within an autoethnographical/biographical setting. The amalgamation between dream interpretation and autoethnography/biography blend in perfect harmony as it allows the researcher/participant to search for hidden thoughts that are present within the unconscious reality of the psyche being studied.

Procedure

Dreams, memories, and reflections were recorded in the DMR journal. The journal was carried by the participant at all times during the data collection process. Dream entries were recorded as soon as the participant woke up from sleeping and remembered having a dream. Dreams were recorded with as much detail as possible in order to maximize the probabilities of removing most of its condensation levels. Memory journal entries were made at any moment the participant remembered an important issue that has had a strong influence in his life. Finally, reflections were recorded in the journal at the specific moment in which the participant pondered upon a specific situation in which further visualization was needed.

The interpretation of dreams, memories, and reflections was used as the foundation for the creation of the narrative document titled: “The Shadow of Joaquin,” that appears in the following chapter. The document is of autoethnographical/biographical nature as it portrays the life voyage of the researcher/participant throughout the different stages that have shaped his immediate reality of being. The cohesiveness of the document is enhanced by the hidden thoughts that consciously and unconsciously have been present in the researcher/participant’s life. The results of the analysis served as the basis to create a narrative philosophical document that ethnographically and biographically describes the life of the researcher/participant from an unconscious perspective. The writing style of document reflects the unconscious nature of its source (dreams, memories, and reflections).

Timeline

Data was collected for a period of five months beginning on Tuesday June 1, 2010 and culminating on Sunday October 31, 2010. In order to avoid loss of important details surrounding the data, the analysis of dreams, memories, and reflections were conducted within twenty four hours of the original time in which they were recorded on the DMR journal. This timeline is not subject to a specific timeframe during the day since the data gathering process can occur at any time during the twenty four hours found on a daily cycle.

CHAPTER III

SOLUTIONS

Dreams, Memories, and Reflections Analysis*Dream Analysis*

A snake in the house: I brought a feisty snake to my house. The body of the snake was sometimes thick and sometimes thin. I was in possession of a long snake catcher tool that I used to handle the snake. The house where I was living was in Puerto Rico. I kept the snake inside the chicken coup. The snake was evil and I sensed that she wanted to destroy me. Throughout the dream the snake wanted to escape from my grasp in order to hurt my daughter Lydia. At least in two occasions the snake went under the door of my daughter's room searching for her but I was able to catch the snake before it could find my daughter. At the end of the dream I was talking to my wife Karen and I told her that to bring the snake home was a bad idea and that I was going to get rid of it. The snake had diamond patches and its face was half human and half snake.

Condensation: The dream brings back memories of the days in which my entire family spend their Monday nights performing spiritual ceremonies related to Afro-Caribbean religions. The most important aspect of the dream is that it depicts a religious practice that even though at that time of my childhood I was terrified by it, it was still welcomed by my parents.

Work of displacement: I attempt to hold the snake from reaching my children as an attempt for them to glide free over the waters of knowledge without getting in contact with the hard times and struggles that I had to deal with in my early life. Furthermore, I attempt to break the cycles of ignorance that I had to endure under my parent's guardianship in order to restrain entities of ignorance from affecting my own children.

Regard of representability: The notion of me bringing the snake home is a representation of the inherent ignorance that I carry within myself. The changing in size of the snake represents the ability of ignorance to adjust its appearance in order to penetrate the mind. The double face of the snake represents the ways in which ignorance can disguise itself in order to have an appealing presentation.

Symbolism: As a result of my personal mistakes I strive to protect my own offspring from the forces of ignorance. My unconscious is creating a reality in which I walk the path of truth and knowledge. In addition, my unconscious is prompting me to make adjustments in my life in order to take future decisions that will allow me to protect my own self as well as important others around me.

Absurdity: No absurdity was found.

Affects: The feelings of fatherly protection towards my children and family are present in this dream. The needs to rid my contour of the many aspects (intrinsic and extrinsic) related to the ignorance that surround my contemporary life are also present.

Jungian archetype: The shadow is the archetype found in this dream and it is represented by a snake. The snake represents the amoral side of the dreamer.

Lacanian order: Imaginary. Eighty five percent of the signifiers have become signified.

The moon: I am sitting over a table having dinner with a group of cats and dogs. The dogs are licking their plates and drooling around their mouths. The cats are talking amongst themselves but I cannot hear what they are saying. I look outside the wooden casement window and I see the moon bouncing around all over the sky. It is dark during the night. The cats get off the table and walk on their four legs outside of the wooden house where we are. One of the dogs is dying of a disease that was inside the food he just ate.

Condensation: There are aspects within our reality that we do not have control over them. In a general sense, I believe this dream relates to the understanding of those uncontrollable realities that do have an influence over our decision making process.

Work of displacement: The meaning of the death of the dog is displaced by understanding that the invisible forces that act upon the reasoning of others within my personal environment can be influential within my conscious reality.

Regard of representability: The moon represents the un-patterned movement of the invisible forces that surround the motion of the influence of the forces that affect my decision making process. The cats and dogs are a representation of the individual differences that are inherent within the reality of the people that surround me.

Symbolism: Even though the dogs and the cats are represented by others (peers and friends), I believe that since I remained a human being during the dream I am being portrayed as the leader of the pack (friends and peers). Even though I don't have control over the actions of the moon (invisible forces), I do have an influence over those who are around me and sometimes I am not aware of it. I see my own self in a leadership role in regards to others who are important to me.

Absurdity: The dream provides a high level of absurdity. The level of absurdity was diminished after most of its condensation was removed.

Affects: No affects were felt during the dream.

Jungian archetype: The animal is represented by cats and dogs, and it represents my friends and peers. The mana is a spiritual power represented by the moon. The spiritual powers can have good intentions, bad intentions, as well as hidden intentions.

Lacanian order: Symbolic. Sixty percent of the signifiers have become signified.

A tricycle trip: I was riding a tricycle with my wife. My daughter was with us but was not riding the tricycle. My wife was pedaling the tricycle and I was riding over the rear bar that holds the axle. There was a woman near us that wanted to get closer to me in a more affectionate way. A part of me wanted to repel the woman and another part of me wanted to get closer to her. The dream takes place in the city of the stones where I grew up. My wife pedaled away from the area and left our daughter playing near a curved road. I asked my wife to return to the area. I felt mad at my wife for leaving her without saying anything. We went back to the area in which we left our daughter. I heard my daughter scream from under a bridge. I am preoccupied. I climb down a steep hill and find her under the bridge. When I looked at her she was physically identical to my sister's daughter, but inside she was my daughter.

Condensation: The dream takes me back to the neighborhood I grew up. At some point in time I lived near the bridge where most of the dream takes place. My feelings and memories of that place produce diverse feelings of happiness and sadness at the same time.

Work of displacement: The importance of the dream is related to the duality of that which exists in me, my family, and those around me. From a historical perspective, I look at how living in that geographical location has been a blessing as well as a place of ignorance and misconceptions.

Regard of representability: In this dream my wife is a loving mother, but she leaves our daughter behind. A woman approaches me in a romantic way and a part of wants to be with her and another part does not. My daughter has an identical physical appearance to that of my niece, but on the inside she is my real daughter. All the dualistic elements found throughout the dream reveal the twofold dimension in which my own self as well as the others who interact with on a daily basis have.

Symbolism: One of the reasons why these unconscious symbols have surfaced from my internal reality is not only based on a warning for me to be careful with the duality of form that is represented by human presence, human interactions, and human decisions; it is also intended for me to embrace the duality of self and others as a genuine form of being.

Absurdity: The absurdity of this dream does not play a major role in its meaning. What may appear to be absurd in this dream is actually a message that intends to create a higher understanding of my relationship with self and others.

Affects: Two important feelings are perceived during this dream. The first one is anger towards my wife for leaving our daughter behind, and the second is the feeling of lost when I knew that my daughter was left unadvised. Those two feelings are often present in my immediate reality as I fear sometimes that if I'm ever away from my family my wife might not be up to the task of raising our children alone.

Jungian archetype: The dualist nature of the dream is represented by the persona. Every person shows a side but a real side is hidden behind the social masks they wear. In my own perspective, a worrisome part of me is hiding behind the mask I put on.

Lacanian order: Symbolic. Fifty percent of the signifiers have become signified.

The other woman: I am looking at a woman who is beautiful. She is blond, blue eyes, and very skinny (just like a model). She invites to have sex with her but indeed she is my actual wife.

When I move closer to her she is no longer the blond supermodel and physically becomes my wife. When I move away from her she transforms into the blond supermodel again. The woman then becomes a beautiful African American beauty that also wants to have sex with me. I hug her and kiss her. When I get closer to her she physically transforms into my wife Karen. In neither

occasion I consummate the copulative act. I moved away from her because I was confused. The dream takes place over a field full of white and yellow flowers.

Condensation: The dream connects me to the feelings that encompass the transformation that I have undergone from being a single man to becoming a transformed man that is married to a single woman. Interestingly enough, every time I got closer to a woman she became my wife.

Work of displacement: This dream is shaped like funnel that has harnessed the different aspects found in my prior life and has transformed those experiences into the family life that I am experiencing today.

Regard of representability: The abstract thoughts take the shape of the blond woman and the African American model. Both thoughts are exchanged for the concrete reality of my wife Karen.

Symbolism: From an unconscious reality it is fundamental to understand that my wife Karen has taken the place of the relationships that I had in the past. From an autoethnographical perspective, the reason why this dream has emerged from my unconscious is as reassurance that not only my wife has replaced those prior relationships that sometimes are remembered, but that my prior life has become one with her.

Absurdity: The level of absurdity was minimal in this dream. The apparent impossible physical transformation of one woman into another has been revealed by the analysis. The analysis revealed that the many relationships I had in the past have now become one that exclusively surrounds my wife Karen.

Affects: Most feelings in this dream were of carnal nature. A part of me sometimes wishes to be single in order to date other women as I customarily did before the time I was married. Those feelings are still found in “trace” amounts within my personal reality.

Jungian archetype: The trickster archetype is present in this dream and is represented by the sudden physical changes that the women underwent. In this case, the trickster does not have a specific physical form but it is an abstract form that is part of my superego.

Lacanian order: Real. Eighty three percent of the signifiers have become signified.

My cousin Eduardo: My cousin Eduardo came to visit me all by himself. I am living in an industrialized city. The city looks or appears to be sinful. Eduardo is a compulsive gambler and the city is full of places to gamble. While I am attending meetings, Eduardo is wasting his money in gambling. After Eduardo loses all of his money, it is obvious to me that he can't stop playing with the slot machines. Eduardo then goes to my place of work looking for me. I am surrounded by executives and I am wearing a white shirt and tie. Eduardo asked me to take him gambling. I told him that I will take him to a very good place. After we took the train we arrived at an industrious casino area. The people around the place felt malevolent. Immediately Eduardo began playing slot machines and I just felt sorry for him. Eduardo continued to lose his money. As I began walking, I find myself away from Eduardo and I'm inside a jungle. I am dressed in a fatigue military uniform and I'm a member of an elite military unit of soldiers. There is a "bad" soldier within the area and even though we are hunting him, he is hunting us down. After several bullet fights with him, my friend Jose De Jesus gets shot near the shoulder. I think that the bullet went through his but I am not certain. I and three other soldiers are carrying him in search of a hospital. We finally find a hospital and enter through the back doors only to discover that the entrance was in the front area. We picked Jose De Jesus up and carried him to the front of the hospital.

Condensation: My cousin Eduardo was convicted of murder at the early age of eighteen. Even though he did not pull the trigger of the shotgun, apparently he was the mastermind of the group

of assailants. This dream reflects the struggles that he has undergone in his life after he was incarcerated and released on twenty five years of parole. In addition, when the incarceration incident happened with my cousin Eduardo, I was already outside of Puerto Rico serving in the United States military and I always wished I could have done more to help him in his time of need.

Work of displacement: The work of displacement in this dream takes place within my unconscious during the time in which the murder incident happened with my cousin Eduardo. I was stationed in Fort Carson, Colorado at the time it occurred and it hurt me dearly. Abstractly, I have carried his pain inside of me just like Jose De Jesus carried a bullet inside his body.

Regard of representability: Jose De Jesus represents the pain that both Eduardo and I felt over his judicial ordeal. The gambling represents the struggles that he is undergoing right now since he is unable to find a decent job due to his stained criminal record. The industrialized city represents the destructive social order that Eduardo knows as his immediate environment.

Symbolism: The reason why these symbols have emerged from my unconscious is because my cousin Eduardo has been going through a lot of personal problems lately. Even though I would like to help him, there isn't much I can do for him other than to pay him for performing manual labor around my house in Puerto Rico. The saddest part of the ordeal is that his poor life choices are a direct response to his priori stimuli.

Absurdity: The level of absurdity was negligible. The condensation in this dream was easily removed. The absurdity in the dream thus depicts an accurate current state of being within my cousin's immediate reality.

Affects: The feelings I felt during the dream for my cousin Eduardo are the same feelings that I feel for him on a daily basis. He is my blood brother and his life needs help and guidance. I also hope that he can establish himself as productive member of society.

Jungian archetype: None found.

Lacanian order: Real. Ninety five percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Ceiling falling: In this dream I am half awake and half asleep. I find my own self jumping out of my bed because my friends are in danger. I can see my wife Karen sleeping over our bed. I am inside my body and I am conscious about the actions that my body is taking but I am not in control. I feel everything that is happening. In other words I am inside my body and my body is in autopilot. I can see large pieces of the ceiling falling as if I was in the middle of an earthquake. The sheet rock is falling and I can see conduit, pipes, and wires crumbling down onto my carpet. My body determines that it is safe to return to bed and that my friends are safe. I put my head over the pillow and immediately fall asleep again.

Condensation: The dreaming episodes are very common in me as I have been known to be an active sleepwalker since I was a young child. This dream enhances my personal spiritual notion that the human self consists of a soul, a spirit, and a flesh and bone body.

Work of displacement: The true meaning of the friends that I am protecting is the many selves that are part of me. As an immediate response to the apparent physical threat I am protecting my physical body, but concurrently I'm also protecting my spirit and my soul during this dreaming episode.

Regard of representability: The pieces of ceiling falling inside my room represent the problems that arise on a daily basis that have a specific influence in my conscious nature as well as my unconscious self.

Symbolism: As I am observing myself react to the inbound pieces of debris falling down over my many selves, I come to realize that my unconscious is also protecting me even at times that I may appear to be vulnerable. This dream has brought an important understanding about how my inner self is in self-protection mode at all times; especially while I'm asleep.

Absurdity: No absurdity found.

Affects: The feeling of unconscious self preservation is something that I have never understood before the analysis of this dream. I am amazed to realize that I am a poststructuralist being that is an amalgamation of many selves.

Jungian archetype: Jung considers the self as the most important archetype. In this dream the self is divided in many parts that were working individually and collectively at the same time.

Lacanian order: Real. Eighty five percent of the signifiers have become signified.

A trip with my dad: My father wants to go to the beach with me alone and the rest of the family is not invited. I really don't want to go, but I won't give him a negative response either. At the same time I am thinking of a married couple that is unbeknownst to me, but that are present since I am sentient of them. I start driving my father's car in the direction of the beach. We drive near our family and I can see my wife, sister, mother, and my daughters. My daughters are playing in a big yard with green trees. As we drive on the highway that leads to the downtown area of the city of the stones, I complain of being hungry. My father makes me stop at a café. Since he knows the owner, he tells him to make a \$1.00 ham and cheese sandwich. While we were on the highway, the couple that I was sentient of drove by us in a 1970's car similar to the one we were inside. Everything revolves around the 1970's in the dream. I get my sandwich and my dad pays the dollar. As I am eating, my mouth feels dry and I ask for something to drink. My father pulls out another dollar and asks the guy to bring us a "couple." I start thinking that I am certain that

my dad asked for two drinks but that the guy can possibly understand that we are asking for cigarettes or something else.

Condensation: In this dream I am seeing myself as one with my father. This dream bounces back at me as it shows me that I and my father are twin souls and we have a lot of characteristics in common nonetheless. In this dream I see my father doing the things I unconsciously do to myself as well as others around me.

Work of displacement: This dream is a look into the past, a reflection of the present, and a projection into the future of my conscious and unconscious reality about my father.

Regard of representability: My father wanting to travel alone with me represents the characteristics that make the two of us unique and that no other member of our family has. My complaining of being hungry and thirsty represents the place that I have as a son and the place my father has as the protector of the family. The manner in which my father expresses himself is always secretive and commanding, as in the way he orders the sandwich and the “couple” of drinks. I happen to enjoy being commanding and secretive as well, and that is an important characteristic that I share with my father. The retrospective temporal descriptions manifest my time of birth which is the year nineteen seventy five. It was at the time of my birth in which I received my father’s genotypes and phenotypes allowing the temporal exclusiveness to be accurate. In the dream there is a couple that I haven’t seen, and then the couple appears while I’m driving on the highway, and then my father asks for a couple at the café. The couple represents the juxtaposition of my unconscious with my father’s unconscious as an inseparable unified entity.

Symbolism: The symbolization of the dream is better explained by the magnetic forces that exist between me and my father. We have always kept a close distance on each other. Our relationship has evolved into mutual understandings of trust, respect, and common ground.

Absurdity: The absurdity found on this dream was enormous when I started the psychoanalytical process of interpreting this dream. The levels of condensation were one of the highest that I have dealt with since I started the process. Even though the interpretation of the dream is complete, I believe that deeper levels of condensation are still present within the episode.

Affects: During the dream I felt like it was fine to accompany my father to the beach but ultimately I did not care much for the trip. Within my conscious realm I do share identical feelings towards my father as I felt them in the dream. The same feelings of being close and far at the same type have always been present in my psyche.

Jungian archetype: The mother archetype is represented by the ocean in this dream. Even though we never made it to the beach, our trip was destined to go to the beach. Even though I don't want to go the beach (the mother), I do feel happiness as we drive by my mother (my father's wife), my wife (who is also a mother), and my daughters (who will be mothers in due time). From a Jungian perspective, the mother represents the buffer or the magnetism that has allowed the relationship I have with my father to continue to be functional.

Lacanian order: Symbolic. Thirty percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Lust: I was having sexual relations with two young beautiful women at the same time. The dream takes place over a dance floor. I thoroughly enjoyed the dream.

Condensation: The dream represents my physical desires that I have for the feminine and the passion that they can produce. The condensation in this dream is minimal.

Work of displacement: The copulative act that occurs in this dream is clear representation of the physical desires that are born in my unconscious and that are a permanent part of me.

Regard of representability: Even though the women in this dream receive a literal meaning, they also represent my unconscious desires to commit sinful acts that go against my personal and spiritual values.

Symbolism: From an autobiographical perspective, I have embraced the love for women and I have often represented that love through the writing of poetry and prose. The memories of loving the feminine side of love and they loving me back will always be an integral part of my life as a poet.

Absurdity: No aspects of absurdity found.

Affects: The physical pleasure that I felt in this dream was live and vivid. Those feelings are still alive within my conscious and unconscious realities.

Jungian archetype: The hermaphrodite exemplifies the union of opposites. In this dream, the union of opposites is represented by my prior relationships that allowed to link my body, spirit, and soul to the women I have loved in my life.

Lacanian order: Real. Seventy five of percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Jogging with a famous boxer: I was jogging in a park similar to Central Park in New York City. The park was big and it was full of people. As I am running through the park, I can see infamous Mexican boxer Antonio Margarito. I approach the boxer and tell him that I have pre-measured routs around the park. At that moment, I begin asking him about the illegal wraps that he used in his gloves during his previous fight with Miguel Cotto (another famous boxer). He explained that he did not have any knowledge about his illegally wrapped hands during the fight. After we finished running we stop by a bus stop to wait for the big bus. When the bus arrives we

become friends. As we travel inside the bus throughout the city, I meet a lot of people that are interested in talking with me and with Antonio Margarito.

Condensation: Boxing is a sport I have thoroughly enjoyed all my life. This is a dream I consider to have a low level of condensation for most of its meaning has been viewed in a literal manner. Antonio Margarito and Miguel Cotto (whom I was hoping would end victorious during the fight) had a boxing bout in Las Vegas, Nevada almost two years ago. After Miguel Cotto lost the fight it was determined by the Nevada Boxing Commission that Antonio Margarito used a solid plaster to wrap his wrists. I was personally saddened by the loss of my favorite boxer at the end of the match and much disappointed after the discovery of the illegally wrapped hands. Within my personal love for the sport of boxing, this dream exemplifies my desire to return boxer Miguel Cotto to his original status of champion that he never recuperated. After his brutal defeat, Miguel Cotto has never been the same sportsman again.

Work of displacement: No work of displacement found.

Regard of representability: The premeasured routs I talk about during the dream represent the analytical process for which I try to make cohesive sense of the actions taken by the boxer. The happy people approaching us inside the bus are a representation of the forgiveness that changes the unconscious realities of the self and others. I have forgiven the cheating boxer for his despicable actions.

Symbolism: At the end of the dream I do accept the cheating boxer into the bonds of friendship. The acceptance of the boxer into the bonds of friendship is a symbol for demonstrating my personal belief that I am in need of forgiveness for the mistakes that I have done in life, and I'm also in need to forget the trespasses that others have done onto me.

Absurdity: No absurdity found in the dream.

Affects: Since I started running with the boxer, I was actually happy to have met him even though I considered him a fraud. The feeling of forgiving him (Antonio Margarito) is juxtaposed with the feeling of self forgiveness for my own transgressions.

Jungian archetype: No archetype found in this dream episode.

Lacanian order: Real. Eighty four percent of the signifiers have become signified.

The cure for AIDS: I traveled to different areas of the world in search for the unusual parts that constitute the medicine that holds the cure for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). The first stop is in front of a cobra snake. A man tells me that the venom of the snake is a constituent of the cure. The man then tells me that the venom of rattle snakes is also a part of the needed poisons, but does not say anything else about it. After that we go in front of the ocean and the man tells me that the jelly fish that grow in this area (unknown area to me) have a toxin that is another ingredient for the cure. Later on, we went to a green hill with lush pastures. There is a zinc metal corrugated sheet lying over the green grass. The man raises the sheet metal. Under the corrugated sheet of metal there is a green moss that grows in that specific region. The sheet of metal is covered with the moss that is the final ingredient for the cure. When the ingredients are mixed with venom from other vipers the recipe is complete. I never get to mix the ingredients.

Condensation: This is a dream my cousin Eduardo had over a decade ago. I thought it was important to include it in this dream analysis since he actually made me write it down in hopes that it was the actual cure for the horrible disease that has taken so many lives worldwide. I would like to think that the cure of H.I.V. lies within the structure of the dream, but I will consider it to be a dream with a double meaning. The meanings of the dream are the cure for the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome and the cure for problems within his personal reality.

Work of displacement: Within my cousin's reality, I believe this dream is a cry for help in regards to all the problems that he was undergoing at the time in which he dreamed it. The duality of every ingredient identifies the problem as well as the cure for that specific problem. When all independent problems are solved, then his life would have been placed in order.

Regard of representability: The cobra represents the abandonment he felt from his family after he was released from prison following his arrest. At the time in which he was undergoing his legal problems he felt cornered and had nobody to find refuge in. The jellyfish represent the judicial system of man and God. The jellyfish can be tranquil and peaceful as they swim, but they can use their nematocysts to sting when necessary. The moss represents the family members of the murdered victim "Ramón." The lush pastures represent the plane of existence in which my friend Ramón (the man murdered by my cousin and his accomplices) is resting at this moment.

Symbolism: The venom of the snake, the nematocysts of the jelly fish, and the moss from the green pastures are a reality in the life of my cousin. For him, the cure for AIDS represents the melting of all the elements into his reality and finding harmony within his troubled reality.

Absurdity: No absurdity found in the dream.

Affects: No feelings were recorded.

Jungian archetype: The mother archetype is represented twice during this dream in the form of the ocean and the lush pastures in which the moss is found. During these difficult times, Eduardo's mother mortgaged her house to bail her son out of prison and was the only person who was actively helping him.

Lacanian order: Symbolic. Fifty percent of the signifiers have become signified.

A boxing match near the secret military base: I travelled to the desert (similar to Nevada or the Death Valley in California) to watch Puerto Rican boxer Miguel Cotto fight against an unknown opponent who was bigger and taller than him. Miguel Cotto and the other boxer appeared to be good friends. The fight takes place in a desert area near a secret military base that was administered by terminator robots. I was the only spectator when the fight began. I heard the voice of Immanuel Stewart (hall of fame boxing trainer who happens to be Cotto's trainer in real life) tell Miguel Cotto that he had no chance of winning, and that if he would not have been in his corner he would not have survived the first round. After a few rounds pass, both boxers get out the ring and start looking for a burrow animal. At this time I am together with the boxers. An animal is inside the burrow but I can't see it. Terminator airplanes begin to fly above us in search and destroy missions. We are ready to get out of the area. An FBI Hostage Rescue Team (I happen to be a member in the dream) arrives to rescue us. We take off running up a hill and the ring stays behind. We enter the secret military complex and go through a lot of places including rooms with spare parts for the robots. There are terminators inside. We go through a metal ladder and we escape the complex. I, the boxers, and several FBI HRT members are inside a cargo van driving under a dark bridge. There are many lights and many cars. The traffic is heavy. The rest of the FBI HRT members are dressed like construction workers in order to confuse the robots.

Condensation: This dream depicts the many parts that constitute the wholeness of all the travels and adventures I have undergone throughout my life. From an analogical standpoint, I do consider myself similar to King Odysseus in the sense that his many adventures always prohibit him to return home to Ithaca. This dream not only tells tails of my prior experiences, it projects me into the future that lies ahead.

Work of displacement: I have embarked in what I call a series of adventures that have allowed me to grow as a professional, a scholar, and a learner. Those adventures are often incompatible with each other since they do not have an apparent congruency between them. On one side of my life, there is an adventurer that has been a sergeant in the U.S. Army, a Federal Officer, A Border Patrol Agent, and now I am heading to the FBI Academy to become a Criminal Investigator. On the other side, I have been a middle school science teacher, a community college instructor, and I am about to receive my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. Even though the juxtaposition of the field of education with my employment as a Federal Agent is often in disagreement with each other, they have both shaped me into the person I am today.

Regard of representability: Going to the desert represents the forward movement into the unknown. The two boxers represent the professional opposites exemplified by my educational background and my place of employment. Just like the two boxers were friends, I am in peace with my life choices. But even though the boxers were friends, they still met inside the ring under the notion of physical contact and conflict. Also, I like more the Puerto Rican boxer (education) but the other boxer is stronger (Federal Government). This is my personal reality within my labor conflict. The burrow animal represents the search for common ground within my labor and educational conflict. The terminator robots represent the personal problems that I have undergone in my life in regards to the incongruence of my labor and education fields. The FBI HRT team is an indicator of where my life is heading as a result of my decision making process.

Symbolism: The symbols in this dream are telling the story of my past, present, and perceived possible future. I find it very interesting how the symbolization of this dream is totally unrelated

to the actual meaning of the dream. Within my unconscious, the past, present, and future are a single unified body.

Absurdity: The absurdity levels in the dream are of medium capacity. The absurdity is related to my personal desire of wanting to amalgamate my professional and educational careers and still being unable to accomplish it.

Affects: During the dream I felt as if there was a mixture of balance and order within the chaotic escape from the desert, infiltrating into the secret base, and escaping from the secret base inside the cargo van. I believe those feelings portray me as a person that is still in control of my life even though it is not utopian in any way.

Jungian archetype: The animal archetype is present in this dream in the form of a burrow animal that was never seen. The representation of this archetype presents the animal side of my humanity that is hidden inside of me in search of a unifying force towards perfect harmony that still haven't been seen or found.

Lacanian order: Imaginative. Thirty five percent of the signifiers have been signified.

A trip home: I am coming home to Puerto Rico to visit my parents. As I am driving to my hometown, I find a police checkpoint that also has National Guard soldiers. Amongst them is my friend Cesar Medina who tells me that he had purchased cologne for me as a gift but now he was selling it. I tell him that I would see him later since I had to leave. After I leave I arrive at my mother's house who tells me that she is pregnant (my mom is 77 years of age) and wants me to chase a wild goose from a nearby creek. I walk down to the creek and find four white geese. I try chasing one of them but I am unable to catch it. Throughout the entire dream I ask myself why my mother got pregnant at this late age.

Condensation: This is the dream with the highest amount of condensation out of the entire analysis. The dream relates to the incompleteness that exists within those that I see around myself and how that incompleteness has created a realm of emptiness inside of them.

Work of displacement: The true meaning of the dream is a warning that tells me that I have no control over the decisions that are made by other human beings regardless of how close they are to me.

Regard of representability: Both my friend Cesar Medina and my mother are people who are very close to me. In the dream they are doing things that doesn't make sense to me and there is nothing I can do but to support them and respect them. The cologne, as well as the geese represents the actions that people who are close to me (others) often take that I am in disagreement with.

Symbolism: The symbolism in this dream is a message that encourages me to consciously learn what it takes to allow the people around me to continue being what they are and to only focus on the aspects of my life that have a more relevant importance. I can only do my part in a world that is full of people that constantly exert bad choices upon their lives.

Absurdity: This dream has a high level of absurdity. Since a large portion of the condensation has been revealed by the analysis, the level of absurdity has been diminished. From an ethnographic and autobiographical standpoint, it is my personal belief that the two people (my mother and my friend) who are present in this dream are known for taking poor decisions and that is the reason why they have appeared in this dreaming episode.

Affects: My preoccupation for my mother is attached to the manner in which my family and friends affect my life by just taking their personal decisions. The feelings I have for them is a desire to progress in all aspects of their lives.

Jungian archetype: The animal is the archetype found in this dream in the form of geese. The behavior of human beings is often similar to the behavior animals perform in their natural habitats. In this dream, human behavior is parallel to the irrational behavior that animals have while living in the wild.

Lacanian order: Symbolic. Thirty five percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Emilio returns: My childhood friend comes back home after his strange disappearance looking fresh and renewed. He was showered and fresh. He wore a clean polo shirt with stripes and had long hair. He looked rested. A group of about twenty people from the neighborhood (all men) received him and welcomed him back. I did not know any of the guys since I haven't lived in the area for some time. I was very happy to see him.

Condensation: At the time I had this dream my friend Emilio Figueroa was kidnapped in Puerto Rico and his whereabouts were unknown. This dream was a revelation that he was already resting and that he had passed away and was in heaven.

Work of displacement: The appearance of my friend Emilio signifies the time in which his status of kidnapped victim changed to murdered victim.

Regard of representability: The group of unknown friends represents the family, friends, and the angels of heaven where he finds himself right now.

Symbolism: The symbols in this dream are my desire to bring peace to myself as well as to the family members of my friend. The symbols represent how I felt at the time in which the future of my friend was uncertain.

Absurdity: No absurdity found in the dream.

Affects: I felt extremely happy when I found out that my friend was rested and renewed. Even though I am saddened by his reality, I also know that I will see him in heaven.

Jungian archetype: The mandala is the archetype present in the dream. The mandala is represented by the stripes printed on his polo shirt. When both ends of a stripe meet they form the circle which is a representation of the mandala archetype. Emilio Figueroa has return to his central focus.

Lacanian order: Imaginary. Eighty percent of the signifiers have become signified.

In search of home: I am living in a different planet and I'm trying to return to Earth. A group of friends is with me and they are also trying to return to Earth. The planet in which we find ourselves has a prime minister and I and my friends are taken to see him. The prime minister tells us that there is a ship bound for Earth. He offers us to take us home. Upon arrival of the ship from space, I discover that the ship is part of a fleet of space battleships that are currently engaged in battle with another fleet of space battleships. We are unable to hitch a ride so we walk around the planet. We arrive at an area near the coast. The trees look like mushrooms. I am on the edge of a mountain. I can see a hut and a shed. There is a black ladder at the vertical cliff that leads to the coast, a Ferris wheel, and coastal houses. I stay on the edge of the cliff talking to the alien that looks human but has brown to dark skin while others jump down and head to the Ferris wheel. The others are searching for alternate methods to travel back to Earth. Throughout the whole dream I have a sense of uneasiness. Things appear to be something they are not. The place is eerie.

Condensation: This dream represents my search for a place I can call home. In this dream, my definition of home is defined by a house, a wife, and my own offspring. This dream is the one that I consider the most important of all the dreams in this analysis because it has allowed me to look back at who I used to be and it encourages me to stay away from my previous lonely self.

Work of displacement: The planet where I find myself is eerie, just like my life was eerie in my

times of loneliness. The dream describes the deep sadness that was carried conscientiously and unconsciously throughout my life. In the dream I try to make it home but there are troubles impeding my trek to the place I call home. In a sense, it is a vivid representation of my struggles to find the person with whom I would create the place that I would call home.

Regard of representability: The group of friends in the dream represents the many selves that exist within my personal reality. The Ferris wheel represents the toys my children would play with. The fleet of battleships represents the internal fights that I had while dating women that I knew were not destined to go home with me but that I continued to date so I wouldn't be alone. The prime minister of the country represents the presence of God that was doing his part but ultimately left me to take my own decisions. The group of friends walking next to me is a representation of the many selves that accompanied me in my search for a place called home.

Symbolism: The reason why these elements have surfaced from my unconscious is to bring the past stage of my life into a final understanding that its influence over me is no longer active. In addition, it serves as an opportunity to embrace those difficult times as a valuable learning tool since they are no longer part of my active life.

Absurdity: Even though the dream is full of symbols, the level of absurdity is almost nonexistent.

Affects: I felt sad for the people who were walking next to me in search of the same place I was searching for. In a sense, I felt sad about me. The feelings I experienced during the dream are identical to the feelings that used to follow me at the time I was a single person. I am very happy to have met my wife and today those feelings are no longer an integral part of my own self.

Jungian archetype: The mother is the archetype that is represented by the ocean. The ocean represents the person who is my wife today and how I used to observe her from afar.

Lacanian order: Illusion. Seventy eight of the signifiers have become signified.

Big birds: Large gigantic birds are making funny faces and are acting strange in an area that has a platform. A man from my parent's neighborhood nicknamed "Cuto" is looking at the birds do their weird dances. He seems to be captivated by their dance. The man sets foot over the stage and the birds cage him. The birds fly away and the man remains caged. The purpose of the birds was to lure innocent people into becoming their slaves.

Condensation: This is an entirely spiritual dream. The dream depicts the manner in which sinful acts as well as temptations lure us into getting closer to them. After we take the steps towards it, we become slaves of our own weaknesses.

Work of displacement: The entire dream is the work of displacement. The actions taken by the birds exemplify the manner in which our souls become trapped in a sinful world.

Regard of representability: The birds represent the evil entities that are constantly trying to gain our attention. The cage literally simplifies spiritual slavery.

Symbolism: The symbolism of this dream serves as a warning to understand the approaches that evil entities within the spiritual realm utilize to enslave our reason and harmony with our creator. As a Christian person, I must be aware of the modus operandi that is used by spiritual forces in order to separate me from my personal spiritual reality.

Absurdity: At first the absurdity of this dream made laugh and even tell people about the dream. After I received the interpretation of the dream it became clear that the dream was of an empathic serious nature.

Affects: No important feelings perceived during the dream.

Jungian archetype: The animal is the archetype found in this dream and it is represented by the large birds. From an autoethnographical and autobiographical perspective, the animal refers to

the evil entities that are constantly operating in the spiritual world. From an analogical standpoint, the animal represent a creature that coexist with humans within the structure of the world, but that have a different purpose in the world than what humans have.

Lacanian order: Symbolic. Ninety nine percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Memories Analysis

Becoming a Christian: I became a Christian on December 18, 1991.

Condensation: This is one of the most important days of my life. When I was a sixteen year old high school student I became a born again Christian when I was invited by a group of friends from my high school. From that day on, I have observed the world through my spiritual eyes.

Work of displacement: When I became a Christian my entire life reality changed from being a person who was not structured in any way or form to a person who began to believe that everything in this world was achievable through my connection with God the Father.

Regard of representability: The reality of having a clear understanding of what would happen to my soul at the time of death became clear as I have been promised a dwelling place in heaven.

Symbolism: The symbols found in this memory are a representation of the gratitude and thanks that I exhibit towards the love God has bestowed upon me.

Absurdity: No absurdity found.

Affects: At the time I became a Christian I felt how my spirit was changed, and the changes I felt in my spirit were reflected in my soul.

Jungian archetype: The self is the archetype present in this memory in the form of the cross. The cross represents my remembrance of the sacrifice that God has done for me.

Lacanian order: Real. Eighty five percent of the signifiers have become signified.

My fight against a midget: When I was twelve years old I had a fight with a wrestling midget. The first punch he threw at me hurt me so much that I started to cry. That was the end of the fight.

Condensation: This is one of my favorite stories to tell at gatherings when I am surrounded by family and friends. I had a fight with a wrestling midget and he punched me so hard that I started crying. After that, my late cousin Anibal Rosado came to my rescue and had a few rounds with the midget.

Work of displacement: Early in my life I came to understand that my fights were not going to happen with my fists but with the use of my mind. My championships were to take place in academia, not on the streets of the city of the stones.

Regard of representability: The midget represents the fights that I will never win because it is not meant for me to fight those fights.

Symbolism: The reason why this memory remains vivid in my life is because I have fought many battles that I should not have. At the end of those battles, I always felt like a loser even if I was declared the winner.

Absurdity: After the apparent satiric reality of the memory, a full realm of psychoanalytical realities has been revealed in the form of useless crusades that I have attempted in my life.

Affects: Pain, suffering, and a sense of disappointment.

Jungian archetype: The trickster is the archetype found in this memory in the form of a midget. Within my biographical and autoethnographical reality, the midget symbolizes that part of my social realities that attempt to hinder me from achieving my highest potential in all respective areas of my life.

Lacanian order: Imaginary. Seventy percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Spiritism: I grew up surrounded by family members and friends who followed Afro-Caribbean religions. The ceremonies took place in my house, my grandmother's house, and at places called "centers" where the believers would gather.

Condensation: As a young child beginning my years in elementary school I was engulfed by the religious practices of spiritism and santeria. During those years I was a very innocent child who was terrorized by all the events that represented the spiritist sessions that took place at my house, my grandmother's house, and at spiritual centers.

Work of displacement: I can still observe my grandmother talking to spirits and spirits talking through her since she was a medium unit. I can still hear the words of my father telling me that our neighbor was a witch and how she was able to transform into an owl at nighttime. All of the parts of the memory are still present in my unconscious because they characterize the ignorant ways that I have chosen not to follow in my life.

Regard of representability: The owl represents the transformation from one being into another being. The spirits represent the powers of darkness that make presence in our physical world.

Symbolism: The reason why the symbols of this memory have surfaced is because they continue to be alive in my unconscious reality. The symbolization of the memory continues to alert me that I must clear away from the ignorance that is represented by darkness and stupidity.

Absurdity: No absurdity found in the memory.

Affects: The feeling of terror without having the choice to reject it is still present today in my personal reality. From a conscious reality, I attempt to bring light to others who are around me in order to protect them from practices that I do not consider beneficial to their spiritual state of being.

Jungian archetype: The general archetype found in this memory is the shadow in the form of my parent's ignorance. Ignorance can be a powerful ally of destruction of the self and others. I attempt to move myself and others from the shadows of ignorance into the light of day.

Lacanian order: Imaginary. Fifteen percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Sixth grade: As a student and teacher, sixth grade is my favorite school grade of all time. I remember waking up early every morning in order to find my friends and route to school. We would walk together to school every morning and we would tell fantastic stories to each other about ghosts, sex, and the girls we liked. While at school, I always played baseball with the rest of the sixth graders and we always had a good time. While inside the classrooms, I enjoyed academics as much I enjoyed cheetos and chocolate chip cookies. The beauty of innocence is what made everything so perfect during this early grade.

Condensation: My days as a sixth grade student represent the happiest year of my entire academic life. In Puerto Rico sixth grade is still considered the last grade of elementary school. During that year, I had the opportunity to enjoy the final year of a journey that I started with a group of friends that I still consider my friends on this present day. We always get together when I travel to Puerto Rico and reminisce about the things we did during our last year of elementary school.

Work of displacement: I remember sixth grade as the time in which my life was perfect and nothing could have changed that feeling.

Regard of representability: No regard of representability found.

Symbolism: From an unconscious perspective, I became a sixth grade science teacher because I wanted to relive the memory of happiness and perfection that was experienced at the time I was a

student. In addition, I wanted to surround myself with the same type of students that share the innocence and incorruptibility of my memory.

Absurdity: No absurdity found.

Affects: The feeling of love and innocence I had as a student is still exemplified by that I exhibit as a teacher.

Jungian archetype: No Jungian archetype found.

Lacanian order: Real. Eighty three percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Squidtopus: On one afternoon during a late spring day, my friend Cesar Medina and I nicknamed Luis De La Rosa (my brother in law) the squidtopus. We defined the squidtopus as the aquatic beast that roams the Caribbean Sea and has squid and octopus characteristics concurrently. As we called him the squidtopus, we would move our hands as if they were tentacles. My brother in law was furious at us.

Condensation: The level of condensation in this memory is minimal. The memory takes place at my sister's house and my friend Cesar Medina and I begin calling my brother in law the squidtopus. Since my brother in law became enraged, we continued bothering him for a while.

Work of displacement: As I self reflect on this memory, I can perceive that the duality of an aquatic beast embodies the union of opposites that can seldomly blend in perfect harmony.

Regard of representability: The squidtopus is a representation of the marriage in which my sister is involved. Even though the marriage of my sister with my brother in law does not make much sense to any member of my family, the decision has been made and ultimately my sister is the one who has to deal with her choices. In time we have come to terms with her choices and she has all of our support.

Symbolism: The symbolism involved in this memory transcends to the discordant relationship that exists between the unified notions of her marriage.

Absurdity: No absurdity found in this memory.

Affects: As my friend Cesar Medina and I relentlessly made fun of my brother in law, I just did not want to stop the satiric onslaught. The feelings were not accompanied by any type of goodwill whatsoever as we were being malevolent.

Jungian archetype: The hermaphrodite is the archetype found in this memory in the form of the squidtopus. The union of opposites is represented by the union of a squid and an octopus (my sister Nancy and my brother in law).

Lacanian order: Imaginary. Seventy two percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Reflections Analysis

Puerto Rico: The juxtaposing of our cultural richness existing together with our social problems. Puerto Rico is the most beautiful island in the world, but sadly the Puerto Rican people do not take advantage of all the benefits (intellectual, monetary, academic etc.) that we have at our disposal. I would like to see my home island as a place that values culture and education over every other aspect that is present within our social order.

Condensation: The purpose of this reflection takes the form of a personal desire to see my home country develop into a productive order that serves the needs of its people in the most intelligent and efficient manner.

Work of displacement: The way in which my home country operates does not make any sense to me. The government agencies operate in such a poor manner that often I wonder how is it possible that after so many years the system continues to operate under such pitiable standards. A

manner in which I define the people who work as state governmental employees is indolent and incompetent. Incompetence is a widely accepted practice in the island of Puerto Rico and the society is often blinded to see that the changes that are needed in the island can only take place if they are born inside the hearts and souls of the people. The citizens of Puerto Rico must have a clear understanding that there is no panacea for our problems and the only vaccination for our social viruses that could be developed lies in the hands and minds of our own children.

Regard of representability: Our social problems are a representation of our failed attempts to maintain the family traditions that are becoming rarer every day. Even though the size of my island has a length of one hundred miles and a width of thirty five miles, our cultural richness can easily match the one of larger size countries.

Symbolism: The reason why this reflection has surfaced from my unconscious is because of the love I have for my home country and my personal desire to elevate the family living standards of my people to those in other countries from the globe.

Absurdity: No absurdity found.

Affects: Often I have feelings of love and hate in regards to my country. On one side, I love the nature, the oceans that surround us, and the green mountains that give us fresh air. On the other side, I dislike the people who commit acts that harm the progressive collectivity of the Puerto Rican people as a whole.

Jungian archetype: The shadow is the archetype present in this reflection. The shadow represents the evil that Puerto Ricans are capable of doing to their own selves. The actions taken by one of us whether they are good or bad have direct and indirect influences on all of us Puerto Ricans.

Lacanian order: Illusion. Eighty three percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Allegory of the cave: A deeper understanding of the allegory of the cave as it described by the philosopher Plato based on my personal meaning of the idea.

Condensation: From a philosophical standpoint, the allegory of the cave depicts the contemporary state in which I view the collective mentality that guides the functioning processes of our modern Puerto Rican society.

Work of displacement: I believe that the collective entity known as the Puerto Rican society is transitioning to a state of mind that is losing most of its valuable cultural traits. As a culture, I believe that we must bring back the social beliefs that constitute us a sovereign race. The new generations of Puerto Ricans are rapidly losing the desire to progress and allow our society to contribute new ways of tangible meaning for the sake of universal well being.

Regard of representability: The man inside the allegory of the cave represents the Puerto Rican people and the collective consciousness of our race. The cavern is a representation of the void of ignorance that we (Puerto Ricans) believe is the only plausible approach to problem solving and decision making since it has been wrongfully approved by our poor choices over time. The curtain represents the hegemonic forces that sit in positions of power that continually inhibit the vision of the people to see truth in its true form.

Symbolism: The symbolism of this reflection takes the form of my innate desire that wishes to see my home country step outside the darkness that permeates the weird shapes and forms of the mental cavern in which we find ourselves and to move into the light of day represented by a progressive consciousness.

Absurdity: No absurdity found in the reflection.

Affects: The feelings I have about this reflection are hope and wishful thinking. I believe that we (Puerto Ricans) can get out of the mental cave that enslave us as we come outside and see the true form of our idealist true self.

Jungian archetype: The archetype found in this reflection is the shadow, and it takes the shape of the darkness of the cave itself. From a socio-cultural perspective, the shadow represents the amoral and destructive decision making practices that our society constructs on a daily basis and that are considered acceptable.

Lacanian order: Symbolic. Sixty eight percent of the signifiers have become signified.

The U.S. Army: A reflection about my days as a soldier and how my military experience has assisted me in achieving new experiences in the civilian world.

Condensation: Joining the U.S. Army is one of the most important decisions I have ever taken. The U.S. Army provided me with the necessary skills to make determinations in situations that require fast thinking under an array of difficult choices. Because of the training I received in the U.S. military, I have been able to complete most of the endeavors I have started and continue to pursue in my life.

Work of displacement: Life in the military can be very rewarding but it is also very difficult. Within the process of undergoing difficult times, the ability to continue to perform until the desired results are obtained was born in me. In addition, my days as a soldier in the U.S. Army allowed me to gain a different sense of brotherly trust that I did not have before joining the military organization in regards to self and others. In the military I learned to efficiently work in groups and to appreciate those who were serving under my hand.

Regard of representability: No regard for representability found.

Symbolism: This is one of the most vivid reflections of this analysis. In a sense, the military experiences I have lived have perfectly amalgamated with my own self and are part of my conscious reality. From an unconscious reality, my experience as a soldier has allowed me to make appropriate life altering decisions even when consciously I was not attempting to follow a military minded approach.

Absurdity: No absurdity found in the present reflection.

Affects: One of the most important feelings I carry with me surrounds the countless times in which I enjoyed being around my friends having a good time while performing military drills inside a jungle, a desert, or a frozen tundra. In the military, most of friends were single and even though at that time we did not see it that way; all we had was ourselves to care for each other. Those feelings of love I will always carry with me.

Jungian archetype: For this important reflection I will use a Jungian archetype that even though is not mentioned in the literature review as an actual archetype, I consider it to be implied. The archetype I found in this reflection is the hero, and it is represented by every person who has served in the United States military under honorable conditions.

Lacanian order: Real. Ninety three percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Laziness: I have come to realize that our current social order is indeed embracing laziness as an acceptable way of life. I believe that every human being that is capable of performing a task of labor should do it according to its own potentiality.

Condensation: The present memory is catharsis in response to the indolent mentality that is currently operating within all the levels of our contemporary social strata. I personally believe that embracing this indolent behavior is a constituent of a possible scenario in which the

governmental and historic-social structures that are in place today can formally cease from existing.

Work of displacement: I view every task of work that must be performed as an idea that must be developed to its fullest potential. Accepting the responsibility of the completion of that work is in my view a binding document that is not broken easily.

Regard of representability: The completion of the dynamic entity that I call work has to be viewed as an entire system that represents an organized structure that is used as a guide for the appropriateness related to that completion. The representation of what work constitutes must be defined by an understanding of what is completed work, the application of the potential that every person has while completing the work, the views on allowing sufficient time to complete the work, the performance of work while being a member of a group, an understanding of the reasons that inhibit the completion of the work, the moral principles that must be applied to the realization of the work, and the criteria for exonerating a person from completing the work that was entrusted to him/her.

Symbolism: The reason why this reflection has surfaced from my unconscious is because I have personally been affected by the incompleteness of the work that was entrusted to others and by people whom I consider to be incomplete in many areas of their lives. When incomplete people are entrusted with completing a new task of labor, even if the work is completed, their individuality does not allow them to perform at the levels in which our modern society requires us to perform. Within our social order, incompleteness creates less valuable resources for the collective well being of all of its members.

Absurdity: A small percentage of absurdity is found in this memory due to two different variables. The first variable takes the form in which the statement of laziness has not been

properly explained, and second, because the theory has not been scrutinized or applied to a specific academic field or situation.

Affects: Even though affects are not of utmost importance in this reflection, it should be noted that when in contact with situations in which incomplete work or incomplete people are in my presence, the feelings of revulsion and sadness are often felt.

Jungian archetype: No archetype found.

Lacanian order: Illusion. Three percent of the signifiers have become signified.

Life after death: Regardless of religion, personal beliefs, or cultural realities, I think that most people on this Earth would like to spend the afterlife in a comfortable place of rest; or at least doing something they would consider to be of value. I believe that there is an afterlife in the Christian heaven that the bible talks about and I am hopeful to make it to that place after my final breath is given to the four winds of the Earth. In addition, I have the most sincere hope that I will not be an automaton in heaven and that I will have choices on some of the aspects of daily existence that I will experience in the presence of God.

Condensation: The final reflection of the DMR analysis takes form as I wonder what will happen with my soul after I die. It is a reflection that is shaped by my imaginative forces and my desire to arrive at a place that I will enjoy myself as much as I am enjoying my days on Earth.

Work of displacement: The true meaning found in this reflection exists because I love my life as a student, father, husband, and friend, and somehow I just don't want to go to heaven yet. Even though I am only thirty five years of age, I am about to enter a new stage of my life while being the recipient of a Ph.D. in Education. I would like to complete the work that is required of me on this planet before I enter the afterlife.

Regard of representability: No regard of representability found.

Symbolism: The entirety of this reflection is a symbol. The reason why this reflection has surfaced from my unconscious is because I am leaving an old life behind to enter a new type of life. I am watching my children grow in an exponential leap, I am getting to better understand the complexities and simplicities of my wife, I am spending more time in religious activities, I am about to take a new position with the U.S. Department of Justice, and I am about to receive my doctorate.

Absurdity: Since this reflection is based on future events to come, I would say that either it has no absurdity whatsoever, or it is comprised of absurdity in its entirety. At this early stage of my life, I am unable to determine the levels of absurdity found in this reflection.

Affects: There are two feelings attached to one another in this reflection and they are uncertainty and happiness. The meaning of this union signifies that from this moment on I will go travel through life facing every new challenge with sharp physical and spiritual senses, an open mind, and a smile on my face.

Jungian archetype: There are two archetypes found in this reflection and they are the self and the mana. The self is represented by the constituents that make my life as a whole and the cross that represents my faith. The mana is represented by the harvest of new knowledge that is being done in this dissertation and the knowledge that will be created after I complete my doctoral studies.

Lacanian order: Imaginary. Zero percent of the signifiers have become signified.

The Shadow of Joaquin: A Poem of the Unconscious

See Table 1 for a List of Primary Characters, Table 2 for a List of Secondary Characters, and Table 3 for a List of Places and Organizations.

Song I: Dreaming

It is a sad evening. As the dimmed sun is overpowered by the arrival of the night, the entire human consciousness of the world is covered by a moribund smell. The yellow color in the far distance gives an environment of farewell, while the orange twilight reflects the unreal battle of the day attempting to remain over the night. A few gray clouds move with steadfast speed through the far away sky that is fading away due to the absence of its native color. The horizon appears to be a canvas being painted by a poet in one of the deepest and most critical stages of his life, a stage in which he is saddened after his loved one has abandoned him for another man. The wind is moving slowly, but continuously, telling everybody upon the face of the Earth that he is part of this event and under no circumstances he should be excluded from it. The evening has almost disappeared, and the dark night is about to take control over what is rightfully hers. The night is about to tell the dwellers of the Earth that she is an entity of power, a force to be reckoned with, and an entity of dominion. This is one of those evenings that make you think if there is something more than mere existence, if there is a spirit that can give us the power to free ourselves from the inner slave that with his moaning reminds us of our daily suffering, or if reality is a fable only found in the depths of the unconscious. And it is in this capricious night that our main character appears...

Now old and full of wrinkles, where life no longer produces pleasure, and happiness has marched away from his face. His sight is saddened by the lack of clarity, and his eyes are teary

since they are a reflection of his soul and spirit. These are the days we swore during our youth we would never see, but sadly they slowly crept over our bodies until they took control of our time and space. These are the days in which the breath of life battles to remain attached to the body, but indeed a difficult task to achieve after the final call has been made by forces superior to human flesh and bone.

His thoughts are whirlpool of ideas and remembrance, a long forgotten reminisce about his long lived past. It is a sad memory. At this moment his mind is a sea of questions, a raging sea that blasts the foundations of sanity and transforms it into putrid puss. One question bounces inside of him like a rubber ball charged with protons; a question that feels like a crown of thorns that pierces his guts and torments him without rest.

“Why?” asks Joaquin.

And with all the sadness present in the air, the night finally arrives. During this night, the moon and the stars in the heaven cannot be observed because they have been forbidden to shine over the old man. The sky is cloudy, and it will remain this way because it has been decided that no rain shall fall upon the old man’s head. A slow breeze caresses the Indian valley while the patient mountain dew begins to fall down and settle over all living organisms alike. An elegant fragrance is secreted by the most delicious of all nocturnal flowers; the Lady of the Night. The faint and subtle scent of the flower can be perceived in the moist air as it enters Joaquin’s nostrils.

The old man cannot restrain or inhibit his sadness. Tears begin falling from his small brown eyes as if the Tigris and the Euphrates are being reborn and its original status of spring has been replaced by the roar of wild white waters. Immediately, a dry moaning accompanies the

tears that wet his chest and his soul. The same question continues to rattle his melancholic universe.

“Why?”

“ Why?”

“Why?”

Darkness becomes intense, and intense becomes the old man’s anguish and loneliness. Now his knees are tired, and his fragile back is being tormented by an acute and merciless pain. As the old man rests over a granite boulder, he pulls out a handkerchief and wipes out his face in an attempt to dry his teary eyes. Even though the granite stone is coarse and spiky, the old man’s body feels it as if it is made out of a foam-like material; spongy and cushiony. The rocky surface feels soft on his skin, so soft that he can feel the rock adjusting its shape to whatever contours his body needs. While Joaquin’s body begins to relax his spirit becomes comfortable as it begins separating from his natural body. The pain on his back is lessening, and his knees can perceive that they had been anointed by the same oil that was used on the feet of Jesus Christ before he was crucified on Mount Calvary. Now his sobbing has been completely extinguished, and the fluvial fury that moments ago flowed rampant through his face has now abandoned its quest for destruction and has returned to its causeway of origin and tranquility. Even though a little bit slower, his heart starts pumping blood at a normal and more silent rhythm. His metabolism is stable, and all of his bodily functions have returned to a perfect homeostasis.

“I am going to take a nap on this boulder.” “It feels so comfortable that I could stay here for the rest of the night or maybe for the rest of my life if there is any life left in me.” “It is time to dream again,” says Joaquin for a last time in his physical life.

It is at this moment when the old man begins to reminisce about his better days, days where life was more beautiful and more precious, days in which the elder spoke like Jibaro and not like puppets of the modern society, days in which life was pure and less busy, days in which the children played inside the forests of enchantment and ate mangos as a noon snack, days in which the only known pain was physical, days in which our souls were innocent and naïve and free of desiring wrong doing or sin, days in which a marble or baseball game was more delicious than sex or any other pleasure that human flesh can offer, days in which true happiness was lived every day and no one knew that it was being lived, days in which tomorrow did not exist since today was the absolute influence in the decision making process, days in which growing old was a fairy tale stained on the faces of great grandparents, days in which bones ached every month during a sudden growth sprout, days in which mom and dad were always falling in love again as the whole family eat supper together, days in which dirt, mud, and water were considered the most technologically advanced toys and days were dreaming was considered an omen of events to come without any regards if it was for good or bad.

“Joaquin, I bet you can’t see me!” can be heard at the far distance.

Joaquin starts looking around to see if he can find out where this delicious voice is coming from.

“Joaquin, I can see you, but you can’t see me!” says the same voice again.

“Who could be calling me, who can it be?” says Joaquin.

“Joaquin, look behind you, maybe you can see me now!” says the distant voice.

Immediately, Joaquin turns around and sees a tree sitting in the middle of a green field covered in spring flowers. Joaquin begins walking towards the voice that calls his name, the

voice that knows who he is but that he does not recognize yet. On his way to the tree, yellow butterflies move sporadically fluttering their wings as they move from the purple flowers to the red flowers and from the orange flowers to the blue flowers. The sun is shining down on the flower covered field and it gives the impression of a dry rain bathing everything under the blue skies. As Joaquin nears the tree, he can see a yellow bench hanging under a robust horizontal branch of the centennial monument.

A set of three strand maguey ropes hold each side of the yellow bench and allow it to swing freely. The tropical rain has taken a toll on the yellow paint of the bench as it is now opaque and cracked. A few small patches of wood fungus can be seen on the edges of the yellow bench, but the red mahogany wood has not been rotten by it. The girl who has been calling Joaquin is sitting on the motionless yellow bench. Her hair is fine as the silk knitted by the silkworm in his eternal task to remain an entity of constant production. The black long hair reaches all the way down to the small of her lower back and it gives her face a special glow that radiates like a light wave sent from heaven by the celestial eyes of an angel. A perfectly symmetrical part divides her hair, and it is similar to the opened Red Sea. Her skin has a natural tan, similar to copper, and is naturally smooth and soft. Her brown eyes are big and clear, and they are able to pierce into the soul of Joaquin. Those eyes can create the illusion that they are fixated on an object, and at the same time they seem to be gone in a swift nirvana. Her smile is fresh like a spring morning, and her lips add a delicate touch to her face. The beautiful princess is wearing a pink strapped long dress with blue and yellow flowers along the hem.

“As I am looking at her, I feel like the yellow butterflies from the green field behind me are fluttering inside my stomach.” “She is the most beautiful eleven year old girl I have ever

seen, her name is Maria Elena, and I'm sure I have seen her in school before," softly whispers Joaquin.

Joaquin is now standing approximately ten feet away from her and he is not able to move his fixated small brown eyes away from her. His knees are now shaking uncontrollably, and even though he tries to regain control over them, he is slowly losing the fight. He is now motionless and petrified; chained to the far distance and his fear. Suddenly, Maria Elena smiles at him and at this moment the world couldn't be more perfect for Joaquin. At the same time, a strong and forceful wind flows under the branches of the centenary tree moving her black silky hair away from her face. Maria Elena raises her left hand and waves at Joaquin prompting him to go to her. The butterflies inside his stomach are fluttering faster than before, and it seems like they are enjoying it. Out of the blue, the weight is lifted off Joaquin's petrified legs as he is floating in thin air. Joaquin can feel inside of him a strong magnetic field that radiates between him and Maria Elena. He is now levitating towards the most beautiful angel he has ever seen in his whole life and existence in this world.

The distance between them was ten feet a few seconds ago and now is only five feet. A spirit of happiness and peace overcomes Joaquin's spirit and completely dissipates his nervousness. The butterflies are no longer fluttering in his stomach, and his heartbeat no longer dances at the rhythm of the verbenas of St. James Apostle that are celebrated in the capital city of the Caribbean Island.

Four feet; the magnetic forces between them grow stronger. The movement towards her continues.

Three feet; the brave warrior that lives inside of him is awakening.

Two feet; his soul can feel her presence, unique and eternal. The magnetic forces are powerful, almost visible.

One foot, the magnetic field has now vanished. Joaquin's feet are now touching the fertile soil that provides everlasting nutrients to the old tree of wisdom.

"Hello Joaquin, how are you?" asks Maria Elena with the most beautiful voice the eleven year old kid has heard throughout his mortal existence.

As Joaquin thinks about what he was going to say or how he is going to answer the question, an alternate universe becomes visible in his eyes; an universe that extends farther than the dream of how would the Garden of Eden would look in our modern time if only Adam and Eve had not eaten from the forbidden tree. If they had not been so selfish and ignorant in their greed to become beings similar to the utmost Creator. If stupidity had not taken control of their reason, perhaps men could be feeding wild lions in the savanna, scratching silverback gorillas behind the ear, or sitting naked in the middle of ten thousand king cobras without any fear.

A third of a second has passed since Maria Elena asked Joaquin the question. The remaining two thirds of the second are as intense as a quadratic equation. Joaquin starts thinking of subatomic particles, Romeo and Juliet, the Pope, nuclear reactors, earthquakes, holy water, volcanic eruptions, battleships, typhoons, tsunamis, a battle tank, chemical reactions, and category five hurricanes. His thoughts are so real that he can see them all mixing, forming, vanishing, and functioning as the parts of a system.

"A second has passed and I'm still thinking of pregnant birds and crazy stuff, I have to make an effort and open my mouth before she begins to wonder if something has gone wrong with me." "Two seconds waiting for an answer is too much time to wait." "Be brave Joaquin, be brave," thinks Joaquin nervously.

Finally he gives Maria Elena the most thoughtful answer he can think of, “I’m fine.”

A faint ringing sound similar to the ringing of an old telephone spoils the short introduction with Maria Elena.

“Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing.”

“Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing.”

At the same time, Joaquin’s feet start to feel light again. The ringing sound is now of medium strength and it continues to augment exponentially.

“Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing.”

“Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing.”

Joaquin is now levitating in front of Maria Elena, and his body is floating away from her. Joaquin can feel the same magnetic force that a few minutes ago attracted him to the yellow bench now repulsing him away from the beautiful girl with long black hair. The loud and distorted noise continues.

“Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing.”

While Maria Elena waves Joaquin good bye, the magnetic field bursts into an explosion of energy and light and a blue and green energy wave is exerted by Maria Elena’s body that pushes Joaquin away from her. Joaquin is now flying away from the ancient tree at almost the speed of sound. The images of Maria Elena, the yellow bench, and the ancient tree are becoming blurry and amorphous.

“Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing.”

“Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing,” sounds the double bell and hammer alarm clock.

“Get up Joaquin!” “It’s time to get up Joaquin!” “Rise and shine my dear boy!” “Open those little eyes, you don’t want to miss the school bus or the delicious scramble eggs with

sausage that the school cafeteria will be serving this morning,” says a new voice, the voice of his mother.

The captivating image of Maria Elena is still present in his memory, but Joaquin can no longer see her. He feels as if he was trapped between two different dimensions, two alternate universes in which one has no control over the other. Finally, Joaquin is able to open his young eyes and discovers that Maria Elena was never near him, that it all had been a dream, a dream so beautiful that he wishes it had lasted forever, or at least an extra five minutes.

The eleven year old is sitting on his twin size bed fending off his pillow and bed sheets. He can still see the pearly white smile of Maria Elena through his dreamy eyes as he silences the piercing noise of his alarm clock.

“Let’s go my dear boy, or do I have to tickle you?” asks Yolanda.

“I don’t need any tickles mom,” replies a sleepy Joaquin.

“Just checking,” replies Yolanda.

A ray of light squeezes through the white aluminum windows of his room. The incoming light reflects a soft touch of innocence over Joaquin’s light bronze skin. As the solar presence increases in the room, so does the details of the small brown eyes that appear to be close and open at the same time, the short black hair that is so wavy that produces the illusion of always being in movement, the full lips, the stumpy nose, the beautiful smile, the pointy eyebrows that look like a devil with horns, the medium size ears, and the medium size belly that holds the remnants of the love of eating cheese and chocolate chip cookies. Since Joaquin loves eating chocolate chip cookies with massive amounts of melted cheese over them before he goes to sleep every night, he has been able to maintain a medium size belly for most of his short days in the City of the Stones.

After Joaquin gets out of bed he walks to the only bathroom the Cantos family has in the house. Upon arrival, he turns the antique brass knob clockwise and it does not move in any direction. It is at this moment that he finds out that his older brother, Agustin, has already taken control of the restroom. Joaquin's bladder is about to blow up and has reached the size of a watermelon. Since he religiously accompanies a couple of chocolate chip cookies with a full glass of milk before he goes to bed every night, his bladder is unable to hold any more liquid by the time he wakes up.

"Agustin, hurry up, I need to pee!" whispers Joaquin in front of the bathroom door.

After waiting for three minutes, his bladder feels as full as a fish tank.

"Mom, tell Agustin that I need to use the bathroom, I have been waiting out here for fifteen minutes and I can't take it anymore!" shouts Joaquin in desperation.

"Shut up you cry baby, I'm almost done!" replies Agustin as he opens the bathroom door and walks toward his room. As Joaquin rushes for the commode, he feels as if the urine is about to come out of his ears; it feels like he is going to implode. The hot/yellowish liquid begins moving thorough his urethra, and at this moment he becomes the happiest eleven year old boy in the entire world. The urine smells like a mixture of ammonia, cod liver oil, and rancid coconut. While he urinates, sun rays filter through the skylight creating strange figures of Christian and Muslim soldiers fighting each other for a piece of the holy land. Now his bladder is almost empty, and he feels like the worst has come to pass.

After flushing the toilette Joaquin side steps to the wash basin, opens the cold water faucet, and splashes cool morning water on his juvenile face. The fresh water invigorates his whole body and rejuvenates his cheerful spirit. Without using any of his senses, he mechanically extends his left arm and grabs the olive green towel that hangs next to the entrance door and

dries his face with it. After Joaquin returns the plush cotton towel to the hanger, he performs the last morning ritual involving the brushing of the teeth. Even though the Cantos family changes their toothbrushes every six months (as recommended by the City of the Stones dentist), there is one exception to this rule. Joaquin has not changed his toothbrush since he was nine years old and continues to use it on a daily basis. For the last two years Yolanda has continually tried to get him a new one, but Joaquin refuses to give the good old brush up. The toothbrush's bristles are no longer stiff and have become bent and faded. Between the bristles, a thin layer of white and green slime has allowed a colony of bacteria to proliferate generously. The colony of bacteria (*Streptococcus Salivarius*) has developed a Utopian style society, with a small hint of democracy. The Mayor of the colony senses that their lives are doomed to peril in an unknown event that will occur years from now and has met with the cabinet members to discuss what measures they are to take in case a real emergency occurs. A mock exercise was conducted and the complete colony was placed under a yellow alert (while red alert would be really bad) in preparation for future catastrophic events.

Joaquin is standing in the middle of the living room and is ready to head out to school. His black knapsack fits snugly on his back and his school uniform is clean and smells like gardenia and lavender.

"Don't forget to give me a kiss and a hug before you go," says Yolanda from the kitchen.

"Mom, you know I need to go, Pachanga, the bus driver does not wait for anybody, and dad has already gone to work and he won't be able to take me to school if I miss it," replies Joaquin.

As Yolanda walks towards Joaquin her hazel eyes express the maternal love she feels for her youngest son. With her knees bent in front of her son, she hugs and kisses her little boy and tells him: “Be a good boy in school today, and don’t forget to eat your vegetables at lunch time.”

“Yes mom I won’t forget.” “Bless me mom,” requests Joaquin.

“God bless you my son,” replies Yolanda.

Yolanda’s smile give her an angelical aura that defines her as the most beautiful being that Joaquin would know in his whole entire life. Yolanda is a woman of medium stature and perfect smile. She has scary eyes, straight hair, fair skin, and a perfect body similar to the one a supermodel has. Even though she has given birth to two children, she has no cellulite, varicose veins, or stretch marks on any part her sexy and seductive body. At age thirty eight it is impossible to guess that she is older than twenty eight since she looks a whole decade younger. Even more, on several occasions she has been requested to present her identification card at supermarkets in order to purchase alcoholic beverages for her husband Ramon Cantos. Yolanda is a woman that could inspire any crusader to leave the quest for the holy city, a woman that could stop time if only time would look directly at her scary eyes and succumb.

With an invigorated aura and a spirit full of joy walks Joaquin towards the school bus stop. His happiness has now been replenished by the love and tenderness his mother gave him through thousands of butterfly kisses and teddy bear hugs. As Joaquin marches down the mold covered side walk, he can see cars of all shapes and colors covered with the tears of Mother Earth that fell during the night as a holocaust for the salvation of her children. The morning rush begins, car drivers hustle to get to work on time, and children prepare themselves for another day of discovery at school. Birds are singing the morning song, prophesying over the land that a new

set of worries has arrived in the minds of the Caribbean Islanders. A hummingbird hovers over a field of colorful flowers as it searches for much needed nectar and divine sweetness. Over the robust mango trees, a group of martins flutter their wings with uneasiness, serving as a premonition of the torrential rains that are about to flood the small creek found at the entrance of the neighborhood.

Joaquin's favorite part of the day is the morning, especially when they are cloudy, hazy, and breezy, and the roaring thunder is lord of the Earth, the oceans, and the heavens. In this morning the sky is as dark as it can be, and the lightning bolts over the horizon create the illusion that Christmas has started in the spring time. Soon, the Caribbean Island will be drenched in the water that will give life to the seeds that patiently wait on the ground for the right moment to sprout. Joaquin can smell the water that is already present in the air, a smell that is combined with pollen, Earth, essence of flowers, grass, and dreams.

"Joaquin, wait for me!" "Stop right there, or I will have to punch you or something like that!" says a voice that is rapidly catching up to Joaquin.

"If you punch me I'll have to tickle you until you pee on your pants," replies Joaquin as he remembers that his friend can be tickled just by mentioning the word tickle.

"Okay man, I'm just kidding, you know I'll never punch you, you are my friend," replies Eduardo Rodriguez as he extends his right arm over Joaquin's shoulder and give him a pal's embrace.

Eduardo Rodriguez is an eleven year old guy that loves fried chicken and fried potatoes. He is chubby, red haired, and has so many freckles in his face that one day his older sister started counting them and after a period of two and a half days the total came up to two million, one hundred eighty seven thousand, nine hundred eighty seven; give or take. The interesting part

about the counting frenzy is that new freckles continually appeared on his face, so it was assumed that the exact number of freckles was impossible to be obtained and the subject was never brought up again. Eduardo loves playing the guitar and believes that one day he will make it big with his harmonious instrument, and maybe he'll even play a few chords with the world's number one guitar man; Tony Joe Superstar. Eleven years ago when Alberto was about to see the light of day for the first time, his right foot became entangled with his mother's vagina and one of the ligaments near the toe was torn beyond repair. The doctors told his mother that he was going to have a slight limp for the rest of his life, but ultimately his mobility was to plateau at a level of at least ninety percent.

“What girls from the sixth grade do you like Joaquin?” asks Eduardo Rodriguez.

“I think that some of them are pretty, but I'm too shy to talk to them,” says Joaquin.

“I like Carla, Johanna, Maria Elena, Maribel, Giselle, Juana, and a bunch of other ones that I have never spoken to because they are in fifth grade and they are just too little for me.”

“They are nothing but little girls,” says Eduardo as he answers his own question.

As the pair of sixth graders walk to the bus stop, Joaquin remembers the strange dream he had about Maria Elena, the girl that he likes from his classroom but has never spoken to. He can still remember the beautiful black hair waving over the flower covered field, he can smell the delicate aroma of innocence and beauty that surrounds her slender body, and he can hear the delicious voice of the angel sent from heaven to define the true essence of perfection. Sadly, all of the beauty was interrupted by the cacophonous sound of the alarm clock his mother bought him at the beginning of the school year.

“So, which one do you like Joaquin?” asks Eduardo for a second time.

This time Joaquin was caught off guard and he looked as spooked as if he had seen a crying ghost, a talking frog with arthritis on his back, or a goat with red eyes and long pointy horns smoking a cigar.

“I don’t know Eduardo, I don’t like any of those girls,” replies Joaquin with a set of eyes that overtly express that he is not telling the truth.

“You are lying Joaquin, I can see it in your face; I can read minds!” “I promise I won’t tell anybody, or maybe I’ll tell Bartolo, but nobody else,” says Eduardo.

“Ok, ok, ok, I’ll tell, but you have to promise not to tell anybody,” says Joaquin with emphatic authority.

“Scouts honor,” replies Eduardo.

“I think that Maria Elena is pretty, and she dresses very nicely too.” “I think that I would like to dance with her at the school party we are having on the last day of school.” “What do you think?” says Joaquin with mixed feelings of embarrassment and relief.

“You should ask her to dance with you Joaquin, I’m sure that she will say yes.” “I know Maria Elena hangs out with Maribel, so maybe I can dance with Maribel since she is very pretty too,” says Eduardo.

“Ok, but if we do this with the girls Bartolo is going to have to find a dance partner from our homeroom; we just can’t leave him alone at the party,” says Joaquin as he remembers that his group of friends has three members, not two.

“That should not be a problem, there are a lot of pretty girls in school, and I’m sure Bartolo will like the idea as well,” replies Eduardo.

A small hill now separates the four and a half size snicker shoes Joaquin is wearing from the bus stop. A soft eastern breeze is now flowing constantly as the rain is getting ready to be

released from the gray nimbus clouds. Up at the bus stop, a group of elementary school students are waiting for the daily ride to school. One of those students is Bartolo de Jesus, professional boxer, and cow milking executive. The truth about this sixth grader is that he has never been inside a boxing ring or has had professional boxing training. He claims that as soon as he enters a boxing club he will obtain all the belts in the world starting at the bantamweights and ending at the heavyweights (no interest in belts below bantamweight). He plans to become the greatest boxing champion the Caribbean Island has ever produced. On the other hand, the title of cow milking executive is a well earned one. Every morning before school, Bartolo milks five cows and nine goats that belong to his grandmother, the person who raised him after his parents were swept away by a surprise water current at a nearby river. After school is over, Bartolo feeds the goats and the cattle with the green pasture he cuts from the side of the road that leads to the entrance of the City of the Stones.

“Eduardo, look who’s waiting at bus stop, its Bartolo,” says Joaquin.

“That rascal always makes it to the bus stop before us, and that’s taking into consideration that he has to milk the cows before he gets dressed for school.” “Let’s go say hi to him,” says Eduardo as he walks towards Bartolo.

“Hey Bartolo, how are you? ask Joaquin and Eduardo at unison.

“I am fine, and I will be better after I take all your marbles in school today,” replies Bartolo.

“Dream on Bartolo, you know that I’m the marble champion, the top champion, and the yoyo trickster champion,” replies Joaquin.

“That might be true, but soon I will be the bantamweight champion of the world,” says Bartolo.

“That is so funny.” “For you to be the bantamweight champion of the world you have to be at least four hundred pounds heavier than what you are right now,” says Joaquin in full satiric mode.

“Oh, yeah, I’ll show you a real champion, I bet you I can kick the dead woman sitting on the bench and she won’t do anything to me,” says Eduardo.

“Come on Eduardo, you shouldn’t mess with the dead, I have heard rumors that if you do that they go to your bedroom in the middle of the night, pull your legs to wake you up, make you eat a green banana, and then they take your favorite toy or item from you and never return it,” says Joaquin with emphatic seriousness.

“My grandmother told me that this woman died the day after the bus stop was built forty three years ago, that no one knows the exact reason of her death, and that in no way should anybody touch her body other than the famous clothing designer from the capital city that changes her into a new dress every fourth day during the month of March,” explains Bartolo.

“I don’t believe that guys, Samantha, the dead woman has been sitting in that corner since way before we started the kindergarten, and you know that is a very long time.” “Just look at her, she is dead, and the dead can’t do anything against the living,” says Eduardo with the bluntness of a drunken politician.

“Well, you do have a point there, if you want to be the champion of something, then maybe you have to kick the dead woman and become a champion like us,” rationalizes Joaquin.

Without any hesitation, Eduardo grabs the shoulders of the dead woman and shakes the inert body back and forth until dry dust comes out of the woman’s hair. Joaquin and Bartolo gaze at their crazy friend while he pulls the dried hair, pinches the cheeks, and squeezes the nose of the dead woman. Apart from Joaquin and Bartolo, no one else in the bus stop seem to care about

what Eduardo is doing to the dead body, after all, the body has been in the same corner for as long as they can remember. The only thing that is left for Eduardo to do in order to become a champion is to kick the body as hard as he can. Eduardo is now in ready position, similar to the stance of a martial artist. As he faces Samantha, his right leg and right fist are in the forward position, while his left leg is charging up with energy. Ten Newtons, one hundred Newtons, one thousand Newtons, one million Newtons of energy are stored in his leg. With a speed that surpasses that of a god, Eduardo let go of his left leg and kicks the left thigh of the cadaver with all the strength he could harness. The spring loaded action happens so fast that Joaquin and Bartolo were not able to see Eduardo's leg at any moment. Even though the charged up leg was relentless, the breathless corpse barely moved from the bench it has been sitting on for decades past. Now Eduardo has his arms raised triumphantly, signaling that the challenge is now complete, and he has become the champion of kicking the dead woman; a title that no one ever cared or dared to obtain.

“I guess that we are all champions now, what do you thing Bartolo?” asks Joaquin.

“Yes, Eduardo is the champion of the idiots, because now the dead woman is going to scare him one of these nights,” says Bartolo.

“Hey guys, here comes the bus,” says Joaquin as he re-fits the knapsack snugly on his back.

The rain starts to come down forcefully making the skies look like the open floodgates of a damn. The atmosphere seems to be a path of destruction and despair. The strong winds turn the rain water into a diagonal wall of liquid vengeance while a large stream of cool water squeezes through the broken roof of the bus stop and drenches the dead woman's pink dress before it reaches the concrete ground. The dress drips dirty water as it drags the dust accumulated on the

corpse's head. A small cricket chirps from inside her ear canal as it seeks refuge from the inclement weather. By general consent, the local community believes that Samantha must have been at least ninety nine years old when she sat on the bus stop and suddenly died, but a true answer to the question has never been obtained.

The yellow bus with black stripes is now parked in front of the bus stop and the folding door is open. The three friends run towards the bus as fast as they can in order to stay as dry as possible.

“Sit down fast and keep the noise down, if anybody starts playing around I will stop the buss and kick you out,” says Pachanga the bus driver.

Pachanga arrives every morning at the same hour and minute. Since he works as a full time mechanic at a local shop, he must have the students at Sand Ward Elementary School as early as possible.

“For sure Eduardo is a little bit over the top, don't you think Joaquin?” asks Bartolo.

“It really doesn't matter to me because he is as funny as they come, and if he is right, the dead woman should never visit him,” replies Joaquin.

The trip was short and pleasant, and now the bus has stopped in front of the school and Joaquin, Eduardo, and Bartolo are getting off. The trio is walking together to the school's cafeteria in order to eat the best scrambled eggs with sausage the world has ever tasted.

“Catch me if you can,” says Joaquin as he takes off running to the cafeteria.

“You are as slow as my grandmother's cows,” replies Bartolo as he takes off after Joaquin.

“Just save me a seat, you know that running and my feet do not get along to well,” replies a fast walking Eduardo.

Sitting at the table across the three amigos is a group of girls from the sixth grade and Maria Elena is with them. They are eating breakfast and talking about music, fashion, and teenage idols (which of course includes Tony Joe Superstar). While Joaquin listens to Bartolo and Eduardo about how much they love scramble eggs, he peeks at Maria Elena as he remembers his early dream. He can now smell the same aroma that was present when he approached Maria Elena on the yellow bench. His nostrils are being anointed.

“Am I still dreaming, or does Maria Elena really wear the perfume of angels and holy incense?” “Did it happen?” “One thing is certain; she is even more beautiful in person than how she was in the dream.” “Why did I dream of her?” asks Joaquin.

“Agustin, is your friend picking you up this morning to go to school, or are you going to walk?” “You are about to be late if you don’t hurry up,” says Yolanda in a soft and calm voice.

“Alberto should be here in a minute mom, you know how much he hates to be late to school.” “I have no idea why he hasn’t arrived yet, but he should be here by now,” replies Agustin to his mother.

“Do you need any money?” asks Yolanda as she washes the dirty dishes that her husband, Ramon Cantos, left in the sink before he went to work this morning at the kitchen cabinet factory.

“No thanks mom, I still have enough money from what dad gave me the other day for helping him build a night stand for our neighbors,” replies the older brother of Joaquin.

“Honk!”

“Honk!”

“Let’s go Agustin!” says a deep voice coming from the sub-compact car parked in front of the house.

“Good bye mom, Alberto is here, I’ll see you later!” says Agustin on his way out of the house.

“Come home as soon as school is over, God bless you!” says Yolanda as her oldest son runs towards the car of his best friend Alberto Castro, better known as the Black Beetle.

“Agustin, don’t open the passenger door since it broke yesterday, just hop inside through the window,” says Alberto.

“Alright man, I can do that,” replies Agustin as he squeezes through the rusty window with utter elasticity.

Alberto Castro (The Black Beetle) is a good looking, adventurous, cheerful, and fearless young man. The reason why he has been nicknamed the Black Beetle is because his skin is so dark that when the rays of the sun bathe his young skin, a bluish/purplish wave moves up and down his body almost as fast as the speed of sound. Every year during the summer solstice, the ultraviolet wave that bounces off his skin moves so fast that it surpasses the speed of sound and a sonic boom is formed around his body. One day when he was three years old, the first sonic boom occurred when he was playing with his cousins on the backyard of his house. When Alberto’s mother arrived to see what had caused the explosion, she found her son crying while standing in the middle of the backyard’s open field. The rest of the children were stunned on the fertile ground, and all the leaves of the tall eucalyptus tree were falling down to the ground resembling the way in which a bird’s feathers spread everywhere after it is hit by a fast moving car. Luckily, the children did not suffer anything worse than a slight headache after they were picked up by their mothers and brought inside of the house. On another occasion, Alberto’s father was

explaining his only son how dark his skin really is and said: “Black Beetle, if a light skin man works outside under the scorching sun for a full day and burns his skin, his skin will look like mine since I have a natural tan.” “If I work under the scorching sun for a complete day, my skin will turn as dark as yours is.” “But if you work under the scorching sun for a complete day, your skin will turn white and the pigmentation process will start all over again; that’s how dark your skin is.”

“Alberto, did you study for the social studies test that we are about to take?” asks Agustin.

“Man, you know the answer; I can’t stand social studies,” replies Alberto.

“Dude, I know the feeling, our teacher is the most boring teacher in the world.” “She stands in front of the class and talks about dates and names of people long dead; may they rest in peace,” says Agustin.

“Agustin, we need to make a cheat sheet,” says Alberto Castro.

“That sounds like a plan, brother,” replies Agustin.

Agustin pulls a five subject notebook from his knapsack and tears a sheet of paper from it. The front cover of the notebook is orange and is covered with doodles that tell stories about extreme boredom and faraway places; some go as far as the Eastern country. The back cover of the notebook is missing because two months ago Agustin attempted to stop a hit from the fat girl that sits in front of him in math class after he called her the walking blob.

“Alberto, do you remember exactly what is this test going to be about?” asks Agustin.

“I’m not 100% sure man, but I think it is about some Corsair named Miguel Enriquez or something like that,” answers Alberto.

“You know you are right, that rings a bell, it is about Miguel Enriquez,” replies Agustin.

The school bell is about to mark the hour in which all students must be seated in their respective classrooms. Alberto is now driving the car with précised skill and superb accuracy. Even though the gas pedal is down to the metal, his car won't go faster than fifty miles per hour because it has a carburetor problem that has proven to be a complete pain in the anatomy. As the pair of high school students approaches the entrance of the City of the Stones, they can see the small duplex building on the right side of the corner that serves as barbershop and hippodrome betting station. As the beat up sub-compact car passes by the entrance, it leaves a cloud of black smoke that makes some of the men from the barber shop laugh. The duo is parking the old beat up car in a parking space that was just left by an older woman driving a fancy sports car. Alberto believes that maybe God is on his side since they are able to find such a good parking space, especially one that is right in front of the school. At the exact same time when Alberto turns the vehicle off, Agustin completes writing the last micro-words of the cheat sheet.

“Let's go!” says Agustin.

“Alright, let's do it!” replies Alberto as they cross the street and walk towards the entrance of Giralt High School, the only High School in the City of the Stones.

The school's bell is now marking the hour, the time in which Ms. Perales starts taking roll and penalizing the students who are late.

“This is the plan Beetle; I need you to sit on the chair behind mine.” “As soon as I am done with the first part of the test, I'm going to touch your right knee with my right hand, and at that moment you grab the cheat sheet.” “After you finish the first part of your test, pass it forward to me, and then we repeat the same process for the second part of the test.” “Also, I do not want you to look suspicious, nervous, to call me, to tap me, or to do anything that might make Ms. Perales become suspicious about our illegal activity,” instructs Agustin.

“Got it,” replies Alberto.

Both guys arrive in the home classroom looking as fresh as a spring morning. The teacher stares at them with a menacing look, but soon after continues getting the tests ready to be passed down unto the students.

Ms. Perales is always in a bad mood. Her facial expression reflects her personal belief that the world hates her, and that she hates the world as well. Rumor has it that when she was twenty one years old, she was in front of the altar waiting for her boyfriend, but he never showed up. Today at age forty seven, she lives in an ancient loneliness that never ends; a loneliness that follows her, a loneliness that stalks her, and a loneliness that stops her from ever gaining happiness. When Rosaura Perales is in front of a mirror, the only thing she can see is a spirit shaped like a human skeleton; dry, and without life. The ever present loneliness follows her like a cursed shadow that never disappears. At this late age of her life, she still wonders about why did her lover disappeared all of a sudden and didn't make it to the ceremony they had planned for more than two years.

As soon as Ms. Perales is about to pass down the test, she is interrupted by the school's counselor.

“Good morning guys, in case you haven't forgotten, today is the day that the recruiters from the Armed Forces will be giving the assessment to join the military.” “The test is only offered to seniors like you, and today is the only day out the year that the test will be offered at our school.” “Remember this, if you still haven't figured out what are you going to do once the semester is over and you graduate from high school, then maybe the military is the right path for you.” “For those of you who would like to take it, you may stand up now and follow me,” says the counselor.

The school counselor has now finished the last call for the Armed Forces Battery. Ms. Perales' classroom is an empty room that holds five nerds who decided to stay and take the test about past dates and dead people. The rest of the students picked up their belongings and followed the counselor towards the testing area.

“Agustin, what do you think about what we are about to do.” “I think this test is do or die, what do you think man?” asks Alberto.

“I think that it will be cool if we go into the military.” “I have heard that the military pays your college tuition, let's you jump from airplanes into hostile territory, teaches you how to shoot a battle tank, retires you a very young age, and lets you be all you can be; I think that is a good deal,” replies Agustin as he smiles because he has escaped the wrath of Ms. Perales and her senseless test.

“I have nothing to lose Agustin, so let's do it,” says Alberto with a smile that shows the beauty of his pearly white teeth.

What Alberto Castro and Agustin Cantos do not know at this early part of their lives is that this is a moment that will define their lives as men, that the simple action of taking the Armed Forces Battery will alter the course of their existence forever, and that some day they will find each other fighting in a foreign country that they had only heard about in Ms. Perales class.

Song II: The Caribbean Sea

A dark alcove full of memories is all that is left of this week. Memories of a dream with Maria Elena, the most beautiful girl in all the City of the Stones, memories of Eduardo kicking Samantha, the dead woman at the bus stop, memories of Agustin and Alberto mentioning that they had taken a test to join the Armed Forces, memories of Bartolo leaving early from school

because he had to take care of a sick goat, memories of his mother Yolanda scaring a group of teenagers after she looked at them with a fair smile when they tried to sell her chocolates for a school fund raiser, memories of the smell the red pack cigarettes produce when his father Ramon Cantos smokes, and memories of memories within memories of older memories that no longer can be remembered is what Joaquin is reminiscing on this Friday night.

A full moon stands firm over the Caribbean Island, bringing light to the hearts of people that find themselves in darkness and utter loneliness. Light covers everything, just like the oceans cover the magnitude of the Earth's crust. According to astronomers and meteorologists as well, it was reported during the evening news that on this beautiful night the moon was going to shine two hundred and seventy one percent brighter than usual. A preliminary investigation has been started by a group of local scientists, but it is too early to arrive into conclusions and further scientific investigations will be required to fully understand this phenomenon. Since this night is almost as bright as a hazy day, police authorities from the Caribbean Island report that they expect all criminal activity to cease since there is no place that a robber could use without being detected by law enforcement officials.

"Those were the best chocolate chip cookies I ever had." "The cheese spread was so thick that I can still taste it even though it is now part of my intestines." "But even though the cookies were delicious, they wouldn't be anything without the frosted glass of milk that mom gave me to accompany them." "Yummy!" "Every time I eat chocolate chip cookies I feel like I am the king of the world, that I am invincible, and that I can eat one hundred more cookies than the ones I already have." "Maybe that happens because there is some kind of special ingredient inside chocolate chip cookies that give the person who eats them immediate cosmic energy, total control of the universe, and eternal wisdom." "Or, maybe the cookies were invented by military

scientists in order for soldiers to have enough energy to survive while they fight in the jungle or to think faster in order to outsmart the enemy.” “Either way, there is such a great mystery in determining the true origin of chocolate chip cookies, but I think that someday I will be able to figure it out with the help of Eduardo and Bartolo.” “And talking about mystery, I can almost swear that mom’s eyes have a different color tonight.” “I guess that since it is so bright outside the energy of the moon is making me see her eyes in a weird different color, or maybe I’m just imagining things,” thinks Joaquin.

Joaquin is resting over his twin size bed while hugging one of his plush pillows. Even though Yolanda has purchased him a nice set of pajamas, he continues to sleep in his underwear alone since he has deemed them hot and uncomfortable. All of a sudden, Joaquin can see a strange apparition in the corner of his room. With his young and fragile hands he scrubs his eyes to make sure that they are free of obstruction, but after a thorough scrub the shapeless entity still remains. At first, he adjudicates the phenomenon to his tiredness since it is already getting late on this night, and second, he hypothesizes that the shapeless apparition is the result of the glowing of the moon as it reflects its light at an angle of seventy three degrees against his mirror.

“What am I thinking?” “I should be smarter than everything that is happening right now because I had a good amount of chocolate chip cookies and frosted fresh milk,” says Joaquin as he sits down on his bed in order to observe the anomaly closer.

While still in the corner of the room, the white gas like entity becomes clearer and takes the physical shape of a small cumulus cloud. The cloud begins to float towards the main entrance of the room at a very slow pace. After a few seconds, the cloud increases in size and begins taking the shape of a human silhouette. Joaquin’s body does not make any type of movement, but his small brown eyes continue to follow the spirit in hopes to determine what it really is. All of a

sudden, a small breeze enters the room and moves in circles around the walls, and as soon as it reaches the ghost it bounces away from it and travels at the same speed but in an opposite direction. A framed picture of Joaquin with his friends Bartolo and Eduardo is slightly stirred by the wind, but ultimately remains in place. The breeze begins to decrease in speed until it comes to a complete stop and vanishes into the darkness of the room. As soon as the wind stops, the ghost like entity takes the physical form of an adult man.

“Do you mind if I turn the lights on, that way you can completely see me?” asks the former cloud.

“Go head,” replies a skeptical Joaquin.

As soon as the lights come on, Joaquin can see that the man is about fifty five years of age, in good health, and has a broad forehead and broad shoulders. The head of the man has naturally curly hair, giving him the appearance to have been covered by thousands of perfectly rounded rolls. A long and wavy beard and white mustache cover most of his face and are interconnected with the scalp hair. The man has perfectly round eyes, a medium size nose, and medium size lips. He is wearing a short sleeve white shirt covered in red flowers, a pair of blue surfing trunks, white rubber flip flops, and a necklace made out of sea shells. Even though most of his face is covered in hair, Joaquin immediately notices that his facial features resemble a candid heart and a warm soul.

“By the way, you are the only person who can see me or hear me in the whole world, so you don’t have to worry about the sound of my words scaring your parents right now.” “But when you talk back to me, the people near you are able to hear you since you are part of this realm, so you must always be careful in regards to the loudness of your voice when I am near you.” “Do you understand Joaquin?” says the apparition.

“Yes sir, I do understand.” “But first, you must tell me who you are, what are you doing here, and how do you know my name?” asks Joaquin.

“Of course Joaquin, but first let me tell you that I am very happy to meet you, and I’m very sorry for appearing in your room uninvited.” “My name is Aristocles, but most people know me as Plato.” “I am originally from the ancient City of Knowledge, but now I belong to the perfect world of Form and Idea.” “In other words, I live in a different dimension from the one you live in.” “On the other hand, the reason I know your name is because I must know; it is my purpose to know,” replies Plato.

“Are you sure my parents can’t hear you?” asks Joaquin.

“I give you my word, they cannot hear anything I am saying,” replies Plato.

“Nice to meet you Mr. Aristocles,” says Joaquin.

“You can call me Plato young Joaquin, Plato will do just fine.”

“Sounds good Mr. Plato, but there is one thing I asked you and you still haven’t said what is the purpose of your visit,” says Joaquin.

“Alright Joaquin, I need you to pay close attention to what I’m about to say.” “I am here because twenty four years from now, specifically when you reach the age of thirty and five years, you will be tested physically, mentally, cognitively, and intellectually by a group of philosophers who call themselves The Committee Members.” “Twenty and four years from now, these philosophers will gather at an unknown destination to hear you propose a new philosophical theory.” “But you don’t have to worry; I am here to get you prepared for the day of The Gathering.” “My job is to guide you through life and teach you how philosophy is the key to solving the riddles that are known to have no solution, to reveal the true essence of what is

hidden between shadow and ignorance, and to enhance the perception we have about the imperfect world in which we now find ourselves,” says Plato.

“That sounds cool, but I am just a kid and I don’t know if I can do all of that,” says Joaquin.

“Don’t worry about anything young Joaquin, we have a whole lifetime ahead of us, and I promise you this, we are going to enjoy every moment we spend together while we learn to love learning itself,” says Plato.

“This is so awesome, I have my very own spirit dressed like a long board surfer that no one can see but me that knows a lot about philosophy and officially came from another dimension; I could not ask for more!” says Joaquin in utter excitement.

“Are you ready to go?” asks Plato.

“Go where?” replies Joaquin.

“We are going to go back in time on this night with the brightest of all moons.” “We will take a trip with a corsair that sailed the waters of this Caribbean Island and that hardly any history books have any information about him.” “His name is Miguel Enriquez, or better yet; Captain Enriquez.” “The first lesson I will give you is that you should know that what has been written in history books has less than one percent of all the historical facts that have actually occurred in this city, this island, and on the individual lives of the people that live on this planet.” “So what say you young Joaquin, are you ready?” asks Plato.

“I am ready, but is it possible to invite my friends Bartolo and Eduardo?” asks Joaquin.

“I am sorry young Joaquin, but this adventure is for you and you alone,” replies Plato.

“That’s o.k., I am ready to go, let’s do it!” says an overly excited eleven year old boy.

“Alright young Joaquin, I will put my hand over your shoulder and off we go,” says Plato.

The duo of master and apprentice are standing next to Joaquin’s bed and are ready to begin time travel. Suddenly, a small breeze appears in the bedroom and slowly increases its speed until it turns into a whirlwind that engulfs Plato and Joaquin. As soon as the whirlwind reaches terminal velocity, it vanishes into the emptiness of Joaquin’s room and travels a few hundred years into the past of the Caribbean Island.

It is a beautiful summer morning on a small eastern port of the Caribbean Island. As the duo of travelers from a different era walk through the narrow streets of cobblestone, Joaquin can see a vast number of merchants selling fresh coconut water, crab, moray eels, sugar cane, lobster, ripened bananas, a variety of roots and ground provisions, bread fruit, and freshly caught fish hanging on chords or laying on wooden tables. The streets are full of life and full of people purchasing the goods Mother Earth continues to provide. The sky above is clear, but since the beginning of time there has always been clouds over the heads of the Caribbean Islanders, a small cloud stationed on the northern sky reminds this day that it is impossible for the atmosphere to completely rid itself of gaseous water. A light breeze blows from east to west bringing an aroma of salt and iodine to a city that is beginning its daily routine. Joaquin can feel in his spirit that he is still in his home island, but he cannot recognize the absence of modernity that surrounds the city.

“Where are we going?” asks Joaquin.

“We are heading to the pier to find Captain Enriquez, and hopefully he still needs able hands for the trip that sails this morning,” replies Plato.

“I have never been on a sail boat before, so this is going to be an awesome adventure!” exclaims Joaquin.

“Joaquin, do you remember what I told you before we left your room about the amount of history that has been forgotten in the annals of societal space and time?” asks Plato.

“Yes, I do remember, you said that our knowledge of history is less than one percent of the entire events that have happened in the world,” says Joaquin.

“That is correct.” “One very important event occurred to your island on this day, but sadly there is no record of it in any of your history books, government documents, or undergoing study by any historian.” “But before I tell you about what is going to happen today, I must tell you about a related event that happened off the shores of the Ancient City of Knowledge many years before your present time or even today.” “Atlantis was a beautiful island similar in size and candor to your home island.” In a single day and night of misfortune it was drunk by the oceans that surrounded her in one of the most horrid events the ancient world has ever known.” “Indeed the island suffered the most powerful earthquake that has ever shaken the world, but the cause of the tremor was not the result of a random event; it happened because of the squidtopus.” “The squidtopus is Poseidon’s pet, a humongous and powerful creature that is half squid and half octopus.” “While Poseidon was busy fighting his brothers Zeus and Hades for the right to own the dreams of philosophers, the squidtopus escaped from his underwater cave and ruptured the bottom of the sea surrounding Atlantis with his powerful tentacles until molten rock began surfacing.” “The constant movement of magma melted the bedrock that held the island in place, and in a single day and night of misfortune the island succumbed to this menace,” says Plato.

“Are you saying that my country is in danger of being destroyed by the squidtopus?” asks Joaquin.

“Yes young Joaquin, your island is in grave danger, but as we speak the brave Captain Miguel Enriquez is preparing his crew to battle this threat.” “We must hurry up if we want to join the crew of the battleship *Anais*, one of the most powerful sail ships ever built in the Caribbean Island,” says Plato.

The cobblestone streets are getting narrower and narrower as young Joaquin and Plato fast pace towards the pier. A shadowy alley is the only thing that separates Joaquin’s young eyes from the seafront. While the radiant morning sun sits on top of the entrance of the alley as a symbol of hope in this hour of irremediable peril, the first glimpse of the crystal clear waters of the Caribbean Sea can be seen at the far distance. As soon as the pair of time travelers crosses the exit of the alley, Joaquin can see the battleship *Anais*, a marvelous galleon that was built by the finest artisans in the Caribbean Island floating over the calm waters that constantly bash the brick seawall. The *Anais* measures two hundred meters from bow to stern, has seven complete decks, three hundred cannons across the lower four decks, seven masts, seventy sails, one hundred long range harpoons across decks five and six, a crew of one thousand able seamen, seven deck commanders, and one captain. Next to the gargantuan battleship is a group of pelicans searching for sardines as a morning appetizer. Up in the sky, a flock of sea gulls remains stationary in midair as a light morning breeze softly caresses their white feathers.

“Do you see the line of people outside the battleship *Anais*?” asks Plato.

“Yes,” replies Joaquin.

“That’s where we need to be, so let’s go Young Joaquin because we don’t want to miss our boat.” “But before we get into the galleon, I must warn you that there will be unspoken dangers in our trip and death will not be so far away from us.” But don’t worry about it, danger is just another word for adventure.” “As philosophers, we will always face danger by those who

wish to cover what is ultimately true with weird shapes and forms of obscurity.” “Today you will learn that uncovering the truth is an important pathway to absolute knowledge,” says Plato.

“I am ready for this adventure, I can’t wait to set foot on the boat,” says Joaquin.

“Captain Enriquez will begin his formal mission briefing in exactly thirty minutes, and it will be from him that we shall receive the details of what exactly we will be doing today,” says Plato.

While waiting on line to join the crew of the *Anais*, Joaquin feels a small tremor and slightly loses his balance. Steadfastly, Plato grabs Joaquin by his skinny arm and brings him to a balanced posture.

“It has begun,” says Plato.

“The squidtopus is rupturing the bottom of the sea, and if we don’t sail soon your island will suffer the same fate of Atlantis at the mercy of the merciless lava,” says Plato.

The seven deck battleship has a removable wooden ladder that connects it to firm land. Upon climbing the steep stairway, Plato and Joaquin reach a platform where they are greeted by a pirate with a wooden leg, a black bandana, and large circular earrings. After a short conversation between Plato and the pirate, the master and apprentice gain access to the boat and become part of the crew for this mission. The crew of one thousand sailors is patiently waiting for the mission briefing over the upper deck near the central mast. At the same place, a rudimentary wooden box is about to become the stage where the corsair is about to give the last words some of his men will ever receive. Near the rear of the upper deck, the wooden door of the captain’s quarters opens. An utter silence can be heard all over the ship, the skies, the pier, and the blue waters as the corsair walks toward the center mast. Throughout the many missions the

sailors have had under the command of Miguel Enriquez, they have learned to respect the man that has successfully achieved victory on all of the naval encounters they have been in.

A tall dark skinned, mulatto, slender body islander takes the stage around his crew and deck commanders in preparation for the mission briefing. Captain Enriquez is dressed in naval colonial maritime clothing, has black leather boots, a whip under his right under arm, and seventeen rows of naval medals that has earned as compliments for his filibuster work under the crown of the colonial government that rules the island in this era.

“Joaquin, I wish I had not come on this trip in flip flops; they might slow me down if we have to run.” “I just thought it would be cool to arrive at your place in tropical clothes since the weather this time of year is a delicacy,” says Plato.

“The weather is not edible, so it can’t be a delicacy,” says Joaquin sarcastically.

Joaquin is unable to stop laughing at the words of his newly acquainted philosopher friend. He feels an energized force that produces bursts of tickles going up and down his entire body. Within seconds Plato joins the laughter and both of them continue the ordeal until tears run down their eyes.

“My fellow corsairs, pirates, buccaneers, filibusters, and friends; I come to you in our most desperate hour.” “As you all can remember, exactly twenty and eight days ago, on the day in which the moon reigned full over the consciousness of men, I told you that we were to begin preparing the *Anais* for a very important mission.” “First and foremost, I would like to thank you all, especially the quarter master for elevating the ships capabilities to the level of preparedness in which we find ourselves today.” “On this day, we will not be taking gold and jewels from other ships as we usually earn our daily bread through pirating.” “Tonight, the full moon will be upon us again as we face an enemy that does not afford to have a human face; it is an unknown

monster that as we speak is about to destroy our beautiful Caribbean Island,” says Captain Enriquez.

“What kind of monster is this, captain?” asks the wooden legged pirate.

“Is he talking about a monster?” murmurs the crowd of sailors.

“Is that earthquake we just had related to this threat?” asks a parrot on behalf of a mute corsair.

“On the second month of this year, which happens to be the shortest of the twelve, an extra day was added to the calendar in order to compensate for the increased six hours every year has been receiving since we experienced a phenomenon called a blue moon.” “During a blue moon, a second full moon occurs during the same month but this time the moon turns blue.” “But this year the moon appeared for a second time within the same month and did not turn blue.” “As soon as this happened I went to see Madam Le Mystique; whom you all know.” “After consulting with our spiritual leader, Madam Le Mystique told me that the blue moon did not appear due to an imbalance in the planetary energies, and that it was going to reappear on this night.” “She also told me about a creature of legendary proportions called the squidtopus.” “Madam Le Mystique said that this ancient creature is capable of completely sinking any land mass into the darkness of the depths of the oceans.” “As you have already noticed, our island has already felt the presence of this creature in the form of small tremors and earthquakes.” “If we do not stop this ancient submariner, our legacy, as well our children’s legacy will be lost forever,” says an inspiring Captain Enriquez.

“That explains everything,” tells Joaquin his mentor.

“I bet you never heard any of this in your school books before,” says Plato.

“I sure haven’t, but I can guess that we find ourselves about three hundred years into the past based on the style of craftsmanship this ship has,” says Joaquin.

“Good power of observation, your senses serve you right,” replies Plato.

“We will hunt this creature on this blue night and we will make sure that our island as well as our people is safe by the time the eye of heavens appears on the east tomorrow at dawn,” says Captain Enriquez.

“Any word on the *Lydia*?” asks a pirate.

“I sent messenger doves three days ago, but still no reply.” “Today, we sail alone,” replies Captain Enriquez.

“This is so interesting, time travel is so cool,” says Joaquin.

“So what say you my crew, are you with me?” asks Captain Enriquez.

“Yes captain,” replies the crew.

“Are we letting this tentacle creature destroy the dreams of our children?” asks Miguel Enriquez.

“Never!” replies the crowd in unison.

“Raise sails, battle stations, everybody man your posts,” Commands Miguel Enriquez.

“Yes sir!” replies the crew.

“What is our heading captain?” asks the navigator.

“We head south, south west,” replies the captain.

“Aye, aye,” says the navigator.

The crew is moving with speed and precision over the seven decks of the *Anais*. As in past endeavors, the crew is disciplined, responsible, and loves to drink potent rum. They believe that rum gives them the strength, agility, as well as the accurate senses to achieve victory in any

battle. Tonight they will need all the distilled spirits their bodies can hold if they want to have their senses in fine tuning to defeat this ancient foe.

The sky above is as clear as it was during the morning. Only a set of cirrus clouds embellish the heavens with their fragile distinction. The *Anais* has been sailing for hours and has not encountered the maritime beast yet. Captain Miguel Enriquez knows that he has no more than thirty minutes of daylight before he must rely on the blue light of the upcoming moon. Plato is serving as a forward observer on the starboard side of the *Anais*, while Joaquin is helping him search for unusually large silhouettes silently moving under the water. The sun is closest to the west side of the island, and soon the day will give up its presence over the strength of the darkness of the night and the mystical light of the blue moon. The crew of brave pirates just had the last meal of the day, and for many of them this will be the last supper their lips will ever taste.

“Mr. Plato, have you ever seen the squidtopus?” asks Joaquin.

“I must say that I have never seen the creature with my own natural eyes, but a friend of mine named Tiresias described it to me once before.” “Today will be the first time we both get to see it,” says Plato.

“When your friend described it to you, did he mention if it was bigger than this galleon?” asks Joaquin.

“Three or four times bigger I would guess, but I don’t know with exactitude,” replies the ancient philosopher.

“If it is three or four times bigger, I think that we might have some trouble in defeating it,” says Joaquin.

“We’ll see,” replies Plato.

“Mr. Plato, I think I see an area over there that looks darker than the rest of the ocean; can you come take a look at it?” asks Joaquin as he points with his index finger.

“Young Joaquin, I believe you have found our foe.” “We must shout to the rest of the crew that we have found it!” says Plato.

“Contact on the starboard side!” screams Joaquin from the top of his lungs.

Immediately, the message was disseminated throughout the entire embarkation, but most importantly, to Captain Enriquez. Captain Enriquez personally walks toward the starboard area where Joaquin and his teacher are standing and begins scanning the area.

“Alright young man, can you please show me what you have found,” says the captain.

“It is right there sir,” says Joaquin as he points towards a large dark area that remains stationary over the vastness of the ocean.

“Good job young sailor, my most sincere gratitude,” says Miguel Enriquez.

“I am taking over the steering wheel, we have found our enemy; the enemy of the only thing that matters,” says captain Enriquez.

Captain Enriquez takes over the steering wheel of the *Anais* and heads straight towards the dark area that Joaquin just discovered. The distance between the *Anais* and the squidtopus is approximately twelve nautical miles. As soon the creature notices that a vessel is moving towards it, it starts moving its tentacles even faster than before in order to complete the task of rupturing the bedrock and accessing the magma underneath it. A large cracking sound is heard coming from the inside of the bottom of the sea and moving towards the surface as a result of the pressure being released when the magma exploded out of the bedrock. What Captain Enriquez does not know is that the squidtopus needs one more underwater perforation in order to turn the Caribbean Island into a permanent coral reef. Just like it happened in Atlantis centuries ago, a

total of ten perforations are needed around the island in order to create the cataclysmic effect. At this time, nine of them have been completed; three on the north side, two on the east side, two on the west side, and two on the south side.

The sudden rupture of bedrock creates a powerful earthquake that is felt on the entire southern side of the island with smaller tremors replicating throughout the rest of the Caribbean Island. A spirit of panic now engulfs the spirit of many islanders as they see their houses transform into a pile of rubble and despair.

“Load the port cannons!” “Hard to starboard!” “Standby on the starboard cannons!” “All stop!” commands Captain Enriquez.

“Aye captain!” replies a pirate.

“Yes captain!” says a corsair.

“We are ready captain,” reply the seven deck commanders at unison.

“Listen up men, the sea beast is in range of our cannons.” “Let’s blow this thing up so we can go home to our wives and children.” “At my command the first deck will shoot in unison, after a two second delay the second deck will shoot until we reach the cannons on the fourth deck.” “Is that understood?” says Miguel Enriquez.

“Yes sir, we are armed and ready,” replies a deck commander.

“Fire,” orders the captain.

“Boom!” sounds the first deck.

“Kaboom!” sounds the second deck.

“Pow!” sounds the third deck.

“Boom!” sounds the fourth deck.

As the cannons fire, Joaquin can see the clouds of white smoke and the fire flashes produced by the blasts of the smoothbores. Even though the cannons are inside the lower decks, the loud sounds are almost intolerable for Joaquin's young ears. A total of one hundred and fifty cannon balls fly towards the submerged squidtopus. Since there is almost no light left on this day, Captain Enriquez hopes that his firepower can put a stop to the ancient creature before the blue light of the moon casts itself over the consciousness of men. Lying at the bottom of the sea is the squidtopus. With his acute vision, the squidtopus can see the slow moving cannon balls flying towards him. With a speed that surpasses that of a tropical storm, the squidtopus gracefully swims between the cannon balls that forcefully splash the surface of the Caribbean Sea in search of the giant target and avoids them without any trouble. Even though the cannon balls do not hit the intended target, they are designed to explode fifteen seconds after they fail to impact a solid surface. This naval ordnance tactic was invented by Captain Miguel Enriquez and this is the first time he ever uses it. No one in the world knows about the mechanisms that compose the self exploding cannon balls but him.

At this time, all of the one hundred and fifty cannon balls have been avoided by the sea monster. Without any warning, the cannon balls begin to explode creating a chain reaction that lights them up into a huge underwater implosion. Joaquin can see sporadic bursts of water at the location where he originally spotted the giant cephalopod. As soon as the waters become tranquil, the crew of the *Anais* searches for the remains of the beast but no trace of it is found.

Up in the night sky, a brilliant blue moon stands firm over the consciousness of the pirates. The blue light of the moon is bright and constant, and it covers the vastness of the sea. As it was foretold by Madam Le Mystique, the crew of the *Anais* will not be needing lighting on this night since the moon is almost as bright as a winter sun.

“All sails to the wind!” commands Miguel Enriquez.

“Aye captain!” replies the sail crew.

“We are going to see if this creature is still alive, or if the implosion demolished it.”

“Nothing could have survived an attack of such magnitude.” “If the cannon balls did not pierce the outer skin of the creature, the chain reaction of explosives should have done the job; or at least I hope so,” says Captain Enriquez.

“Incoming wave!” “Starboard side!” yells the mast watchman with utter seriousness.

As a result of the recent seismic activity in the Caribbean Island, an underwater replica of the earthquake has created a giant sea wave that is fast approaching the south side of the island. Between the fast approaching wave and the shores of the sandy beaches we find Joaquin, Plato, Captain Enriquez, and the rest of the crew of the *Anais*. As soon as Captain Enriquez hears that a wave is coming towards the starboard side of his boat, he immediately turns the steering wheel of the galleon hard to starboard and places the bow in a frontal position in order to meet the wave head on.

“Mr. Plato, look at the size of that wave,” says Joaquin.

“It is huge young Joaquin, but I am sure this battleship is fully capable of handling it; or at least I hope so,” says Plato.

“Worst case scenario, we can get a couple of surfing long boards and ride the wave under the blue light of the moon.” “What do you think Mr. Plato?” says Joaquin.

“Sounds like fun young Joaquin, maybe we ought to go surfing one of these days, but definitely we should ride much smaller waves,” replies Plato.

“Alright Mr. Plato,” says Joaquin.

Even though the massive wave carries within itself the seed for the destruction of the boat, the pirates are unable to stop admiring the beauty of the neon color of the blue wave. As the sailors observe the incoming wave, they begin to reminisce about the happiest days of their childhood. Joaquin remembers dancing under the early rains of May with his mother Yolanda, Plato remembers how his father used to teach him how to yield a sword, Miguel Enriquez remembers the first time he ate guavas, and the rest of the crew remember one thousand beautiful memories of the good old' days.

“Lower the sails, and brace for impact!” commands Captain Enriquez.

Plato grabs a maguey rope and binds himself and Joaquin to a wooden pole. The rest of the crew grabs onto whatever they can get and hopes for the best. The captain remains firm behind the steering wheel.

The blue wave is crawling under the battleship *Anais* and steadfastly begins to raise it. As the galleon moves upward it is abruptly shaken by the power of the oceanic lambda. Captain Enriquez masterfully steers the two hundred feet long boat as if it was a fisherman's dinghy. Even though the galleon is well above the water, the magnitude of the wave is so strong that large amounts of salt water flow over the upper deck and a handful of sailors vanish into the mystical blue waters. A few seconds later the *Anais* reaches the crest of the wave at an almost vertical position. Joaquin and Plato have a tight grip on the maguey rope that allows them to remain over the upper deck of the boat. As the boat glides over the crest of the wave, a strong splash sound is made when the wooden hull of the galleon reenters the crystal blue waters.

“Deck commanders, give me a status assessment on our current situation,” requests Captain Enriquez.

“Deck one is flooded with one meter of water; captain,” replies the first deck commander.

“The rest of decks are ready and standing by, but we lost several men while battling the giant wave; captain,” replies the seventh deck commander.

“We will mourn our comrades later, my men, but now we must stay alert.” “Begin bilging the water out of the first deck of the *Anais*.” “I want all my cannons operational!” “There is no time to waste,” commands Captain Miguel Enriquez.

The blue wave has now reached the southern shore of the Caribbean Island, and with it, a path of destruction and chaos has arrived. The enormous wave did not give any quarter to the countless innocent families that live near the coastal areas. A spirit of sadness now carries the hand of the sepulcher over the lives that were, are not, and will never be again.

Meanwhile, the squidtopus is swimming towards the battleship *Anais* at his maximum possible velocity. Poseidon’s pet has figured that he must rid himself of the threat that recently attacked him before he can proceed to his tenth and final place of drilling.

“That was a very close call Mr. Plato,” says Joaquin.

“I agree young Joaquin, that wave was merciless, but sadly I am certain that the worst was felt by your fellow islanders on the southern shore,” says Plato.

“Do you think my family is safe?” asks Joaquin.

“Your ancestors should be fine, but your parents will not be born until three hundred and thirty three years from today; there is nothing to worry about,” replies Plato.

“I should have known, after all I find myself in the past and this adventure surely does not feel like a dream,” says Joaquin.

“I can assure you young Joaquin, you are not in a dream, today is just as real as your time will be three centuries from today,” says Plato.

“Incoming!!!!!!!” “Port side!!!!!!!” screams one of the watch guards.

Immediately, Joaquin's young eyes turn to the port side of the boat and spot a giant fluorescent purple light in a direct collision course. As the light draws nearer, the captain can truly appreciate the size of the giant aquatic beast. He knows that the *Anais* alone will be no match to a giant cephalopod.

"Everybody get ready, it seems the enemy is at our gates." "At my command, all port cannons fire," commands Miguel Enriquez.

"Yes sir, all one hundred and fifty port side cannons are ready and standing by," states the seventh deck commander.

"Fire!," commands the captain.

The entire boat is shaken by the raw force of the one hundred and fifty cannons being shot at the exact same time. This time the powerful noise is transformed into a forceful wind that travels through the entire boat and stops after Joaquin's young face can feel it. As the cannon balls splash the blue waters, the squidtopus avoids them with the same easiness he experienced before. As it was expected by the captain, the activation of the underwater implosion is too slow and the cephalopod remains unharmed. It is now a matter of minutes until the squidtopus meets the valiant crew of rum driven pirates.

"Young Joaquin here is a hand harpoon." "If the beast comes near you, do not hesitate in defending yourself and the rest and the crew; I will do the same," says Plato.

"How much can this harpoon do against an island sinker?" asks Joaquin.

"Perhaps not so much, but we are not the only ones holding a harpoon; look around you."

"I can see the determination on the pirates' faces as they are ready to defend the ship they have used in the past to steal treasures from other colonial governments within the vastness of the

Caribbean waters.” “I also know that if we don’t defend this boat, we all get eaten by the squidtopus,” says Plato.

“I don’t think so, what Captain Enriquez does not know is that we have Mr. Plato with us, and that has to count for something,” says Joaquin.

“I guess that I will hold on to my harpoon young Joaquin; that’s all I can do,” replies Plato.

As the presence of the blue moon grows stronger over the crystal waters of the Caribbean Sea, the water under the battleship *Anais* begins to glow with a fluorescent purple light that grows in size and intensity every second. While the head of the giant cephalopod is still submerged under the blue waters, twenty large fluorescent pink tentacles completely surround the galleon. The pink tentacles measure approximately six hundred meters and have suction cups with a diameter that surpasses two meters. Without any hesitation one of the pink tentacles grabs a drunken corsair and completely sucks him in through one of the suction cups. Joaquin can see that half of the body of the poor man has been swallowed through the suction cup and his legs rapidly move until they disappear into the pink tentacle.

“Try to harpoon the tentacles until they are pinned down to the deck and then chop them with your swords!” “Above all, avoid the suction cups if you don’t want to become the beast’s supper!” shouts Captain Enriquez from behind the steering wheel.

The crew of the *Anais* is fiercely battling the pink tentacles of the aquatic menace. As Joaquin stands firm in complete awe next to his philosopher master, he can see dozens of legs fluttering like desperate birds as they are being sucked alive by the squidtopus. The beast will have a feast before sinking the island, or at least it will try. Near the bow, a corsair is desperately

trying to pull his friend away from one of the suction cups, but his futile attempt results in both men getting sucked through the tentacle at the same time.

One of the fluorescent pink tentacles is wrapped around the central mast and completely tears it as if it was a toothpick. But as soon as the tentacle snaps the mast out of its base, a group of seven brave pirates harpoons the tentacle down to the deck and start chopping it with their swords. Now completely severed, the tentacle has lost all of its pink color and now is surrounded by the lifeless color of death.

Until now, the massive body of the squidtopus has remained under water, but as soon as it loses its first tentacle it starts violently moving under the water as sign of pain. Joaquin can see how the water near the boat is bubbling rapidly.

“I am finally going to see your face.” “Come on and hurry up so I can kill you!” says Miguel Enriquez.

The massive body of the squidtopus surfaces on the port side of the *Anais* at the same location where Joaquin and Plato are standing. The behemoth has an elongated head with three stumpy spears over the top similar to a squid. Right under the top, the squidtopus has two large eyes similar to the ones an octopus has. The skin of the hybrid cephalopod has the elasticity and malleability of an octopus, and yet the rigidity of a squid. Large diamond shape patterns cover the body in its entirety and glow in the same fluorescent pink of the tentacles.

In a moment of profound ecstasy, Joaquin’s young eyes and the giant eyes of the squidtopus are locked into a spiritual trance. For a few seconds, Joaquin is able to feel the inner feelings of hate and destruction the squidtopus desires. At that moment Joaquin truly understands that the beast must be eradicated from the circumference of the Earth. In moment fueled by adrenaline, sugar, and noradrenalin, Joaquin harnesses all his strength and spears away his

harpoon with the giant eye of the beast as target. As the harpoon flies away from the boat Plato grabs Joaquin by his shoulder and runs away from what is about to be an enraged beast that is three times the size of the boat they are standing on. The harpoon nearly missed the eye of the squidtopus, but as usual, it was avoided by the agile submariner.

“That was awesome Joaquin, but I don’t think you got him,” says Plato as his flip flops move up and down the deck.

“I gave it all I got, and he deserves it for trying to hurt my island,” replies Joaquin.

The squidtopus is wrapping the remaining nineteen pink tentacles around the *Anais*. This time the tentacles have a fluorescent green ring around the suction cups that look beautiful and deadly at the same time. As the tentacles begin to squeeze the structural integrity of the galleon, water comes inside the first deck through a crack ruptured by the brute strength of the enemy.

“Port side cannons, prepare to fire!” commands Captain Miguel Enriquez.

The captain knows that if he fires the one hundred and fifty cannons at such close range, the squidtopus might be destroyed, but the delayed implosion of the cannon balls have enough power to take out an entire armada of battleships. The time is running out for the battleship *Anais* and its crew as the tentacles rapidly crack the hull of the boat.

“If it is meant for us to die at the mercy of this foe on this blue night, then so be it; I will take it with me to the bottom of the sea and the end of the abyss,” says Miguel Enriquez from behind the wooden steering wheel.

“At my command...”

“Captain, look to the left side of the weird looking octopus, it’s the *Lydia*!” exclaims an exasperated sailor.

“So my old pal Cofresi got my message after all,” says an enthusiastic Miguel Enriquez.

Joaquin can hear dozens of “swooshing” sounds coming from the back of the squidtopus, the result of the forceful penetration of one hundred long range harpoons that have found a gargantuan target shaped like a squid an octopus at the same time. Immediately, the fluorescent tentacles that almost destroy the battleship *Anais* begin to release the perfect grip of destruction and sorrow. Joaquin can see that the squidtopus is under duress as it is tries to move rapidly away from the boat.

“Raise sails!” “Long range harpoons, port side, prepare to fire at my command, fire!” commands Miguel Enriquez.

As the fast moving harpoons approach the frontal area of the squidtopus, Joaquin can feel nothing but sadness in his heart for what is about to happen to it. In his young heart, he has never experienced pain or suffering; only love and tenderness from his beautiful mother Yolanda. One by one, all one hundred long range harpoons find a suitable area within the flexible flesh of the aquatic monster. Some of the harpoons pierce the large eyes of the beast blinding him before it goes to the afterlife, while others penetrate the fluorescent purple elastic skin. The battleship *Anais* fastly moves away from the squidtopus while its one hundred long range harpoons continue to hold the frontal area. Similarly, the *Lydia* is holding the monster with one hundred identical harpoons but on the opposite side. The squidtopus has two hundred long range harpoons piercing its entire surround, and two synchronized captains about to destroy him.

“At my command, port side cannons, starting on deck one.”

“Fire,” says Miguel Enriquez.

As the cannonballs penetrate the fluorescent flesh of the monster, Joaquin cannot hold his sadness and begins to cry. Plato puts his right arm around his shoulder and remains quiet. At the same time, the *Lydia* is firing all one hundred and fifty starboard cannons. The fluorescent rings

around the suction cups of the tentacles are changing to an array of different colors; blue, orange, pink, purple, green, yellow, red, and combinations of all the different colors in the world. Even though the squidtopus has two hundred long range harpoons and three hundred cannon balls inside of him, it is futilely fighting for his life. From the safe distance of the galleon, the cannonballs begin to implode and a tremendous explosion disperses the squidtopus into thousands of pieces. The maguery ropes that once held the long range harpoons are freely floating over the crystal blue waters that are bathed by the moon. But even with such a large explosion, the dead upper part of the body of the squidtopus was not completely destroyed. Still with harpoons stucked inside his eyes, Poseidon's pet travels faster than the speed of sound to its permanent graveyard; the moon.

"I am sad because the squidtopus is dead Mr. Plato," says Joaquin.

"I understand young Joaquin, but what was done here saved the lives of millions of thousands of people, including some of your ancestors," replies Plato.

"I think that I am going to get sick Mr. Plato, I want to go home now," says Joaquin.

"That sounds like a good idea, let's go back to the future," replies Plato as a whirlwind surrounds both master and apprentice and takes them back to the time and space in which postmodernity reigns as the triumphant master of deconstruction.

In the middle of the crystal blue waters of the Caribbean Sea, the starboard side of the battleship *Anais* and the port side of the galleon *Lydia* are docked together. Captain Miguel Enriquez welcomes his old friend Captain Cofresi and his crew in celebration. The cooks of the *Anais* have made a delicious salad with the giant piece of tentacle that was left over the deck. Needless to say, the corsairs celebrated with spiced rum until the morning dispatched the blue moon that reigned supreme over the consciousness of men.

Song III: Christian Renewal

“Maybe my intentions are not purest by coming into this place today.” “Maybe I don’t have the slightest clue about the origin of my decision, and maybe I do.” “I like to think that God is the One in control right now, but to be honest, I do not know who God is.” “Well, maybe I do know a little bit about Him, but I do not know if the rumors I have heard in the past about who God really is qualify me as a Christian, a religious connoisseur, or a good person.” “I have heard that in the beginning God created the world and all the creatures that roam around it, that the oceans were formed after a flood was sent from heaven to kill evil giants, that He had the Israelites walk through the desert and then cross the Red Sea while a pharaoh chased after them, and that Jesus Christ was born in the month of December and that’s the reason why we celebrate Christmas every beginning of winter,” thinks Alberto as the car he is traveling abruptly evades a pothole.

“But even if I am completely clueless at this moment, my ignorance is about to be dissipated into the evening dew that spreads its thin layer of white cover over the concrete building that my friends visit every Friday night and Sunday morning and know it as church,” thinks Alberto.

“What am I getting myself into?” “Is there a real purpose behind all of this, or is it just my curiosity for venturing into the unknown?” Alberto asks himself.

“I personally don’t know the guys from church but often I see them in school hanging out at the basketball court bleachers while they sing hymns with other Christian students.”

“Sometimes during our lunch hour they walk the hallways preaching the gospel of the Lord to everyone at The Stones High School, or they hand out informational literature about the path to salvation, or they simply upset the school principal as she complains that they are not allowed to

do that around school settings.” “On one occasion, when I was eating cod fish fritters and snow cones with my best friend Agustin, they approached us and gave us a polite invitation to visit the church.” “At that moment, I became intrigued about the message of salvation of the soul and that’s how I made it here today accompanied by Marc, John, Luke, and Mathew; the church guys,” says Alberto.

As Alberto Castro pulls himself out of the compact car where he and his friends had driven into the almost full parking lot, his heart begins pounding a little bit faster than normal, he feels anxious, and since his breathing is not providing enough oxygen to his brain due to the sudden exasperation, he feels momentarily dizzy. Alberto’s friends are very happy for him because he is visiting *The Christian Renewal Church*, the fastest growing Christian church in his hometown; The City of the Stones. As Alberto Castro waits over the black asphalt for his friends to secure the car, he enters into some kind of trance that he has never experienced before; a spiritual trance. He is able to see his friends talking to him as they move their mouths up and down like a hospital elevator during a busy Saturday night, but he cannot hear anything that is being said. The only thing that he can hear is his own consciousness, a hidden voice that from today forward will speak to him whenever an important event is going to occur in his life; regardless if it’s good or bad. His inner self is now saying: “We are here, at the end of all things, and the beginning of all things, at the highest peak of the highest mountain, at the deepest end of the deep, at the column of smoke that rises into the heavens in the form of incense and prayers of the saints, and at the place where songs have no subliminal intention, only purity and more song.”

Alberto’s consciousness is now finished delivering the message and is back into her resting place waiting for the time when she is needed again to provide insight to her host. But

even Alberto's consciousness is not aware that someday in the future she is going to speak to him in the emptiness of space outside of the physical reality of our planet; at a place where all varieties of cheese exist.

The church building is not the traditional protestant white chalet on top of a hill next to a white picket fence with green pine trees embellishing the front and back of the structure. Instead, it is a square shape cinder block building with a rectangular shaped outer core. The pathway that leads to the outer core is made out of red and blue cobblestone and is covered by the sky above that is beginning to turn dark like the skin of Alberto. As Alberto walks through the antique pavers, the smell of the small *Cross of Martha* flowers that lay on each of his sides bathes his whole body with a divine fragrance. At the end of the *pathway to salvation* stand two neo-classic pillars covered in white latex paint. Standing next to the white pillars stands a set of clay pots with yellow roses and white tulips. These yellow and white flowers provide a welcoming taste to the entrance of the holy place. Even though it is already dark outside Alberto's eyes are delighted by the celestial blue color in which the outside walls are painted. Alberto immediately associates the blue color of church with a blue blanket that his mother has kept secured in a locker from the days in which he wore cloth diapers held by lustrous safety pins and cotton bibs.

As the group of friends arrives to the outer core of the church, Marc says: "We have to hurry up because the service started ten minutes ago, and if something we know about Pastor Elias Vega is that he holds a silver pocket watch on his right hand as he begins the Friday night service with military accuracy." "He makes the choir step into the Holy of Holies five minutes before 7:00 pm, and when the minute hand finds itself in the middle of the 1 and the 2 of the 12 number, the service begins."

“I agree with you Marc, Pastor Vega is very structured, and I really like it that way,” says John.

Alberto notices that there are a man and a woman standing at the main entrance of the church welcoming visitors and providing them with a printed schedule of the service. The yellow roses and the white tulips that stand next to the white pillars have a very unnatural glow. The flowers appear to be reflecting a special type of light similar to neon, but no light sources can be found near the flowers in a night where the sky has turned as dark as the outer space. Alberto can see that not only the roses are glowing, but the whole place seems to be irradiated with a strange light.

“Let’s try to avoid using the main entrance; we should enter the holy grounds through the side door,” says John.

“Good idea,” says Luke, the guy who was riding shotgun during the trip.

The music coming from inside the church is beginning to grow louder inside Alberto’s ears. As the sound waves travel through the canals of his ears his whole body feels heavy and light at the same time. At this moment Alberto cannot understand the exact words of the song, but he can hear the congregation shouting: “Hallelujah!” “Jesus is Alive!” and “Blessed is the Lamb!” Since his brain is unable to process the feelings and emotions that are slowly gathering inside of him, he has decided that he is not going to try to decipher it; he is going to let fate run its course on this night.

The guys take a hard right on the outer core and circumvent the main entrance in order to respect the sanctity of the service and avoid distraction. As they are walking, Mathew, the driver and owner of the compact car puts his right arm over Alberto’s left shoulder and tells him,

“Welcome home.” Alberto smiles at him and slowly nods his head as a sign of thankfulness. As the music becomes clearer, so does the consciousness of the whole congregation.

As Alberto Castro enters through the side aluminum door, he wonders about the old superstition of the roof falling over the head of a sinner as a punishment for entering a sacred place. For the first time in his life, at least the first time he can remember, Alberto prays to God Almighty and says: “Father, if this roof is to fall down, please let me get out in time so I won’t die a poor person; please give me a chance to make it in life.” “I also think that I’m supposed to say Amen when I am done, so Amen.” Now that his prayer has been completed, Alberto stands next to John and Marc and continues to listen to the most beautiful music he has heard in his entire life.

On the left side of the Holy of Holies Alberto sees the church choir; a cluster of men and women wearing black pants or skirts and white long sleeve shirts. To his surprise, most of them are high school teenagers just like himself or Agustin. The choir is singing so beautifully that Alberto Castro thinks that they are a group of angels singing to God directly, and mortals don’t have the right to participate in an event with such holiness. On the right side of the Holy of Holies is the band, a group of passionate musicians that either plays an instrument in the high school band, or former musicians that became tired of the sex, drugs, and rock & roll that is enjoyed by secular bands. When the music from the right side of the Holy of Holies meets the angelical voices from the left side, the amalgamation cannot be measured by either the Richter or the Fujita scales. For Alberto, the only way in which he could describe the fusion of voice and sound is by juxtaposing an uncontrolled atomic explosion to the drinking of nectar by a humming bird hovering in front of a flower. The result is a burst of sweetness that surrounds the

body, soul, and spirit; an energy that can change a person from the inside to the outside. And that is exactly what Alberto has been searching for throughout his short existence on this Earth.

While everybody claps their hands and rejoices the simple but yet powerful words of the song begin making sense in Alberto's head:

Where can I hide from you my Lord?
 Where can I be without your presence?
 How many times could I try in vain?
 To leave your side without your essence
 I'm here with you, do not leave my side
 I have heard your cry, in this lonely night
 The shadow of death, will not touch your life
 I'm sending my angels, to guard you with might
 Jesus you are my savior, and I thank you in this precious night
 Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh
 I will praise you for the rest of my days in this land
 Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh
 I know that I can't hide from you, so forgive me and give me your light
 Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh
 Jesus you are my savior, and forever you shall hold my hand
 Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh

In the middle of the choir is Patricia Nava, better known as Patty; a high school junior that loves to go to beach on Sundays after the morning service. She is an honor roll student and plans to attend college to study physics or engineering. Patricia is a very skinny girl, but without

a question she has the natural body waves that all the women from the Caribbean island have. Her skin is white as the snow-peaked Andes Mountains, her face has sporadic freckles that make her look young and innocent, and most importantly, she has the most beautiful smile Alberto has ever seen in his whole entire life.

Alberto can't stop looking at Patricia, and even though he did not have in mind to come to church for the fish and the bread, he knows that it can be an added benefit. In a small glance, Patty notices that Alberto is looking at her and she gracefully smiles back at him. Alberto feels warm feelings in his heart, feelings that he has not felt before in his life. He does not know if it is the Spirit of God touching and cleaning his inner self, or if his heart is pumping faster than normal because the beautiful blond girl has smiled back at him.

The congregation is now sitting on the cushioned wooden pews and the offering is being collected by the deacons. The music ministry continues to play sacred lyrics about the resurrection of Christ the Messiah, the love of the Father, and the second coming of the Lord. Mathew is sitting next to Alberto and tells him: "The interesting part about giving money in church is not only that the Lord blesses the giver, but he also gives you one hundred times the amount given back; 1=100." "So think about it, for every dollar you give in church, the Lord will give you back one hundred; and it never fails." "This is a thing of faith that works pretty well, especially for guys like us who were not born with silver spoons in our mouths."

Luke takes out a couple of pennies from his wallet and gives John one of them. Luke knows that he is going to triple his blessings just by giving away his last two pennies as some lady did two thousand years ago. Mark takes out his Mickey Mouse wallet and retrieves a one dollar bill and places it inside the offering basket. Alberto thinks that a little bit of monetary help from above could never hurt, so he decides to place a one dollar bill inside the basket as well.

“All rise.” “Let’s pray.” “Dear heavenly father we thank you for this opportunity that you have given us to come into your presence to worship your holy and powerful name.” “We ask you to send your Holy Spirit to guide us into becoming better Christians and humble servants of Your name.” “I now present to you the message that you have chosen for Your congregation.” “Please speak to our hearts and reveal the meaning of your holy words to us.” “We ask you this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; Amen.” “You may be seated,” says Pastor Elias Vega.

Pastor Vega is a wonderful preacher, a father figure for all the members of *The Christian Renewal Church*. He fits Niccolo Machiavelli’s perfect description of a prince in the sense that he is respected without hypocrisy. His messages are full of life, repentance, and mercy, but the message for this Friday night service is one that is going to change Alberto’s life forever. Pastor Vega begins the sermon by asking the congregation to raise their hands if they believe the church of the Lord is a hospital, a place in which the sick can go and receive healing of the heart and body. A series of semi-skeptical hands are raised into the air knowing that Pastor Vega likes to place intellectual and spiritual booby traps while he preaches.

“You may lower your hands now,” says the preacher with a smirk on his face that reveals to the congregation that maybe raising the hand was not such a good idea.

“I am sorry to disappoint you, but the church of the Lord is not a hospital; it is an army,” says the pastor.

All mouths in the nave are shut and all eyes face the pulpit in complete reverence.

“Biblically speaking, the church of the Lord is considered to be an army, an army that has soldiers who are fighting a spiritual battle against the forces of evil.” “Since the beginning of time the forces of evil have attempted to disrupt the perfect relationship that our creator wants us

to have with Him.” “The interesting part about how our enemy the devil acts, is by trying to alter the words of God the Father.” “He likes to twist and bend what is not supposed to be bent.” “Our enemy enjoys blinding the church into believing that it is o.k. to change the ways in which we reach our Savior, that it is o.k. to do as little as we can since we are saved and our salvation is eternal.” “I would like to tell you two different things before I continue, number one, the bible is a clear manual of instructions, and second, if a good Christian commits sin and does not repent he/she can also fall from the grace of the Lord,” says Elias Vega.

“Praise the Lord!” shouts a woman.

“Preach it Pastor!” shouts the husband of that woman.

“Hallelujah!” says a one hundred and twenty year old lady that holds the record for being the oldest woman on the planet.

As the pastor continues the deliverance of the message, Alberto begins to like the idea of becoming a Christian. Deep inside of him, he can feel somehow he is being called to live his life in holiness.

“The church of the Lord has wrongfully become a hospital, a place where the wounded can be healed and fed.” “Now, I do not want you to misunderstand me, the Lord has purposely established the church as a place for healing of the body, spirit, and soul.” “But the Lord never intended for the church to be a permanent hospital.” “The problem with utilizing the church strictly as a hospital is that it has created a body that is getting fat and lazy.” “If a person feels bad, they go to the church.” “If a person has a problem with the spouse, they get counseling from the pastor.” “It is all about me, me, me, me, me, me, and me.” “But let me tell you something; that is not the way an army operates.” “An army is fighting a war, and sometimes soldiers get wounded in a battle.” “For that purpose, armies have combat medics, nurses, and surgeons.”

“The purpose of the medical personnel is to diagnose and steadfastly bring the soldier back to his feet.” “Now, as soon as the soldier has recovered from his wounds, he picks up his weapon and goes back into the battle.” “Soldiers do not sit down and get fat at the hospital eating cod fish fritters and drinking champagne cola while others are fighting a war out there.” “Does everybody understand what I’m talking about?” asks the pastor.

“Now, let me ask you another question.” “If we are an army of powerful spiritual soldiers, why are we still sitting down in church worrying only about ourselves and licking each other’s wounds?” “Why don’t we get up our buttocks, pick up our rifle which is the word of God, and we head out to the trenches to reinforce the soldiers who are still in the fight?” asks the pastor.

“Hallelujah!” shouts the church in unison.

“Alright pastor!” shouts a young man from the audience.

“We must go out into the world and preach the message of salvation of the soul to every living person.” “I must tell you something, the most important mission our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ gave us was to reach out to those in need and bring the message of salvation to every corner of the Earth.” “We have to love each other, but especially those who have not confessed their sins in front of the cross.” “As you all know, there is nothing more important in this Earth than to secure a place in the New Jerusalem; the place that our Savior has prepared for us and that soon we will see with our own eyes.” “But while we are still on this Earth, we must reach out to those who have not met Jesus Christ as their Savior.” “We must understand that we are soldiers fighting a war.” “We are not sick people anymore; the Lord has anointed our wounds with wine and new oil.” “Let us do our part!” “Amen,” says Pastor Vega.

The congregation agrees with their pastor and thanks Jesus the Son of God for the message.

“Hallelujah, Christ is the Lord!”

“Jesus is coming back for his church!”

“Thank you Jesus for your sacrifice; I will never forget it!” says the 120 year old woman.

Alberto can see tears of joy running down the face of many of the church members, including John, Luke, Mark, and Mathew who are sitting next to him. As the music ministry climbs back up the side steps that lead to the Holy of Holies, Alberto can see Patricia Nava wiping the tears from her hazel eyes. His heart feels warm just by looking at her, and somehow he feels that this day was written in his destiny way before he was born. The music ministry begins playing a worship song that pierces Alberto’s soul and spirit:

Put your troubles in my hand, I am
 Leave your sorrow far away, I am
 Take your cross and follow me
 Put your troubled sight on me
 Come with me I’ll take you home, I am
 Peace I freely give to you, I am
 Everlasting love and peace, I am
 I will hold you through the storm
 You will never have to mourn
 Say my name and I’ll be there, I am

Pastor Elias Vega is singing together with the music ministry. It is a certain fact that he does not belong in any musical group, but he truly sings from his heart and when you do it for

the Lord the intolerable becomes tolerable. While the music ministry plays the worship song, Pastor Elias Vega asks the question that will change Alberto's life forever:

“Does anybody would like to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?” “The Lord has made this moment just for you, so don't let it go.” “If anyone in here has not had a personal encounter with the Father, now is the time to receive salvation,” asks Elias Vega.

The congregation knows that during the call for salvation they must bow their heads and pray to God so His spirit can touch the souls of those who have not received salvation yet. Without saying any words, John, Luke, Mathew, and Mark pray for their friend Alberto. They can feel that the Holy Spirit is touching the soul of Alberto and is calling him into holiness.

Even though Pastor Vega has offered the opportunity to be saved to everybody in the congregation, Alberto feels as if the question has been directed only to him. The desire to have everlasting life grows stronger as every second passes by, but Alberto knows that this is the point of no return, that once he gives his life to the living Christ he will never be able to return to his old life.

“Alberto, would you like to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and savior?” asks Luke.

“Yes,” replies Alberto.

“I am very happy for you Alberto,” says Mathew.

“John, can you take Alberto to the Holy of Holies so the pastor can pray for him and help him confess his sins?” asks Mark.

“Come with me Alberto, I'll take to Pastor Vega,” says John.

Together with Alberto a group of nineteen other people walks toward the Holy of Holies to receive everlasting salvation. The group consists of widows, prostitutes, professionals, thieves, students, musicians, war veterans, and farmers who have decided to get a fresh start in life.

“You are about to receive the Lord into your hearts.” “But before you experience salvation, you must repeat these words after me.” “Heavenly Father, I come to you today to confess my sins and to implore your forgiveness.” “I believe that you are a merciful God that can openly see the desire of my heart to serve you.” “I believe that you sent your son Jesus Christ to die in the cross for the redemption of my sins.” “I believe that on the third day after his death your Holy Spirit resurrected Jesus Christ and eternally defeated the grave.” “I ask you to come into my life, and stay with me until the day your son Jesus Christ returns for me.” “Amen,” says Elias Vega.

“Amen,” says Alberto as well as the other nineteen people.

“You may return to your seats now.” “I would like the church to welcome our new brothers and sisters with a big round of applause.” “For those of you who have accepted the Lord as your savior, I welcome you to continue visiting our church in order to learn about Christianity,” says Pastor Vega with great joy for the new souls that are now part of God’s army.

Alberto and John are back on their respective places and are waiting for Pastor Vega to continue with the weekly announcements and then the closure of the service. But what no one knows is that the service will last longer than usual and one person will soon die inside the church before the service is over.

As Pastor Vega reads the weekly announcements to the congregation that sits quietly over the wooden pews, he can feel in his spirit that something that is not supposed to happen is happening. His body can feel cold and hot at the same time. Cold chills run up and down his spinal cord as a premonition of what is about to happen.

“Knock, knock, knock,” loudly sounds the main doors of the church.

Immediately, the double doors of the main entrance are forcefully opened, slamming the concrete walls that anchor them. An eight feet tall demon enters the church without an invitation and walks toward Pastor Vega. Alberto can see that the demon's skin is covered in brown hair similar to a full grown massive bull. The legs are long and have oversized hoofs that make a loud clacking sound as he steps over the ceramic tile and walks toward Pastor Vega. Its head resembles the one of mad bull ready to charge at a matador. A thick black smoke comes out of the beast's nostrils every time it exhales, and a pair of goat-like horns protrudes from the large head of the evil entity giving it an unholy appearance. The eyes are crimson red and glow like the fire from hell glows over the souls of the condemned. Middle point between the main entrance door and Pastor Vega, the damned creature extends a pair of humongous bat-like black feathery wings. It happens so fast that Alberto is unable to follow the ends that now touch the side walls of the building.

“Stop right there, demon!” “You are not invited in the house of the Lord.” “But before you say anything, tell me what is your name and why have you come here,” says Pastor Vega.

“My name is Thoros, and I'm here to deliver a message,” says the creature with the tiniest voice Alberto has ever heard.

As soon as the demon finishes stating his name everybody in the congregation laughs so abruptly that they cannot stop for an extended period of five minutes. The voice of Thoros is so squeaky that even Pastor Vega in all of his spiritual seriousness finds it impossible not to laugh at him. While Alberto laughs at Thoros's voice, he briefly stares at Patricia Nava and admires her natural beauty. This time Patty notices that Alberto is looking at her and she not only smiles back at him, but she waves her delicate hand at him and tells him: “welcome to church.” Even though Alberto could not hear her words, he was able to read her lips and did not miss the message.

“Alright church, you must stop your laughter now,” says Pastor Vega.

The silence in the church becomes ominous after the church members slowly come to their rational senses.

“State your business and make if fast Thoros,” says Pastor Vega.

“I am here to close a deal that was made exactly one hundred years ago,” says the demon with a high pitch squeal.

As soon as the demon expresses his intentions the church body is reminded of the squeaky voice and chuckles in unison, but this time no laughter comes out of their mouths since Pastor Vega gives them a look in which he commands them not to laugh at the demon any more.

“I am not sure to understand you demon, you must talk clearly now even though that might be difficult for you to accomplish,” says Elias Vega.

“One hundred springs ago, in the year in which seventeen percent of the planets rain moved against gravity and created cylindrical shaped clouds, a person that sits amongst you made a pact with my boss,” says Thoros.

From thin air, the horned creature materializes a papyrus paper scroll and unrolls it in front of the congregation. Attached to the ends of the binding contract is a set of carved wooden rollers that serve as the point of contact between the demons hands and the scroll. Once the papyrus is completely unrolled the demon delivers the message.

“The pact reads as follows: On the third day, of the third month, on the year in which cylindrical shaped clouds formed in the sky, a blood pact is being made between Edelmira Morales and the fallen creature that now lives at the bottom of the abyss whose name is the Lord of Evil. It is granted to Edelmira Morales her desire to live to the age of one hundred years past the twenty years she has today. The guarantee of one hundred more years cannot be exceeded by

a single day. In addition, Edelmira Morales will become the most famous adult film actress in the history of the entire planet. As part of the pornography career, it is granted to Edelmira Morales her desire to be filmed having an orgy with one hundred different men during a one day period. The recording of this orgy will be kept in the annals of the adult film industry as the ultimate guide to group sex and will be translated to all the different dialects and languages around the world. Finally, on the day of her death, Edelmira's body will be kept at the entrance of the gates of hell as a symbol for those who have made a pact with the Evil One and have received everything that was promised to them," reads Thoros.

As soon as the demon finishes reading the script, he raises the papyrus scroll with his hair covered arms. The massive dark wings are tucked on his back, ready to be used at moment's notice. With the scroll in hand, the demon turns around in order to show everyone in the congregation that the scroll holds inside a legitimate pact of blood.

"As you can see, the pact was sealed with the blood of Edelmira Morales on the day herself and the one who sends me agreed upon it." "You will also agree with me that a blood pact cannot be dissipated under any circumstances," says the demon with his familiar squeak.

The congregation is waiting to see the reply of the most beloved elder of the church; Ms. Morales. Alberto does not know who Ms. Morales really is, but he can see a very old lady on the left side of the nave grabbing her wooden cane and getting up to a stand. Even at this very old age, one hundred and twenty years to be exact, Alberto can see that the old lady must have been a gorgeous woman at the time she had spilled her blood over that papyrus scroll. She has dark skin, big honey eyes, a perfect smile, and a curvaceous body that still turns heads around after being on this Earth for more than a century.

"Ms. Morales, do you have anything to reply to this creature?" asks Pastor Vega.

“As a matter of fact, I do my beloved pastor,” replies Ms. Morales.

“Everything this demon has said is completely true. On a day like today, while the cylindrical clouds hovered over my head, I made a blood pact with the Evil One. At that very young age, I wanted to experience the maximum level of pleasure any living woman could endure. I wanted to have sex with one hundred different men and have one hundred orgasms within the same day, and I did. I wanted to live for one hundred more years in order to continue experiencing all the pleasures that my human flesh desired. I figured that if I could get paid for doing what I enjoyed the most in this world, which is having sex, I could have a perfect life that is full of pleasure and monetary joy. But the Evil One can only take you into a path that appears to be good, but at the end it is path of destruction and eternal damnation. I set out on a mission to live for One Hundred Years of Solitude,” says Ms. Morales.

“I have come for your body Ms. Morales, it is time to die,” says the demon.

“Wait a moment demon, you cannot come to the house of the Lord and take anybody at your own will; is there anything we can do to annul this contract?” asks Pastor Vega.

“As I told you earlier, a blood pact cannot be abolished,” replies Thoros.

“Don’t worry about me my good pastor, you do not have to intervene on my behalf anymore,” says Ms. Morales.

“Are you ready to go?” asks Thoros.

“Yes demon, I am ready to, but first, I have to make a small prayer. So just stand in there for a minute, I will be done soon,” says the one hundred and twenty year old woman.

“Alright church, for this one minute, I want everybody to pray with our elder,” says Pastor Vega.

The church body has their heads vowed and are praying to God Almighty. This is Alberto's third prayer since he has been at the service. This time Alberto is praying for two very important things, first, that God can provide some type of assistance to the old lady, and second, that he gets a chance to meet the beautiful chorister that has smiled at him in several occasions throughout the service. The sixty seconds of prayer have now culminated. The entire church body has asked the Lord to protect and safeguard the elder that they have come to love for so many years. Mathew, John, Luke, and Mark have decided to continue praying as they think it is necessary. All heads are looking at Ms. Morales as she slowly walks towards the front of the demon and stands firmly in front of him.

"I must tell you something demon that I am very sure your boss is not going to like. I perfectly understand that we have a pact, but I have made a new pact based on a pact much older than the pact that I made with the Evil One. Once I discovered that I was in route to live for One Hundred Years of Solitude, I decided to give my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. When I met Jesus Christ, He told me that all my sin was forgiven, and that I was to start a new life under His guidance and protection. Two thousand years ago the Lamb without sin was slaughtered in Mount Calvary for the redemption of the sins of everyone on this Earth. The blood that was spilled down the cross established a pact that supersedes any other pact. As you can see, the pact that I made with the God of the Armies of Heaven happened before I made a pact with your boss, so you will not be taking my body to the gates of hell today," says Ms. Morales.

"I disagree with you old lady, now you must come with me and stop wasting my time," says the demon.

The demon is about to walk towards the century old lady. In his dark mind, he knows that he must return to hell with the body of the ancient woman if he does not want his boss to get upset at him.

“Stop right there demon!” shouts an illuminated giant with an unsheathed sword standing at the main entrance of the church.

Alberto can see on the face of Ms. Morales that she has peace within herself. But he can also sense in his spirit that this is the first and last time that he is going to see this woman.

“Once again demon, I keep on forgetting things; it must be because of my old age. A moment ago I made a special prayer to God. Since God has been aware of this pact from the moment He became my savior, and he has known that his archenemy was going to come for me one day, he gave me a special prayer written on an emerald stone and told me not to read it until the day it is needed. I have carried this emerald in my pocket for a very long time, and today I finally read the prayer. And in case you haven’t noticed, Gabriel, the archangel is standing at the entrance of the church. So I guess that I won’t be going with you after all and I hereby declare our deal a forfeit,” says Ms. Morales.

Before the demon can say anything, the archangel moves so fast that no human eye can follow him. Ms. Morales can catch a small glimpse in the face of the demon that tells her that the evil creature knows that his time on this world is coming to end. But not only the end of his evil deeds is about to culminate, she knows that Gabriel is known for slashing demons with a single painful stroke; and this demon is going to get the worst of it.

Alberto can hear a “swoosh” sound bouncing on the walls of the holy church. Since Mathew, Luke, John, and Mark are still praying with their heads vowed he has a larger field of vision. In front of the one hundred and twenty year old woman lies the body of the evil creature

comprised of two large pieces. The smallest piece is composed by the head with the goat like horns and half of the torso, while the biggest part of what is left of Thoros has the hooped legs and the other half of the torso. Alberto notices that the beast's eyes no longer have the crimson red they had a moment ago and that now they look like gray pieces of coal that will never be able to burn again.

“Do you know the reason why there is no blood on the floor?” “I would have thought that a demon this size should have at least four hundred gallons of blood flowing through his veins,” asks Alberto.

“I do not know Alberto, but I will guess that since demons betrayed God at some point and time, then God took out their blood since blood is a symbol of life; and demons represent the complete opposite of life,” replies Luke.

“That makes sense Luke, thanks,” says Alberto.

Next to motionless body of Thoros is the archangel Gabriel, the angel who holds the heavenly record for having killed or wounded more demons in battle. Gabriel is a nine foot giant that dresses in white linen clothes. The clothes have long sleeves that cover half of the length of the hand leaving only his fingers to be exposed to the human eye. On his feet he uses a pair of sandals similar to the ones Jesus Christ wore during his travels over Middle Eastern deserts. His skin is white, but he has a tan that suggests that often in his journeys he is bathed by the stars of the Milky Way. Starting over the shoulder and all the way down across his chest, the archangel has a leather belt that he received from the Father himself as a symbol for being a soldier at war. The face of the archangel has both a distinctive angelical beauty and the seriousness of being an emissary of the Almighty. The small amber brown eyes and brunette long hair fulfill the self prophesy that all angels are gorgeous creatures.

With a firm grip, both of Gabriel's hands hold a mighty sword with a blade that is five feet in length. The sword is made out of a combination of Damascus steel, carbon steel, and titanium, and it is the most awesome sword Alberto has considered a complete work of craftsmanship in his entire life. The hilt has a pommel that resembles the head of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The grip is made out of lamb skin; a crest of the power of sacrifice. Separating the hilt and the blade is the cross guard, a perfect example of that great chasm that divides Hades from Abrahams side. The blade of the sword is slim and long with a slight curvature that increases as it moves to the point. The double edges are so sharp that they can cut through any known material, including squeaky voiced demons without ever losing their perfect sharpness. The sides of the blade have very distinctive patterns that are the result of the Damascus steel. The patterns on the right side of the blade has pictorials of some of the mayor events that have established the relationship between God and man: the creation of the Earth during the sixth day period in which man was given the right to rule over the beasts of the planet, the flood drowning the giants and the people who decided to ignore the warnings of Noah for one hundred and twenty years, a baby floating down the Nile river in a fragile basket, the wars between king David and the Philistines, the prophet of the Lord delivering a message in order to rid himself of the blood, the birth, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Christ, the apostles delivering the news of salvation in every corner of the Earth, and a picture of the future day in which Jesus Christ is in the clouds of the heavens calling out his people to enter into eternal salvation at his side while heavenly trumpets are heard at the four corners of the land.

In contrast to the beautiful images that feel vivid to anybody that observes the right side of the blade, the other side does not have any images at all. In contrast, it is completely covered with the archangels favorite texts from the bible; one text per every chapter. The interesting part

about it is that only the book, chapter, and verse are written. It is up to anybody who has seen this sword to find the good book and search what the written word is. Starting at the point of the blade, the blade reads: Genesis 1.1, Exodus 6.1, Leviticus 26.1, Numbers 5.6, Deuteronomy 20.1, Joshua 1.5, Judges 15.16, Ruth 1.16, I Samuel 17.45, II Samuel 7.22, I Kings 9.57, II Kings 23.3, I Chronicles 17.19, II Chronicles 20.22, Ezra 7.27, Nehemiah 9.32, Esther 8.6, Job 1.8, Psalm 117.2, Proverbs 5.21, Ecclesiastes 2.11, Song of Songs 7.1, Isaiah 1.16, Jeremiah 3.14, Lamentations 2.12, Ezekiel 2.22, Daniel 3.25, Hosea 14.2, Joel 2.13, Amos 7.4, Obadiah 1.15, Jonah 1.17, Micah 7.17, Habakkuk 3.2, Zephaniah 1.2, Haggai 2.6, Zechariah 10.2, Malachi 3.1, Mathew 1.23, Mark 6.24, Luke 23.33, John 20.1, Acts 2.4, Romans 1.17, I Corinthians 6.13, II Corinthians 6.1, Galatians 5.13, Ephesians 5.8, Philippians 4.13, Colossians 3.21, I Thessalonians 3.13, II Thessalonians 2.3, I Timothy 4.12, II Timothy 4.7, Titus 3.5, Hebrews 5.9, James 5.7, I Peter 2.7, II Peter 2.7, I John 4.2, II John 1.9, III John 1.4, Jude 1.18, Revelation 1.7, Amen.

“What do we do now Ms. Morales?” asks Pastor Vega.

“I don’t know my beloved pastor, but I’m sure the archangel is about to tell me,” replies Ms. Morales in a soft and calm voice.

“Ms. Morales, my time is very limited, so I will be brief.” “I am here on behalf of God the Father whom you called just minutes ago.” “As you already know, it is inevitable for you to stay alive past this night, so you will not leave this service alive.” “The good news is that your soul is saved, and your body will not be going to the gates of hell to be displayed as a trophy.” “There is salvation for all of those who want it, but it must be asked for before the Sacrificed Lamb returns to this Earth,” says the archangel with emphatic authority.

“I have walked the narrow path my dear Gabriel, I am ready to rest in the hands of my Lord Jesus Christ.” “Thank you dear Lord for sending your guardian angel to protect me on this day, Amen.” “If you all excuse me, I am going to go back to my corner and sit for a second.” “Good bye Gabriel, good bye pastor, good bye my children; may the Lord bless you always,” says Ms. Morales as she slowly walks towards her seat.

Great carefulness is used by Gabriel as he sheathes his powerful sword back into the white leather scabbard. With his right hand he raises the lifeless left leg of the demon that used to be called Thoros, while the other hand has a firm grip on one of the goat like horns. As Gabriel walks towards the entrance of the church with the two body pieces of the unholy creature, he turns around and says: “Pastor Vega even anointed people like you can fall from grace if they do not live a life in complete sanctity.” “Do not let the enemy twist your mind.”

“I won’t Gabriel, I won’t,” replies the pastor.

“Are you guys coming, or do you choose to stay a little longer?” asks Gabriel.

“I think we are going with you,” says Luke.

“Alberto, we won’t be giving you a ride back today since our mission on this world is complete.” “But we want you to know that before we picked you up today for the service we gave our good friend Patricia Nava a phone call and she will be driving you home tonight,” says John.

“Nice to meet you Alberto, we’ll see you later,” says Mathew.

“Alright Alberto, do not forget that nothing in this world is more precious than the salvation you just received.” “Serve the Lord with all your might and all your strength,” says Mark.

Standing at the front of the church is John, Mark, Mathew, Luke, Gabriel, and the lifeless body of the demon Thoros. The entire congregation is looking at them and waves their friends good bye.

“May the peace of God be with you always, shalom,” says Gabriel as he and the gospels fly towards the infinite sky.

“Alright church, please stand in order to be dismissed,” says Pastor Vega.

All the breathing bodies are standing and ready to pray with the exception of Ms. Morales.

“Father, we thank you for this service on this beautiful night.” “Please take us to our homes and protect us every day of our lives, Amen,” says Pastor Vega.

The lifeless body of Ms. Morales is being carried outside by the youth of the church. The body will be taken to The Stones Funeral Home in order to be mummified and placed at the front entrance of the Mayor’s office. Since Ms. Morales lived to one hundred and twenty years, she is well known by everybody in the City of the Stones and her body will serve as an inspiring monument of love, repentance, and dedication to God and the community.

Prayer of the Emerald Stone

Dear God, please send your angel to protect me.

As you know, I am already one hundred and twenty years old
and there is someone here trying to take me to hell.

Please don’t let that happen, Amen.

Song IV: The Plague

This is the year in which a total solar eclipse lasted for an entire week. Scientists have concluded that the reason why the eclipse lasted for such a long period of time is related to the magnetic forces that constantly repel and attract between the Moon and the Earth. Initial speculations have hypothesized that at the exact moment in which the Sun, the Moon, and the Earth became perfectly aligned, the magnetic forces of the three objects were exponentially increased by an anomaly that was created at the core of the Moon. Since the Moon is situated between the Sun and the Earth during a solar eclipse, scientists believe that the Moon served as a “magnetic locking mechanism” withholding the rotation of the celestial bodies. This anomaly allowed the three objects to remain motionless for a period of seven days and since the shadow of the Moon was casted over the Caribbean Island at that moment, the people of the island experienced an event that no other group of people in the planet has experienced before.

But the total eclipse of the sun is not the only unusual event that has taken place this year. During the month of September, the month in which lover’s dreams often become a reality, two separate hurricanes arrived at the shores of the island at the exact same time. One of the behemoths remained stationed on the northern shore of the island, while the other one hovered directly below it on the southern coastal region. The hurricanes were considered “thunders of god” by the street indigents that beg for goods at the city’s plaza and by meteorologists as well. Both of the low pressures reached speeds above two hundred miles per hour, and the residents of the Caribbean Island were on high alert due to the upcoming inclement weather. After a period of three days, the northern hurricane lost its intensity, was downgraded to a tropical storm, and completely dissipated. As soon as this happened, the southern low pressure followed the exact same steps of the northern hurricane and all of its raging power was lost forever. After the

incident concluded, the seas returned to a state of sublime calm and eternal peace. At that moment, the National Weather Center of the Caribbean Island cancelled all of the alerts on catastrophic winds and notified the islanders that they could return to their busy and monotonous lives again.

A week after the hurricanes dissipated, an article found in the Bright Star, a local newspaper, announced the intentions of the Space Aeronautics Agency from the Big Island to send a group of astronauts to the Moon in order to study the anomalies that occurred during the total solar eclipse. The article also stated that recruitment and training of astronauts will begin immediately since they fear that similar events may take place in the future and they wish to avoid further complications.

The night is so dark that even a wolf's mouth would seem brighter than a light beacon guiding the entrance of a crude ship into the bay of the Capital of the Caribbean Island. There is no movement of the wind in any direction, and the leaves of the dark trees remain motionless as if they were scared to move, scared to breathe; scared to exist. Dozens of crickets can be heard spreading inside the somber vegetation that covers the backyard of Bartolo's house. The chirping becomes more intense every minute, but still there is no movement in this nocturnal theater of confusion, darkness, and chaos.

The sky above is as dark as death itself, and even though there are no clouds covering its eternal vastness, the stars of the heaven are not shining down over the City of The Stones tonight. The sky appears to have come to a complete halt in which the planet is no longer rotating around the circumference of the sun. It seems like all life has ceased to exist in the

Caribbean Island, and that somehow it will become a forgotten rock in the middle of the magnitude of the oceans.

A stagnant smell can be perceived in the air, a smell that is not pleasant to any living being or even to an unfriendly spirit searching for a place to dwell. The smell is not as strong as the one a maggot filled dead dog can produce, but it is constant and impossible to forget about. In nights like this people prefer to stay in their houses looking at their television sets and hoping that a comedian will take away their sorrow; that it will transform it into a profound catharsis of hypocrisy and illusion.

In this dark and lonely night a group of friends is sitting in the balcony of the house that belonged to the now deceased grandmother of Bartolo. Joaquin is rocking back and forth the chair that use to hold the old and fragile body of Bartolo's grandmother before her departure from this world. Every time Joaquin's shoes become airborne, the squeaking noise produced by the wooden chair serves as a reminder that everything that once was new must decay in this imperfect world.

Eduardo is playing a melancholic tune with his wooden guitar, a song that enhances the dark influence this night brings to the people of the City of the Stones. While is not a bad song, Eduardo feels awkward while playing this tune since it is uncommon for him to play something other than heavy rock n' roll music. Bartolo is in the kitchen opening a bag of plantain chips and pulling a bottle of coconut soda pop from the refrigerator to offer his friends. He carefully places the ice cubes inside the plastic cups and slowly pours the gaseous drink inside of it. While the coconut soda settles inside the plastic cups, he picks up the bowl full of plantain chips and places them on a tray made out of bamboo.

“So how is this college semester going for you Joaquin?” asks Eduardo as he strums the guitar.

“College really isn’t difficult man, but you really have to study for the science classes because at times they can be tricky.” “I tell you this dude, for most of the classes all I have to do is pay attention to what the professors are talking, but for the math and chemistry classes I really have to go home and hit the books,” replies Joaquin.

“Here’s coconut pop and some chips guys.” “I hope that the bubbly stuff that keeps on coming to the surface can make me feel better since this night is so depressing that I just want to lay down and die,” says Bartolo as he places the tray over a wooden table that sits in the middle of the balcony.

“Have you noticed how everybody is feeling sad and depressed lately?” asks Joaquin.

“Yep, it is so true, I don’t even want to play guitar anymore.” “And as a matter of fact, I am going to put my strings down so I can grab some of those plantain chips before you eat them all,” says Eduardo as he sarcastically looks at his two best friends from the corner of his eye.

“Now this is serious guys, do you think that the solar eclipse that we had a few months ago has something to do with the way we are feeling now?” “I mean, if you think about it, everybody is feeling sadder than usual, people are no longer smiling, and from what other guys are telling me at the university they can’t hardly get any sleep at night or focus in school work.” “I just wish I knew what is going on,” says Joaquin with a saddened expression on his face.

“Eduardo, any luck finding musicians to make that band of yours?” asks Bartolo.

“You know how it goes man, everybody seems to be busy with their own lives and have no real appreciation for the musical arts.” “I few semi-good musicians and singers have come by

the house, but they don't have what it takes to be in the big leagues." "They are not influenced by the right kind of music if you know what I mean," replies Eduardo.

"Don't worry about it man, I think that you are talented enough to play with Tony Joe Superstar; you will make it someday," replies Joaquin as he savors the plantain chips.

"I don't know if you are observing our surrounding guys, but I don't see any cars on the street." "It is Friday night and I don't see any people heading out to the clubs in search of alcohol and phone numbers as it customarily occurs every beginning of the weekend." "There is something elusive in our environment, something elsewhere, an unknown force that is driving away the happiness of the island and is singing us a lullaby of death." "There is a sepulchral anesthetic in the air and I can feel it; I know it surrounds everything and everywhere," says Joaquin with utter seriousness.

"Did you guys hear that a group of astronauts is heading up to space to check out what caused the week long solar eclipse we had a while ago?" says Bartolo.

"Yeah man, I heard that there is some stuff going on up there and if we don't check it out soon things might get worse for us down here," replies Eduardo while holding his faded wooden guitar.

"That might take some time Eduardo because the Space Aeronautics Agency is recruiting and training astronauts at this moment." "Eventually they will go check it out," says Joaquin.

"I am pretty sure that the astronauts will figure it out and everything will get back to normal." "If they don't, this might be the end of the world as we know it," says Bartolo.

"You always think that there is a government conspiracy to destroy the world Bartolo; I am sure that it is all a natural event," says Joaquin.

“No Joaquin, there is nothing natural about this, the government knows something and they are not telling us,” says Bartolo.

“And changing the subject, how is your boxing training going now that you have decided to go professional after losing all your amateur fights?” asks Joaquin.

“You guys want to know something, I have always known that my time as an amateur boxer was just a warm up; I will never lose in the pros,” replies Bartolo.

“Let us know when is your next fight so we can come see you,” says Eduardo.

“Sure, sure, as soon as I know I’ll let you guys know.” “I am also thinking about finding me a manager that will take me to my first championship bout and finally win a world title.”

“After I win the first one, I’ll win a belt in any weight class there is.” “The only thing that slows me down in my boxing career is that I cannot leave my goats and cows by themselves since there’s no one to take care of them during my absence,” says Bartolo.

“Don’t worry about it man, I am sure Joaquin and I can figure something out if you have to travel,” says Eduardo.

“We can always leave enough food and water for your animals and my father can check on them if I ask him,” says Joaquin.

“No worries Bartolo, no worries,” says Eduardo.

As the night moves on the group of friends continues to enjoy the conversation that started many years ago when they used to wait for the bus en route to their elementary school. They still talk about the girls they like, future endeavors, the sadness that fills the very air they are breathing, and reminisce about the days in which innocence was the only reality that existed in their imperfect universe. As the hour hand of the clock moves forward into the unknown, so

does the darkness that falls down on the island resembling the morning dew that bathes the flower gardens of Joaquin's mother's house.

"All right guys, I am going home to try to do some homework, but most likely I will not go to school tomorrow since I just want to lie in bed and take the day off," says Joaquin as he sets the empty cup of soda pop over the fried plantain crumbs.

"I am going to go home and take a shower, and then I am going to dream about playing guitar on stage with Tony Joe Superstar," says Eduardo.

"All right fellows, we'll talk later so we can get together again," says Bartolo as he picks up the tray with empty cups and walks towards the kitchen.

"Take care Bartolo, I'll give you a call tomorrow," says Joaquin.

"Good night Bartolo, let's hope that this sadness is not affecting your cows, because if it does, they won't produce any milk tomorrow morning," says Eduardo as he rests his wooden guitar over the shoulder.

As Joaquin walks toward his parent's house his body struggles to keep a moderate pace. He is breathing heavily and has no desire to continue walking. The sadness he has been feeling all day is taking a heavy toll on his body, but yet he manages to stay in motion. As Joaquin looks toward the dark sky, he notices that it is even darker than how it was before. The crickets continue to chirp in their eternal mating ritual as the dark silhouette of an owl remains motionless on the leafless branch of a termite infested acacia tree.

Out of thin air Plato appears next to Joaquin and circles around him for a few seconds. As usual, he is dressed in his characteristic surfing trunks, flower shirt, and flip flops.

“Joaquin, I have come to warn you about a danger that grows as we speak.” “Dark times have fallen upon you and your people, and what I am about to tell you is of magnanimous importance,” says Plato.

“Go ahead Mr. Plato, I’m all ears,” replies Joaquin.

“I believe that every person in the Caribbean Island has fallen captive to a rare sickness that is known as The Plague,” says Plato.

“Is this plague related to the way everybody has been feeling lately, including me?” asks the tiresome Joaquin.

“Indeed Joaquin you are correct, but that’s not all.” “Once upon a time a total solar eclipse rested its shadow over the ancient City of Knowledge for a period of one hour.” “At that moment the people of the city did not feel any side effects from the eclipse, but several months later they began feeling tired, depressed, and lost the desire to continue living.” “As the strength of The Plague grew stronger my countrymen decided to stay in their homes and avoid contact with society until one night they fell asleep and never woke up again.” “The aftermath of The Plague was solely survived by philosopher, storytellers, and their families.” “As time went on, the survivors were able to rebuild our way of living and slowly the onslaught of that day was partially ignored,” replies Plato.

“This is almost as bad as the time we had to stop the squidtopus,” says Joaquin.

“I think this could be even worse,” replies Plato.

“Is there anything we can do to stop this plague; to make it go away?” “If we don’t do something about it my friends and family are going to disappear forever, and I sure don’t want that.” “Mr. Plato, do you know how exactly the philosophers and storytellers survived this dark sickness?” “Are there any historical documents that could provide us with that answer?” “How

much time do we have before it is too late for the citizens of the Caribbean Island to fall asleep forever?" asks a worrisome Joaquin.

"I am not aware of any special countermeasures, elixirs, or a panacea that was used by the philosophers or storytellers to stop The Plague, but what I can tell you is that I know of a person who might be able to help us," says Plato.

"And who might this person be?" asks Joaquin.

"His name is Tiresias, and he is an old friend of mine." "A long time ago, Tiresias lost his ability to see with his given eyes, but in return he gained the gift of spiritual visions and foresight." "After he died, his ability to foresee the future was greatly increased due to the separation of his true self from his mortal body," says Plato.

"Where can we find this man named Tiresias?" asks Joaquin.

"Tiresias can be found inside the cave of the forgotten winds, the place in which philosophers seek out truth and guidance." "Only one thing you must remember, Tiresias is a man who was also a woman for a period of seven years." "As you speak with him, you might get the feeling that you are talking to a man and woman at the same time; do not let this distract you," says Plato.

"I do not think it will be a problem at all, but if we are to save the Caribbean Island we must hurry Mr. Plato," says Joaquin.

"By the way Joaquin, you and I have known each other for a long time, we have had countless adventures for the past nine years, and I have come to see you as a friend and brother; you may just call me Plato."

"Thanks Mr. Plato," replies Joaquin.

"You missed it Joaquin," says Plato as he chuckles.

“Hold on to my hand Joaquin, we are going to find Tiresias,” says Plato.

Joaquin stands next to the ancient philosopher that is old in wisdom and never ages. In an instant, a slight wind forms around Joaquin and his mysterious friend. As the wind increases in strength and velocity, the once petrified leaves of the motionless trees near Joaquin begin to move in all directions. Plato has surrounded himself and his student in a forceful tornado; a limitless energy force that will serve as a transport to the dwelling place of the only being that is capable of aiding the citizens of the Caribbean Island in this hour of darkness and peril. Instants later the forceful tornado disappears leaving the City of The Stones in the same condition it was before. The leaves on the dark trees are no longer moving, and the dark shadows of the cinder block houses cast their emptiness over the unpaved grounds with their unholy presence. The crickets no longer chirp to the lone night as they have agreed upon withholding their melody until the eye of heaven greets them again; if it ever does.

“Where are we Mr. Plato?” asks Joaquin.

“We have arrived at the eternal dwelling place of my good old friend Tiresias, he should be able to tell us how are we going to save the people of your island Joaquin,” says Plato.

“These winds are too strong Mr. Plato, make sure you hold on to something or you will become the first millenary philosopher to fly as high as the moon,” says Joaquin.

“Don’t worry about my old bones Joaquin, they are doing just fine,” replies Plato.

The winds are moving in an irrational pattern of confusion. Sometimes the air travels from north to east, from the top to the bottom, from south to north, from west to east, from the bottom up, from west to south, and finally it always returns back inside the cave where it originally came from. The short pathway to the entrance is a steep windy climb covered with

large volcanic stones and a thick layer of sharp edged pebbles. The distance from the bottom of the hill to the entrance of the cave is not long, but the fast moving winds make it almost impossible to reach. As they climb the steep rocky hill, Joaquin can't stop thinking about how much he loves his family and friends, and how he must not fail in this endeavor.

“Can you tell why these winds behave in such a strange pattern?” asks Joaquin.

“What we are experiencing is known as ‘the rage’ of the forgotten winds.” “The reason why these winds move in such irregular patterns is because they represent a group of signifiers or thoughts found within the inner self of human unreason.” “The forgotten winds are the actual remnants of thoughts that were found in the unconscious areas of people in the world who have been forgotten by their loved ones.” “These thoughts are constantly searching for a reason to exist, but since they don't have one, they have found a quasi-resting place in this area.” “In very rare occasions these thoughts do find a new host and they become revealed within the broad spectrum of the human psyche, but much carefulness must be used when attempting to anchor them into reason since it can be a difficult challenge,” says Plato.

“But if these thoughts are so close to Tiresias, is he sane enough to be trusted?” asks Joaquin.

“Now you are thinking like a philosopher Joaquin.” “To be honest with you there is no answer to your question.” “It is up to us to make our own determinations about every detail that is placed in front of us in our daily walk through life.” “So Joaquin, from this perspective you should always be critical of everything that is given to you.” “Accept what is right, and decline what is not meant to be accepted under the light of wisdom, faith, and reason,” replies Plato.

Now at the entrance of the cave the roaring presence of the forgotten winds has transformed into a subtle breeze that caresses Joaquin's face. Joaquin can feel how the soles of

his shoes are rapidly fading away under the merciless contact with the needle sharp pebbles that cover the entire ground.

“Joaquin, I will attach the end of this rope around my waist and then I will give you the other end so you can do the same thing.” “Under any circumstances we are to become separated because within the absolute darkness of the cave our souls can get lost forever,” says Plato.

“My eyes can see further than those of an owl under the cover of darkness,” says Joaquin.

“Can your soul keep its candor under the cover of darkness?” “That is the question you must ask yourself,” says Plato.

A small fragment of light is all that is left of the entrance of the cave. The narrow pathway that leads to the dwelling place of Tiresias is completely free of obstacle and Plato does not hesitate in taking advantage of it. As Plato leads the way through the darkness of the cave, Joaquin can see that all around him there is movement, movement that has no name, shapes that have no shape, and forms that have no form. Joaquin tries to determine the source of those weird shapes and forms but is not able to figure it out; all that he knows is that he has entered a place that will make his soul rejoice in pleasure and will make his spirit tremble in conscious fear. There are no remnants of the entrance of the cave of the forgotten winds. Joaquin finds himself attached to a rope that he can no longer see since the presence of light has completely vanished from this ancestral place.

“Tiresias, we have come to seek you out!” says Plato with a loud voice.

In an instant Joaquin can see a fire burning in front of him that was not there a second ago. After spending time in absolute darkness Joaquin’s pupils remain almost close under the effects of tunnel vision. Slowly, the fire starts moving towards the pair of friends tighten up by a

piece of maguey rope. As the fire approaches, Joaquin can see an old and fragile hand holding the wooden torch that fuels the blinding fire.

“Who has entered the cave of the forgotten winds?” asks a voice that is masculine and feminine at the same time.

“It is I my good friend, it is me; Aristocles,” says Plato.

“Plato, Plato, Plato, my friend; it has been so long since we have embraced each other as brothers,” says Tiresias.

“Who is this person that is behind you?” asks Tiresias as he embraces Plato.

“This is my friend Joaquin; he is my disciple from the Caribbean Island,” says Plato.

“Nice to meet you Mr. Tiresias,” says Joaquin.

“I think that you can ask your question now Joaquin,” says Plato.

“Do you remember the time in which a plague descended upon the ancient City of Knowledge and most of the population fell asleep and never woke up?” asks Joaquin.

“Indeed I do Joaquin, at that time only philosophers and storytellers survived the onslaught of the horrible plague.” “But what does that have to do with you Joaquin?” asks Tiresias.

“The same event is happening at this very moment in the Caribbean Island, my home country.” “I am afraid that if I don’t do something about it the people I love the most in this world will disappear forever.” “Can you help Tiresias?” asks Joaquin.

“Of course Joaquin, I can help you.” “If I couldn’t, Plato would have never brought you here,” replies Tiresias.

“So, what must I do?” asks Joaquin with emphatic seriousness.

“You have in front of you a very dangerous problem that is threatening the existence of the people you love.” “Right now you have two choices in front of you, and you alone must decide which one is the most appropriate one,” says Tiresias.

“I am ready Mr. Tiresias, please tell me,” says Joaquin.

“The first choice you have is a very simple one; you are to travel to the highest peak of the central mountains in your home country and there you will find a rare and exquisite flower that grows in a medium size tree with heart-shaped green leaves. The flower itself is large and has red-pinkish petals, and is known as the Maga flower.” “The flower is not hard to find since it produces a subtle aroma that once perceived by your sense of smell your body will begin to relax and your entire self will feel refreshed.” “Once you find the Maga flower you must be very protective of it since the flower is very delicate.” “As soon as you retrieve it from the tree, tear its five petals and carefully place each of them individually inside a coconut shell bowl that you must construct with a handful of rudimentary tools.” “After every petal has been placed inside a bowl, you have to add a special mixture of alcohol and spiritual herbs that you can get from Madam Le Mystique.” “Once you have prepared the five separate potions you have to pour the first one over the waters of the Caribbean Sea, the second one inside a lake, the third one inside a river, the fourth one inside an aquifer, and the fifth one inside an estuary.” “As soon as the five potions evaporate into the atmosphere, they will disperse over the consciousness of men and immediately begin the healing process.” “Sadly, only half of the population of your home island could survive the plague with this choice,” says Tiresias.

“Are you interested in this choice?” asks Tiresias.

“And what is the second choice?” asks Joaquin.

“The second choice will allow you to save everybody in the Caribbean Island including your parents, your friends, and your loved ones, but your chances of success and survival are very small.” “With all frankness you could lose your life, spirit, soul, and body under completely different circumstances,” replies Tiresias.

“I do not think that my life is more important than the lives of the people who have embodied my personal society.” “I will gladly give my life if necessary so I can save the lives of my loved ones, but ultimately that won’t be necessary since I will beat this challenge with ease.” “Just tell me what I have to do so I can get back to my friends and family as soon as possible.” “I don’t need to know what I have to do; I choose the second option,” says Joaquin.

“It will be done according to your word,” says Tiresias.

“Good bye Joaquin, I’ll see you soon...,” says Plato.

Darkness is everything and nothing, and the emptiness that surrounds this cavern is not allegorical; it is all real. The torch that moments ago flared the vastness of the unknown has completely vanished from Joaquin’s pupils and has gone away with its blind master. Joaquin is waiting patiently as he stands over the thorny rocks, waiting to see what will happen, what will be his test, and how is he going to survive what is coming soon. Joaquin waves his left hand in front of his eyes and is unable to see or catch a glimpse of anything. Not one photon of light has escaped from the ancient moon to aid the young philosopher. Five minutes have passed and Joaquin feels as if an entire eternity of loneliness has fallen over him and has burglarized his soul. From invisible, to almost invisible, to negligible, and to dim, a translucent veil falls down from the ceiling of the cave and reaches the floor. As Joaquin’s eyes begin to readjust to the dim light that firmly glows behind the veil, weird shapes and forms cast their shadows over the veil creating a choreographed dance of deceiving destruction.

“I don’t think I’m going to like what’s behind that veil or maybe I will like it too much and then I might lose my focus.” “But what I do know is that I have to see what secret hides behind it,” thinks Joaquin.

Enough of the light that sits behind the veil allows the nineteen year old college sophomore to avoid the stalagmites and thorny rocks that separate him from the veil. As he walks, he can hear faintish sounds that echo throughout the cavern and pierce the sanity of his soul. The sounds resemble those of demons screeching, of people being murdered, of evil entities plotting to destroy the world, of thoughts that have no name, of slaughtering the innocence of children, of punishment and suffering, of pestilence and plague, and of sweet, sweet carnal desire.

“My heart is pounding fast, I have to control myself, I have to keep a clear mind if I am to face this challenge; I must not fail,” thinks Joaquin.

The noises of despair are no longer echoing throughout the cave. The short walk from where Plato and Tiresias departed from Joaquin to the front of the veil has been completed and the young philosopher wonders what type of creatures could have made such horrid and unpredictable noises. Now in front of the veil Joaquin sees that a set of three fires are responsible for the light that has restrained the darkness of the cavern. The weird shapes and forms continue to dance between the veil and the three fires. The cave ceiling is covered in stalactites and giant fruit bats, while the once rocky bottom is layered in guano, crickets, and mud.

“My legs are getting tired, so I better take a sit on this rock while I figure out what am I supposed to do.” “Maybe I should have gone looking for the Maga flower instead of being stranded here,” softly whispers Joaquin.

As Joaquin brainstorms about how is he going to get out of the cave, the veil slowly begins pulling itself up. He jumps away from the rock he is sitting and grabs a pair of stones from the ground in case he needs to defend himself from what possibly made the demonic sounds a few minutes ago. Stones in hand, Joaquin hides behind a giant rock and slowly peeks at the bottom of the veil. To his surprise, he can see the barefooted legs of what appears to be human beings. Then the knees appear to be human, the waists appear to be human, the breasts appear to be human, and finally the heads appear to be human. Once the veil has completely vanished into the ceiling of the cave, a beautiful room is revealed with a gigantic carved wood bed with plush pillows, desert cotton sheets, and a soft mattress. Spread throughout the room are hand carved wooden benches with foot stools, volcanic stone baths, massage beds, and wood tables with countless varieties of perfumes, colognes, and essential oils. But the most beautiful thing Joaquin can see is a group of one hundred perfectly shaped women wearing only a miniscule bikini top and bottom.

“I must be going crazy, because these are the most beautiful women I have ever seen in my life.” “I did not know that so many gorgeous women could have been waiting in this cave all along for me.” “Now I really know what Plato is trying to do, he just wants to reward me for all of those adventures we have had in the past where I have risked my life to help him.” “That old’ rascal knows how to have a good time; Plato is my best friend,” says Joaquin as he let’s go off the stones from his hands and slowly steps away from behind the rock.

As soon the one hundred women see Joaquin they start clapping their hands, screaming in utter cheerfulness, and start jumping with happiness. The beauty of the almost naked women is a sight that makes Joaquin’s body tremble in anxiety and nervousness.

“There he is girls,” says a brunette.

“Yeah, that’s him,” replies a red haired woman.

“He is cuter than I thought he would be,” softly says a black haired woman.

“I am not sharing him with any of you, he is all mine,” says a blond.

In unison, the one hundred women start waiving their soft and delicate hands at him signaling that it is perfectly fine for him to approach them and that in no way they intend to harm him.

“Why don’t you get out of that ugly mud and come here to talk to us,” says a petite beauty.

“We promise we won’t bite, unless you want us to,” says a tall and slender supermodel.

Joaquin crosses the threshold that divides the guano covered mud from paradise. As soon as he enters, the women welcome him and offer to satisfy all of his needs in all imaginable ways.

“We are so happy that you are here Joaquin,” says a red haired woman.

“And how do you know my name?” asks Joaquin.

“Who wouldn’t know your name, you are Joaquin Cantos, aren’t you?” replies a bronze skinned woman.

“Yes ma’am, that is me, Joaquin Cantos; the one and only,” replies Joaquin.

“Why don’t you sit here, get comfortable, and leave the rest to us,” says a green eyed girl.

For the next two hours Joaquin Cantos is treated like a king by the most beautiful servants any kingdom has ever known. First, he is stripped from his dirty clothes and shoes and is bathed in clean waters with fresh cut flowers and relaxing salts while only wearing his white cotton underwear and his necklaces. After a refreshing bath, he is dried by ten of the beautiful girls and dressed in a white cotton robe and pink slippers.

“Now you are going to get a deep tissue massage Joaquin, so just sit back and relax,” says a brown eyed girl.

While Joaquin is getting a massage, the rest of the one hundred women continue to talk about how gorgeous and sexy his visitor is and how much they want to touch his body and pleasure him. The essential oils have created a deep sense of relaxation that the nineteen year old philosopher has never experienced before. He feels renewed, fresh, and invigorated after having being bathed by the relaxing warm waters and massaged by twenty hot bodied women. Joaquin feels like a commanding god on a golden throne being loved by the servant women of his harem.

“How do you feel Joaquin after this massage?” asks the blue eyed masseuse.

“I feel like I’m in heaven, I feel like the world is a perfect place where evil is a rumor no one has ever heard, and I feel like I could stay down here for the rest of my life; but sadly there is something I need to tell you ladies.” “I have thoroughly enjoyed your company on this day, but I must be on my way now.” “It felt good to get bathed and massaged by your soft and delicate hands but I need to get back to a mission I don’t even what is,” says Joaquin.

“Joaquin, we are not done with you.” “Do you see that gigantic bed in the middle of this room?” asks a full bodied goddess.

“Yes I do, it looks very comfortable, but I can’t go to sleep right now; I really must be on my way,” says Joaquin.

“If you want, you can make love to all of us at the same time Joaquin.” “This will be a day you will never forget.” “We promise that you will enjoy every second of it, and for sure we will pleasure you for as long as you want; what do you say?” asks a slender brunette with a sexy tone of voice.

While Joaquin debates in the deepest areas of his heart, his soul, and his spirit the once in a lifetime proposition to lose his virginity with the one hundred women he found in this cavern, the ladies start pouring massage oil over each other and rub it as their bodies embrace in sensual movements.

“Don’t make us wait Joaquin, come make love to us!” says a blond.

“I am yours forever Cantos, take me, take me now!” says a red haired beauty.

“I want you, I need you, don’t make me wait; make me yours,” says an ebony skinned woman.

After a short but yet painful deliberation, Joaquin expresses his true feelings and says: “I am honored by your pleasantries and hospitality, and even though I would love to make love to all of you, I must decline your offer.” “My first reason is because I am on a mission right now, and the second, the most important one, is because I am in love with my girlfriend Maria Elena.” “Maria Elena is head strong sometimes, but she is also the sweetest woman I have ever known in this world.” “If I am to lose my virginity, it would have to be with the woman I love.” “So respectfully, I will decline,” says Joaquin.

Joaquin’s ultimatum is not received with empathy among the almost naked beauties. While the nourishing essential oils endlessly drip from their perfect bodies unto the hand crafted carpet that covers the entire room, the once sensual movements of their hips have been transformed into sad faces that express how much they wanted to make love to the only man alive inside the forgotten cavern. In the blink of an eye the eyes of the one hundred women change from hazel, brown, amber, green, and blue into crimson red. The pearly white smiles that seconds ago fervently wanted to please the nineteen year old islander are now a deadly pair of fangs that protrude eight inches from their dark gums. To add to their ferocity, the nails have

grown so large that the distal edges have firm contact with the carpet from a standing position. Hissing sounds emerge from between the fangs and give Joaquin cold chills all over his spinal cord and his spirit.

“You should have made love to us when you had the chance Joaquin Cantos,” shouts a group of demonic women.

“We were going to love you until the life force within you would succumb, or in other words, we were going to love you until death,” says a fanged woman.

“Isn’t that romantic Joaquin, we were going to love you until death,” says the semi-naked creature.

“Are we ready my sisters?” “It is time to feed, so let’s feed!” says the former supermodel.

“Think Joaquin, think.” “What should I do now?” “Think Joaquin, think.”

The army of darkness is about to tear Joaquin’s flesh with their razor sharp nails and appetite for destruction. In a moment of desperation Joaquin grabs the two stones he previously held as he was hiding behind a large rock. With the speed of a demon the first group of former supermodels launches their attack at Plato’s disciple.

“I cannot fail, the fate of my country is in my hands,” thinks Joaquin.

Hanging from a large stalactite over where Joaquin stands is an unknown person wearing a martial arts uniform with a mask that only reveals the eyes. As soon as the masked warrior let go of the stalactite, she gently glides toward the front of Joaquin with utter tenacity and unsheathes a steel sword that was scabbard on her back. At the exact same time one of the demonized women was about to slash Joaquin’s face, the unknown female moves with godlike speed and severs both hands and head of the ex-blond supermodel.

“Joaquin, are you o.k.?”

“Maria Elena, is that you?” asks Joaquin.

“Yes it is me, who else could have come rescue you dummy?” replies Maria Elena.

“How did you, oh, forget about it, we have a situation here,” says Joaquin.

With an impressive ability Maria Elena gracefully handles the sword with pinpoint accuracy against the ongoing attack of the evil creatures. Similarly, Joaquin uses the two stones he found on the ground and is helping Maria Elena fend them off. But even with Maria Elena’s uncanny abilities, Joaquin knows that she won’t be able to hold the incoming rampage for an extended period of time.

“Joaquin, I don’t have much time to explain what we are about to do so I need you to repeat this Buddhist incantation after me: Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, Nam-Myoho, Renge, Kyo,” says Maria Elena.

“Okay, I got it, Nam-Myoho, Renge, Kyo,” says Joaquin.

Maria Elena and Joaquin are gently pressing their backs against each other in an attempt to protect their rears from the incoming monstrosities. As the pair of young lovers chants the Buddhist prayer, the ferocity of the creatures augments with every second that passes.

“Alright my sisters, playtime is over, we all attack at once.” “We are going to send this clown and his stupid girlfriend to the underworld in more than one thousand pieces.” “Kill them!” “Kill them both and let the people of the Caribbean Island rot forever in the underworld!” says a demonized woman.

Surrounded they are, facing total annihilation by bikinied entities of despair. The darkness of the cave is the darkness that exists in the hearts of the gruesome dwellers; the creatures of the night whose appetite for lust and destruction is never quenched.

“Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo”

“Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo”

From all angles of the circumference of space and time the creatures jump as they deliver their final attack on Joaquin and Maria Elena. Joaquin closes his eyes but continues to chant the prayer that Maria Elena asked him to repeat minutes ago. With the sword raised into the ceiling of the cave, and the thumb of the left hand placed on her sternum with all fingers touching each other while facing up, Maria Elena’s eyes and hair turn fluorescent green and the entire cave is lit. A sudden energy burst irradiates from the center of Maria Elena and it sends the creatures flying across the entire cave.

“How did you do that?” asks an exasperated Joaquin.

“This technique is the called the Palm of Buddha, but you haven’t seen anything yet.”

“Just sit back and observe,” says the energized Maria Elena.

With the simple action of extending the palm of her hand towards and enemy, the technique of the Palm of Buddha releases a powerful energy burst that pulverizes any target. Even though the creatures are back on their feet attempting to attack Joaquin, all of their efforts are futile since Maria Elena is pulverizing them without any hesitation. Only three bikinied creatures are left hiding in a corner of the cave, wishing that they had never encountered the energized girl holding the sword. One of the creatures is about to say a word when the burst of energy sent by Maria Elena reaches her and she disappears into the darkness of the unknown.

Maria Elena’s eyes have return to her natural light brown color, and her hair is dark and silky as the time Joaquin dreamed about her when he was eleven years old.

“Are you o.k. Joaquin?” asks Maria Elena.

“Yes I am fine, but tell me how is possible for you to be in this realm of existence?” asks Joaquin.

“You should have figured it out by now,” replies Maria Elena.

“I see.” “I guess that you already know who is Plato, my philosopher friend,” says Joaquin.

“He came to me before you departed to this realm of existence in order to save our fellow Caribbean Islanders from The Plague.” “He said that you might need my help and gave me the choice to help you or not, and I didn’t hesitate for a second.”

“Thanks Maria Elena,” says Joaquin.

“One more thing Joaquin, if you ever get bathed and massaged by anybody other than your own self, I will apply the palm of Buddha to you and as you already know, it is not going to be very pleasurable.” “Do you understand?” asks Maria Elena.

“Yes Maria Elena, I do understand; I’m sorry.”

“I brought a flashlight Joaquin, let’s get to the entrance of the cavern where Plato is waiting for us to take us back to our realm,” says Maria Elena.

“I should have brought a flashlight, I will never go caving again without one,” says Joaquin.

The darkness of the cavern is interrupted by the light that permeates through its entrance. The forgotten winds restlessly continue their irregular movements of confusion and lost. Plato is still using his tropical shirt, surfing trunks, and white shower shoes, while Tiresias stands next to him in his white toga and leather sandals.

“Is the Caribbean Island safe Mr. Plato?” asks Joaquin.

“Yes Joaquin, thanks to you and Maria Elena The Plague has been lifted away, and it should never return.” “At least for now the dangers are not crawling upon your island; only for now...,” says Plato.

“Is your student ready for The Gathering?” asks Tiresias.

“He is head strong and hard worker, but he is not ready yet,” replies Plato.

“Will he be ready in time?” asks Tiresias.

“Yes he will...”

Song V: Boxing Gloves

The smell of sweat, triumph, defeat, and glory are archived within the walls of this room. Through decades and decades and hundreds of faces, countless stories have been told in this room and their essence still remains until today. Stories about undefeated champions that retained their belts after a gruesome battle, stories about foreign boxers that even though they won the match the judges did not do them justice, stories about upcoming legends that knelled in front of this walls asking God to protect them during the fight, and stories about illegally wrapped hands that sent their opponents on a one way trip to a vicious coma are still alive and growing in this sanctuary. Entire generations of boxers have seen these walls and have smelled the air of this room and have left a small fragment of their uniqueness inside of it. Walls cannot talk or express their inner feelings, but if they could, numberless books could be written in honor of the blood and sweat of the gladiators that continue the proud tradition of professional boxing.

The main event will begin as soon as the final under card bout of the night concludes in which two heavyweight women slug each other for a priced belt known as the princess belt. Whichever warrior emerges victorious will take home the princess belt and a pink leather purse made by the same fashion designer from the Capital City of the Caribbean Island that dresses Samantha every year.

For Bartolo de Jesus it isn't new to be part of the main event of a boxing night. Since he moved away from amateur fighting and became a professional boxer, he has attempted to be crowned a world champion in five different occasions and has been defeated every single time. His first attempt happened at the bantamweight where after a long period of training and preparation he was to face "The Dynamo." Unfortunately for him, "The Dynamo" used his special dynamic upper cut and Bartolo was knocked down on the first round. Even though Bartolo was very disappointed, his two best friends Joaquin and Eduardo encouraged him to continue pursuing his dream of becoming a champion in all the belts from bantamweight to heavyweight (no interest in belts below bantamweight).

Bartolo then faced "The Priest" for the super bantamweight belt and was clearly winning the fight until the "The Priest" said an unknown prayer after the fifth round and Bartolo started having stomach cramps and was unable to leave his corner thus allowing his opponent to win by way of technical knockout. Surprisingly, as soon as the fight was over the cramping stopped and Bartolo felt healthy again.

Bartolo's climb for stardom continued with his third opportunity for a belt at the featherweight when he faced "Mucho Destructo." This time both of Bartolo's wrists fractured since "Mucho Destructo's" head felt like solid rock every time he punched him. Bartolo was unable to continue fighting and was rushed to the hospital for immediate surgery on his wrists. It was later discovered by the Caribbean Island Boxing Commission that "Mucho Destructo" had consumed steroids to make his skull thicker and stronger. Years later "Mucho Destructo" passed away when his skull became brittle and shattered into hundreds of pieces.

Bartolo's fourth championship fight happened against "El Malo," the super featherweight champion of the world. At that time Bartolo was fighting a very technical fight against the

champion, but on the final ten seconds of seventh round “El Malo” intentionally used his elbow and broke Bartolo’s nose. There was so much blood over the canvas that a custodian had to enter the ring and clean up the coagulated mess. Further examination of the nose by the ringside doctor prevented Bartolo to continue with the fight and “El Malo” retained his belt.

But the quest for boxing grandeur did not stop with his previous defeats. The fifth championship fight took place at the lightweight division in an undisclosed location. This time Bartolo faced “The Torpedo” in a battle that will never be forgotten by boxing enthusiasts and gamblers as well. From the first to the twelfth round Bartolo and “The Torpedo” exchanged punches without stopping, getting bruised, or showing signs of fatigue. The champion utilized his famous heat seeking left hook on Bartolo but it had no effect on him whatsoever. Both fighters were in some kind of trance and could not back down from the fight even if requested by the referee. At the end of the twelfth round brawl the fight was dimmed a draw and the champion retained his belt. Once again Bartolo lost an opportunity to become a champion in the contact sport of boxing.

Tonight Bartolo is having his sixth championship fight against an extremely difficult fighter that promises to retain his belt and make Bartolo beg for mercy. The reigning light welterweight is only thirty four and half inches tall and is known as “The Midget.” Bartolo knows that is going to be a difficult fight, but his trainer has assured him that his is in the best possible shape he could be and that no worries should overcome his rational thinking on this night. As Bartolo gets his hands wrapped in preparation for the fight, he begins to wonder if Joaquin and Eduardo have come to see him fight.

“What am I saying, I know they are here; they have never missed any of my professional fights,” thinks Bartolo de Jesus.

The final under card fight has concluded with both heavyweight women being unconscious and receiving oxygen from the paramedics. Since the judges were unable to arrive at a decision due to the lack of stamina from both participants, the princess belt will remain vacant but both boxers will still receive the promised pink purse from the famous fashion designer.

The fight is about to begin and Bartolo has a feeling of anxiety and excitement rushing through his veins. As soon as the Rock & Roll music from Tony Joe Superstar begins to play Bartolo makes his way into the ring accompanied by his trainer, cut man, and complete entourage. The arena is full of people, the cameras are rolling, and Joaquin, Maria Elena, Agustin (who is on military leave), Eduardo, and Alberto (who is also on military leave) are eagerly cheering at their beloved friend from the front row. As “The Midget” enters the ring the crowd goes wild in a rambunctious cheer of excitement and energy. For the last five years, the miniaturized warrior has been the undefeated light welterweight champion of the world and has a spotless record of thirty four wins without loss.

“These are the rules guys: I want a clean fight, everything you say can be used in a court of law (just kidding), protect yourselves at all times, anything below the belt line is considered illegal, respect my commands at all times, if anybody gets knockdown the opponent must go to the white corner, good luck to both of you, and touch gloves,” says the referee.

The bell rings and the fighters move to the center of the ring. Bartolo is thinking that it shouldn't be difficult to beat up a guy that is so little, but he is about to find out that appearances can be a deceiving prejudice. Bartolo throws his left jab and misses, his right hook and misses, and his downer cut and misses every time. On the contrary, his child size opponent has not thrown any punches and completes the first round with a meticulous observation of Bartolo's

speed, stance, power, and pitfalls. Neither one of the fighters touched the body of his opponent during the first round.

“He is quick, I couldn’t land any of my punches on him,” says Bartolo to his corner.

“Don’t worry about it, you are just warming up.” “All you have to do is bend your waist forward so you can be closer to him.” “Once you do that, use a combination of left and right hooks to the head and body.” “He will not be able to escape your power and tenacity.” “Go get this little dwarf thing Bartolo,” says Bartolo’s corner.

Contrary to Bartolo’s corner, the only technical advice “The Midget” receives from his trainer is to destroy the challenger and to not let the fight continue onto to the third round. As soon as the bell rings “The Midget” begins attacking Bartolo with everything he’s got. Bartolo knows that he is getting hit with speed and power, but he does not know where the punches are coming from. Even though he covers his face with his red gloves, the punches continue to rain down on his belly, face, neck, chest, and shoulders. From within the crowd, Joaquin is unable to see who or what is hitting his friend. All he is able to see is a fast moving whirlwind similar to the one Plato uses for transportation spinning out of control in the middle of the ring. Joaquin hopes that his friend is having the best part of the ordeal, but ultimately he is unable to determine what is going on inside the ring. Suddenly, all movement inside the ring stops and Joaquin sees Bartolo lying over the canvas while “The Midget” stands next to him. Immediately the referee starts counting:

“One”

“Two”

“Three”

“Get up Bartolo!” says Joaquin.

“Four”

“Let’s go Bartolo, let’s do it, you have to get back on your feet!” shouts Bartolo’s trainer.

“Five”

“Six”

“You can do it!” screams Eduardo.

“Seven”

“Eight”

“Nine”

“Ten”

Bartolo is unable to stand up during the ten-count and “The Midget” raises his short stumpy arms triumphantly after the final bell is ringed. The ringside doctor rushes to Bartolo’s aid and wakes him up with the help of ammonia sticks and specialty salts. The crowd cheerfully celebrates the victory of the champion as he rightfully retains his precious belt. Now in the middle of the ring, a black corded microphone lowers from the ceiling of the arena unto the hands of the announcer.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have a decision.” “After two grueling rounds of world class boxing, the winner by way of knockout and still the light welterweight champion of the world, ‘The Midget!’ says the announcer.

The deeply bruised and badly battered Bartolo returns to the room that earlier had the hopeful smell of championship and victory. The entire entourage remains quiet as the head trainer removes the gloves from his hands and the wraps from his wrists and knuckles. Minutes earlier Bartolo had visited the arena’s infirmary and received eleven unfortunate stitches over his right eyebrow. While at the infirmary, he noticed one of the heavyweight ladies that participated

in the previous under card bout receiving oxygen through a green plastic mask. As he observed her thick body, he felt warm feelings in his heart and could not help to admire her beauty. As soon as Bartolo showers and changes into clean clothes, he goes back to the infirmary and greets the heavyweight boxer and asks if the pink purse was given to her. She smiles back at him and they immediately become kindled spirits. Little did he know that in the not so far away future he would marry “Matilda” the boxer and they would train together for championship bouts, they would raise their children in the humble arts of cow and goat milking, and they will live until death set them apart in the house Bartolo inherited from his now deceased grandmother.

Song VI: In The Early Morning Rain

It is 1600 hours in this god forsaken country and it seems like the world is coming to an end. The sky is completely covered by a layer of gray clouds that give the eye of the beholder the impression that the sun will never be seen again, that forever it will hide its glorious presence since there is no purpose in shining in such a horrid and distant land. The simple thought of looking at the sky can give the fiercest man a feeling of weakness, sadness, and despair; it can break the spirit of the living as well as the spirit of the undead. Lightning strikes at the near distance, and as it branches down to the Earth it resembles the roots of a recently germinated bean sprout searching for nutrients on lifeless soil. A series of thunder travels through the damped air so fast that when it bounces off the ground the crust of the Earth shakes. The green canopy covers as far as the human eye can see. The last tree in the horizon is the beginning of a new forest, and the last tree of that forest is the beginning of another forest that continues until the end of the world. Everything has been painted green in the Eastern Country; the trees, the

frogs, the lizards, the birds, the grass, the houses, the snakes, and pretty much everything that sits or moves has adapted to the green color of the surround.

There's a village to the south
and a river to the north
and much more can say my mouth
in the early morning rain

At the far distance, small columns of smoke rise into the dreary sky that covers the land. The smoke is coming from rustic villages located throughout the dense vegetation of the jungle. The local villagers have learned to become one with nature in the sense that they have no need to travel to the main cities of the country to purchase food supplies or household goods. Since before puberty, children learn the ways on how to raise chickens, how to cultivate the muddy rice fields, how to hunt spider monkeys, how to fish the wild eastern catfish, how to retrieve honey from a sting ready beehive, and how to raise healthy water buffalo. Since rice is the primary food energy source for the villagers, the entire community works at unison in order to have a prosperous harvest. After the grain is gathered by the able hands of the selfless community, the villagers carefully store the rice in small barns built over the most elevated and protected areas of the grounds. This is done to prevent the rushing waters of torrential floods from reaching the rice and damaging it. For rice to grow abundantly, it must be completely soaked with massive amounts of water for an extended period of four months. This year the cropping of the rice paddies will not be slowed by the absence of cloud juice, on the contrary, it will have more than what Mother Nature normally provides the fields of the Eastern Country since the monsoon season started three weeks earlier and it hasn't stopped raining over the muddy fields or the military outpost known as Camp Lightning. Since the beginning of the season the rain has been

coming down as if a flood has been sent from God Almighty to rid this evil world from sin; to restore it to what He originally had in mind for humanity.

A faint hovering sound alerts a group of parrots that nest over the uppermost canopy of a possible incoming danger. As their wings flutter away in frantic flight, a small picture without any known shape appears at the point where the canopy meets the endless sky. The villagers stop plowing the rice fields for a second to observe the growing shapeless figure that slowly flies toward their humble abode. In case danger is approaching, the villagers must seek refuge inside their fragile hay shacks and subterranean tunnels that connect the entire community. The war has transformed the lives and minds of the village people; peaceful rice farmers who live deep throughout the jungles of the Eastern Country. A few minutes later the picture takes a more realistic shape than before, the hovering sound grows stronger, and the unknown image is revealed. As a farmer looks up to take a closer look at the flying object, a detailed image of a helicopter from the Western military is reflected on his cornea. As the crystal clear picture of the helicopter bounces from his eye, the farmer's ten year old child observes a soldier sitting at the main cargo bay while swiveling a fully automatic machinegun. Even though the farmer does not trust the foreign soldiers, he believes that they would not fire their weapons at innocent civilians so he picks up his plowing hoe with his calloused hands and ignores the presence of the aircraft.

I'm flying on a hellish ride
with my weapon by my side
and grenades that tell no lies
in the early morning rain

It has been three minutes since the military helicopter flew by the village en route to Camp Lighting. The helicopter pilot continuously adjusts his direction as he does not want to fly

over the camouflaged outpost he will be landing shortly. Flying over the jungles of the Eastern Country can challenge the navigational skills of any pilot, and to add a notch to the challenge, the pouring rain that bounces off the windshield limits the visibility of the cockpit and it greatly increases the level of difficulty of this flight. With unsurpassed ability, the helicopter pilot spots the military outpost and circles around it in search of a landing strip.

“This is Sheppard Alpha requesting permission to land, how copy?” says the helicopter pilot.

“We are not expecting an arrival, especially under the current weather conditions, over,” replies the Command Center.

“Roger, roger, we have been previously cleared by Coronel Sanders, over,” says the helicopter pilot.

“Stand by Sheppard Alpha, I will contact the Coronel for verification, over,” replies the Command Center of Camp Lighting.

The Communications Sergeant is about to call his superior officer to verify the claims of the helicopter that hovers over the outpost when the phone next to him starts ringing. The phone is answered with the customary phrase: “Command Center, this line is not secure, please do not discuss any classified material, how may I help you sir/ma’am?”

“This is Coronel Sanders, allow the helicopter to land.”

“Yes Sir,” replies the Communications Sergeant as he hangs up the phone.

The Communications Sergeant picks up the lapel radio and contacts the helicopter:

“Command Center to Sheppard Alpha, you are clear to land; a landing path will be illuminated momentarily, over.”

“Roger out,” replies Sheppard Alpha.

In a regular military post the Command Center is a specialized building full of military gadgets and secrets, but in a combat situation it is nothing more than an oversized green camouflaged tent with a rugged concrete floor. A soldier in full wet weather gear walks outside the Command Center to assist the helicopter in landing. The wind is blowing at approximately thirty miles per hour and blasts the soldier's poncho in every direction possible without mercy. The soldier is determinant on to holding his poncho for he knows that at war staying dry can make the difference between life and death. Over his right shoulder he is carrying an olive green bag full of flares and a couple of flashlights. He takes six flares out of the green bag, pop's them, throws them on the mud, and makes an almost perfect circle over an open field next to the ammunition storage area. The flares burn so brightly that the soldier dares not to look directly into them since his night vision ability can be diminished in case the outpost is attacked by enemy soldiers. The pilot spots the makeshift landing strip and continues to circle the military installation as it is getting ready to approach the landing zone. The ground soldier takes out a set of flashlights from the green bag and signals the helicopter pilot that the landing zone is ready for his arrival. While the helicopter hovers over the landing strip, the ground soldier's poncho almost gets torn as the wind blasted from the helicopter increases in intensity. The helicopter's spotlight shines its light directly over the landing path as the pilot makes a few final adjustments. Finally, Alpha Sheppard skids sink themselves inside the muddy grounds of Camp Lighting during this rainy evening.

The helicopter's rotor is spinning its blades at a slow but steady speed. As the pouring rain touches the blades, a cloud of splashed water forms a mist that engulfs the helicopter. The lever on the sliding door turns counterclockwise, a loud thumping sound reveals that the sliding door is locked on to the latch, and the cabin of Alpha Sheppard is now open. A black leather and

green fabric Jungle Boot is the first thing that can be seen on the opened lateral door of the helicopter's cabin. A soldier steps outside of the comfort of the helicopter's dry cargo area into the muddy terrain and secures the area. The ground soldier in full wet weather gear notices that the commando that just came out of the helicopter is wearing a different type of uniform from what the rest of the infantry soldiers wear. The uniform has a series of patterns with three distinctive colors; brown, beige, and dark green. The patterns on the weird style uniform resemble that of an aerial photography taken over a jungle at five thousand feet above the ground. The commando is wearing a brown beret sloped towards the right side of the temple. On the right sleeve of the uniform there is a black patch with an embroidered picture of a sheep's head. The upper part of the patch has embroidered olive green letters that read: "The Lord is my Sheppard, Psalm 23." A medium size rucksack is snugly worn on his back, and an M20 assault rifle with a digitalized scope is locked and loaded and ready to perform if necessary. With a specialized signal, the commando notifies the pilot that the perimeter has been secured and the rest of the soldiers step outside of the helicopter; eleven more to be exact. The 12th man team is now on the ground and moving away from the helicopter. The rain continues to come down relentlessly. As soon as the Special Forces team moves away from the helicopter, the pilot waves his comrades good bye and powers up the turbine engine as to generate lift and thrust. A few seconds later, the olive green helicopter is airborne again and begins the voyage back to the Capital City of the Eastern Country.

My platoon is always ready
and all bayonets are sharp
but our boots won't have no shine
in the early morning rain

The ground soldier waves his left hand at the leader of the Special Forces Team and asks him to approach him.

“My name Specialist Scott, I will take you now to the Command Center.”

“Thank you Specialist, my name is Supreme Sergeant Agustin Cantos.”

“Nice to meet you Supreme Sergeant,” replies Specialist Scott.

“I would like to get my men out of the rain and I’m pretty sure you would like that as well,” says Supreme Sergeant Cantos.

“Yes, that would be nice, follow me Supreme Sergeant Cantos.”

The walk to the Command Center is not very long since Camp Lightening is a very small outpost that consists of a Detachment of Cooks, Combat Medics, Quartermasters, a Combat Engineer Platoon, an Artillery Battery, and an Infantry Battalion. It was originally designed to house only Search and Destroy Infantry units but casualties amounted heavily at the beginning of the war without the assistance of overhead fire support. As a result, Higher Command decided that an Artillery Battery was necessary to support the ground troops and one was deployed to the outpost six months ago from Headquarters.

The ground soldier opens the olive green vinyl door of the tent and allows the Special Forces team to get out of the rain. Inside the Command Center the ceiling lights are red and dim since bright incandescent lighting can produce a blinding effect on a soldier’s eye. Supreme Sergeant Cantos can see the silhouette of Coronel Sanders standing on the opposite corner of the Command Center.

“Alright guys put down your gear and wait here until I report to the Commanding Officer,” says Supreme Sergeant Cantos.

As Coronel Sanders walk towards the Special Forces team his silhouette changes into a man wearing a white suit, black bow, white boots, and black reading glasses. When the soldiers look at his face, they notice that his entire facial and scalp hair is white and his skin is pale and healthy. Agustin Cantos walks in front of the Coronel and salutes him by saying: “Operational Detachment Alpha reporting for duty.”

In the early morning rain
with my chicken drum in hand
and my biscuit from a can
in the early morning rain

“Welcome to Camp Lightening, Supreme Sergeant.” “I want you and your team to settle down in the barracks, grab some chow from the mess hall, and to get plenty of rest tonight.” “The mission briefing will take place tomorrow morning here at the Command Center at 0800hrs,” says Coronel Sanders.

“Thank you Coronel,” replies Supreme Sergeant Cantos.

“By the way Supreme Sergeant, you guys do not need to pull guard duty tonight since our forward observers have not come in contact with enemy troops.” “We’ll let the infantry handle the guard duties,” says Coronel Sanders.

“Yes sir, thank you.” “I’m sure the group will enjoy a full night of rest.”

“We all could use some sleep Supreme Sergeant, as you know, this war is not going to end anytime soon,” says the Coronel.

“Sir, I would like to ask you one question before we part ways for the day,” says Supreme Sergeant Cantos.

“Yes, Supreme Sergeant, go ahead,” replies the Coronel.

“What exactly happened to the group of Intelligence Officers that disappeared in this area about a month ago?” asks Agustin Cantos.

“An investigation is going on right now based on the facts we have been able to gather.” “The only thing we know at this moment is that they were ambushed and killed in a surprise attack.” “Enemy troops are suspected, but we haven’t ruled out other possibilities.” “But whatever hit them, hit them so hard that they never saw it coming.” “One thing is certain, the Intelligence Officers were gathering information about enemy troop movement at a village nearby and did not return to base that night.” “The following day an Infantry Platoon found whatever remained of them scattered near the truck they were traveling in.” “They looked as if they had been blown to pieces, but yet there were no signs of explosives or any type of shrapnel in the immediate vicinity.” “Our boys did not get a chance to shoot back at the stealthy enemy.” “We can only assume that they were blown by an explosive device of some sort, but so far this mystery has been difficult to solve.” “Command Headquarters is analyzing a sample of the flesh from the carnage but the results have not been disclosed yet.” “That is all I know at this time Supreme Sergeant, so be careful out there and protect your men; the jungle is cursed,” replies the Colonel.

“Thank you Colonel for the information, I’ll make sure to pass it down to my team.”

“You’re welcome Supreme Sergeant Cantos, you’re welcome,” says the Colonel.

Sergeant Cantos salutes Colonel Sanders with all the formalities involved in the traditions of military life. As he is about to share with his men the intelligence information he received from the Colonel, he hears a terrifying sound over the Communications Station coming from the pilot of Sheppard Alpha.

“Mayday, mayday, this is Sheppard Alpha, can anybody hear me?” “This is Sheppard Alpha, I am receiving heavy fire, mayday, mayday.” “My rear rotor is losing power, the helicopter is non-responsive, I am going to ditch, mayday, mayday.” “My grid location is 678 123, I repeat, my grid location is 678 123 near Lang Long Ridge.” “Mayday, mayday.....”

The helicopter has now crashed
 and my friend is out of sight
 maybe he'll make to a M.A.S.H.
 in the early morning rain

A long squelch is followed by an utter silence that fills the Command Center with uncertainty. The only thing that can be heard is the roaring thunder that continually shakes the pillars of the Earth. A flash of light illuminates the whole room in just an instant, and then the room goes back to the saddened dimmed lightening. The thunder that follows the lightening is so powerful that the tables inside the room are stirred with strong raging violence. A few operational manuals and dull pencils fall to the ground as a consequence.

Coronel Sanders approaches the Special Forces team and says: “I am pretty sure that he survived the crash, after all he is one of you guys.” “I will contact Headquarters Command to make them aware of the incident and request a rescue team to be dispatched immediately to his last grid location.” “I do not want you to attempt a rescue tonight; I want you guys to follow my previous orders.” “You have a big day tomorrow, so don't let this incident bother you.”

Under the command of Supreme Sergeant Cantos, the Special Forces team gathers their equipment and follows Specialist Scott to the chow hall. Every soldier is given two pieces of the original recipe chicken, a couple honey butter biscuits, coleslaw, and mashed potatoes with gravy. After they eat, Specialist Scott takes the members of Operational Detachment Alpha to the

barracks and returns to the Command Center. The Barracks are nothing out of the ordinary; olive green foldable cots, a latrine, mosquito nets, sleeping bags, and a few shower heads. Within the silence of their minds, the Special Forces team does not discuss what happened with the helicopter pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Thomas that night. They know that their brother in arms is fully capable to survive in the bush and that there is nothing they can do at the moment. After all, they have been in some of the toughest combat situations any soldier could face and they have always come out alive. It is now 2100 hrs and the soldiers of Operational Detachment Alpha are about to get a full night of sleep. After they say goodnight to each other, they hug their combat ready M20 rifles as if they were a teddy bear in case they need to fight in the middle of the night.

Now I wonder about T (Thomas)
who know where he now could be
in the jungle wonders free
in the early morning rain

The temple of Shin Lam Zen is located about twenty five miles south of Camp Lightening. This temple is a pilgrimage destination for members of the Buddhist religion of the Eastern Country as well as other neighboring countries. The monks that reside in the temple live similar lives to the local farmers as they raise pigs, slaughter chickens, catch fish in the clear waters of the rivers, and plow the muddy rice fields. Since an early age the monks take vows to serve in the monastery with kindness of heart and obedience to the teachings of Buddha. On a daily basis, they practice meditation as they seek the face of Buddha in every aspect of their lives. The monks have learned to be respectful of the world that surrounds them as they seek to

be at unison with nature. They know that to reach the state of nirvana they must achieve unfading peace within their inner selves.

For the past five weeks, the Head Monk, Master Thanh, has dispatched a group of seven monks throughout the villages nearby in order to track down and find a Dark Shaman that has been interrupting the flow of living energy that surrounds the ninth threshold. The monks believe that they are getting closer to the Dark Shaman, but he has proven to be elusive and slippery. The monks of Shin Lam Zen have identified the Dark Shaman as a Voodoo Priest since they continue to find elements of the Afro-Caribbean religion in the areas of the spiritual aftermath. Items such as headless chickens, small dolls with rusty needles puncturing their cloth bodies, and open coconut shells with rotting pieces of meat inside have been found in secluded areas of the jungle by the monks. Every time the monks arrive at a location where the Dark Shaman is presumably pursuing his acts of black Santeria, they only find an abandoned bamboo shack or an improvised hay bed in the middle of the jungle. Master Thanh knows that this threat must be neutralized immediately, if not, he will have to face the spiritual abandonment of the people. A total of nine villagers have now perished under the cruel hand of the Dark Shaman. Today, the father of the latest victim traveled to the temple of Shin Lam Zen to explain the Head Monk the circumstances surrounding the strange assassination of his daughter. He was not able to explain with exactitude what had happened as he could only say that his daughter was found blown to pieces and smeared across the walls and ceiling of her room.

The villager told the Head Monk: “The room was dark, and everybody in the house was asleep.” “I never heard anybody move, talk, or scream during the night.” “Usually if anything moves in or around the house I get out of bed and verify that everything is fine.” “I just didn’t hear anything that night.” “In the morning when I went to my daughter’s room as I normally do,

I found nothing but pieces of flesh and bone everywhere.” “The only way I can describe it is as if she had blown up after swallowing a whole grenade.” “I know that this country is at war, but I never saw or heard any soldiers in the village.” “There were no Eastern (North or South), or Western soldiers near the village, no gunshots, no explosions, and no human tracks.” “Can you tell me how was my DAUGHTER KILLED?”

“I am working on this matter as fast as I can, so please be patient.” “We are getting closer everyday to the person we believe is the assassin of your daughter as well as eight other villagers.” “I promise you, we will find this dark figure, and he will be brought to spiritual justice.” “You must have faith in Lord Buddha as he is holding your spirit with the energy of his wise hand.” “Your daughter is now in the Land of Buddha; she is resting and enjoying the beauty of spiritual transformation.” “Someday she will reincarnate into a new body and will have a place in this realm of life again.” “Understand that she is not dead as death does not exist; she has traveled to a different plane of existence and is learning about her true self,” replies the Head Monk.

“Master, do we have your permission to return to the jungle in search of this Dark Shaman?” asks one monk.

“Not right now,” replies Master Thanh.

“But why master?” asks an impatient monk.

“This Voodoo Priest is killing innocent people, and you don’t want us to return the jungle in search of him?” says a monk.

“He is right master, if we don’t catch him now he will continue to assassinate innocent souls; please let us return to our search,” says a monk.

“It isn’t that I don’t want to let you go my beloved brothers, do not misunderstand me.”

“Right now there is new training I would like to teach you, and after you learn it you should have no problem finding this Dark Shaman.” “It is time for meditation,” replies the Head Monk.

“We will do as you say master,” reply the group of monks.

A great mystery lies ahead
with the shaman casting spells
but his secrets he won’t tell
in the early morning rain

It is 0500 hrs in Camp Lightening. The rain is no longer falling as ferociously as it did yesterday, but a light drizzle continues to fall and the entire perimeter is as muddy as it can be. There is no thunder or lightening in the heavens or on Earth, only the gray skies remain. The sounds of soldiers waking up, the shouting of orders, the smell of scramble eggs and bacon being prepared by the cooks, the sounds of early birds chirping inside the jungle, and the singing of cadences by platoons everywhere on the complex serve as a signal that a new day has arrived over the people living in the Eastern Country.

The Special Forces team composed by Supreme Sergeant Cantos, Sgt. Pascual, Sgt. Doogie, Sgt. Gross, Sgt. Felder, Sgt. Mo, Sgt. Chico, Sgt. Big Dog, Sgt. White, Sgt. Cobra, Sgt. Tang, and Sgt. Grundy is awake, rounding up their gear, and getting ready to receive their orders for the special mission that brought them to the outpost. As they speed lace their jungles boots, they talk about their friend and pilot Chief Warrant Officer Thomas and agree that he is too smart to be dead and hope that a search and rescue mission finds him before the enemy does. But

the subject of conversation is cut short as they subconsciously know that their heads must remain clear and focus on the current mission.

“Hey guys, don’t you love it when we go out on ‘special’ missions and we don’t have to pull guard duty,” says Sgt. Pascual.

“Yea, that’s pretty cool, I used to hate pulling guard duty and kitchen patrol,” says Sgt. Felder.

“You guys are fools, we did not pull guard duty last night because we are in an outpost as visitors, but you know that in the bush if one of us falls asleep the rest of us dies,” says Sgt. Doogie.

“You always want to be the gun ho soldier Doogie, chill out man,” says Sgt. Cobra.

“It’s not that at all, I just couldn’t let you die knowing that you haven’t paid me the twenty bucks you needed to pay that hooker from Capital City,” replies Sgt. Doogie.

“As soon as we get out of the bush I’m going to find me one of those skinny girls from the Capital City and I’m taking her home with me.” “I love those skinny bodies,” says Sgt Gross.

“Big PX!” shouts Sgt. White.

“That’s right baby, big PX!” replies Sgt. Gross.

“Make sure you guys protect yourselves when you come in contact with the ladies.”

“That black syphilis that is walking around has no known cure,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“I heard that if you get it you can’t go home and you have to stay in a secluded island with people who already have the disease,” says Sgt. Tang.

“Estan locos todos,” says Sgt. Mo.

“Si,” replies Sgt. Chico while smiling.

“Our team today is at a 73.62%, but the standards will come up; guaranteed,” says Sgt. Grundy.

“You freak me out with your percentages man,” says Sgt. Big Dog.

“The percentages work for him, and I guess they work for me too since Sgt. Grundy is always right with his numbers,” says Sgt. Felder.

The whole team is laughing raucously at each other’s comments, but especially at Sgt. Cobra’s confession about the hooker from Capital City.

“There is only one spot in the entire world for the best prostitute ever, and it belongs to that last one I had; she’s got it.” “She even told me the magic words after we had sex: ‘G.I. you’re number one, I love you long time,’ and you know there is no faking that.” “You know this man,” says Sgt. Cobra.

“I will meet you guys at the Command Center at 0800hrs.” “Don’t be late guys,” says the older brother of Joaquin Cantos.

The beauty about being a Black Operations Soldier is that every man next to you is like your brother. The use of rank is diminished by a sense of camaraderie that sometimes is difficult to find in Regular Combat Units. But there is one thing that Supreme Sergeant Cantos really loves about the military, and that is the singing of cadences. As he walks under the constant presence of the light drizzle, he notices an Infantry Platoon doing physical training (pt). The sergeant in charge of the formation is singing a cadence he has come to love since before the war started. Somehow this cadence has always been present in his unconscious mind even under the present nameless chaos that has taken control over the minds of the people of the Eastern Country.

In the early morning rain
with my trousers soaked and wet
and the mud up to my waist
in the early morning rain

The sun is not going to come out today and probably it will never come out again, ever. This country has been forgotten by the sun for he hates it. But even though the sun is nowhere to be seen this morning, the night darkness is beginning to dissipate into the inevitable brightness that engulfs the daily routines of diurnal life. Human silhouettes' become real human beings, and night creatures become a distant silhouette that fades away as dreams become a forgotten thought.

“Mud is eternal in this war torn country, and sometimes there is more mud inside the head of the people of the Eastern Country than on the ground.” “First they ask us to come here to fight in the good name of democracy, and when we get here, they look at us as if we are the invaders; it doesn't make sense.” “Anyhow, I better get to the Command Center to see if there has been any news on Chief Warrant Officer Thomas,” thinks Agustin Cantos.

All the members of Operational Detachment Alpha have arrived at the Command Center and are waiting for Colonel Sanders to brief them on the upcoming mission. As they wait, a gregarious feeling of uncertainty constantly resurfaces over their collective mind as they wonder about their friend.

“Did you notice how the eggs they gave us this morning were green?” asks Sgt. Chico.

“CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT, IF WE STAY IN THIS COUNTRY ONE MORE MONTH WE ARE GOING TO TURN GREEN OURSELVES!” says Sgt. Big Dog.

“Just be glad you ate,” says Sgt. Doogie.

“At this moment, our platoon is at a 72.89%,” says Sgt. Grundy.

“We are even lower than at wakeup, what is going on?” replies Sgt. Cobra.

Specialist Scott approaches the team and tells them that the Colonel is waiting for them inside the Conference Room. As the team walks through the rugged concrete floor inside the Command Center en route to the Conference Room, they see the Communications Sergeant sitting at the same desk where Alpha Sheppard gave the final mayday before crash landing in the jungle. Within the team’s communal thought they would like to hear Colonel Sanders tell them that Chief Warrant Officer Thomas was found by an Aerial Force rescue team and is now receiving medical treatment for minor bruises and scratches at a cozy hospital full of beautiful short skirted nurses.

In the early morning rain
I dream of a better place
where my children can be safe
in the early morning rain

The Colonel is standing in front of an old fashion black board and is holding a long skinny stick he commonly uses as a pointer for mission briefings. A long wooden table with a plastic laminate countertop stands in the middle of the room with nineteen chairs tucked under. The tables appear to have been punished by middle school students for twenty years and then sent to Camp Lighting as a gift from the district’s superintendent. The Special Forces Team enters the Conference Room and remains at the position of Parade Rest waiting for Colonel Sanders to give them permission to sit down.

“At ease, take a sit gentleman.” “I am pretty sure that you would like to get an update on Chief Warrant Officer Thomas crash landing before I begin your mission briefing.” “I will now

give you a sit-rep.” “Last night I informed Command Headquarters of the helicopter crash and requested a search and rescue mission.” “Command Headquarters replied by stating that the inclement weather and reduced visibility in the area made it almost impossible to send an aerial search and rescue mission at that moment, instead, and Infantry Platoon that was engaged in the area was given the grid coordinates of the crash and was asked to look for survivors.” “At 2330 hrs, the Infantry Platoon reached the crash site and found the motionless body of the gunner with a bullet through his head.” “The pilot’s body was nowhere to be found so there is a possibility that your teammate is surviving in the jungle or was captured by the enemy.” “All Infantry Units in the vicinity are aware of the missing helicopter pilot and are keeping an eye open for him.” “That is all I have at the moment,” says Coronel Sanders.

“Thank you Coronel Sanders, I am are sure that our pilot is alive and well.” “I know that we will see him soon,” replies Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“Now let’s get back to business.” “Before I begin the mission briefing you must know that the information I am about to disseminate is considered ‘top secret’ and under no circumstances it should be revealed to anyone or anybody.”

“We are accustomed to it,” says Sgt. Pascual.

“Command Headquarters believes that the enemy is mounting a major counteroffensive designed to spearhead its troops into the Capital City of the Eastern Country.” “If the northern troops succeed with this attack, the undermined interim government of the south will inevitably be in danger of getting over run.” “For the northern troops to succeed in this endeavor, they have developed the most advanced Main Battle Tank the world has ever known.”

“What kind of tank?” asks Sgt. Chico.

“Command Headquarters Intelligence believes that the enemy’s new Main Battle Tank utilizes a modern type of camouflage technology that allows the vehicle to completely become invisible.” “At this time we only know of the capabilities of the vehicle, but our scientists have not been able to figure out how does the invisibility technology works.” “Moreover, the tank utilizes photovoltaic panels to harness the energy of the sun and then it stores it in specialized batteries that can stay charged for days without having to be recharged.” “Command Headquarters Intelligence believes that the tank needs only one hour to fully charge all combat systems and then the tank can operate under the stress of combat for days.” “Since electricity is the main source of power of this vehicle, its noise production is drastically reduced to zero decibels.”

“The tank’s stealth is impressive, but does it pack a punch too?” asks Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“Yes it does Sup. Sgt. Cantos, the tank’s fire power is impressive.” “The tank has total of five main guns mounted all around the turret; two parallel 120 mm smoothbores in the front, one short barrel 105 mm on the right side, another short barrel 105 mm on the left side of the turret, and one 105 mm self reactive gun that utilizes a self awareness computer that recognizes enemy vehicles and automatically shoots at them on its own is mounted on the rear.” “The tank utilizes a single automatic loader that can swivel around and load all four main guns within two seconds each,” says Coronel Sanders.

“There has to be a flaw with this tank, how about the armor?” asks Sgt. Mo.

“I am sorry to disappoint you Sgt., but the tank’s armor is just as impressive as the stealth capabilities.” “The tank utilizes an unknown type of armor made out of semi-solid liquid metal that absorbs kinetic energy and reroutes the impacting energy into the ground.” “As a kinetic energy penetrator round comes in contact with the armor plating the molecules found within the

liquid metal bind together and reinforce that impact area and it becomes impenetrable.” “The momentum carried within the impact is then channeled through the tank tracks unto the ground where it disperses.”

The enemy is growing strong
and has a tank that we can't see
I hope they don't shoot at me
in the early morning rain

“In other words this tank is stealthy and almost indestructible,” says Sgt. Gross.

“A tank that can shoot you at point blank range and you would not even know it was there,” says Sgt. Cobra.

“Coronel Sanders, you still haven't told us what is our mission,” asks Agustin Cantos.

“The enemy has developed a single prototype of this ‘Super Tank’ as we call it.” “As we speak, the enemy is building an entire armada of Super Tanks inside an underground secret base and soon they will be operational.” “If the tank becomes operational, the enemy will have a strategic advantage over us and we could lose this war.” “We must not let that happen.” “Your mission is to infiltrate your team inside the secret base, steal the Super Tank, and bring it back to this outpost.” “Once the armored vehicle is here it will be transported to Command Headquarters in an attempt to study its weapons and combat capabilities closer.” “We will use their own technology against them, and we will be victorious; excelsior,” says Coronel Sanders.

“The success probability of this mission without receiving any casualties is 47.89 %,” says Sgt. Grundy.

“As soon as your team has the tank outside of the secret base, you will contact me so I can send the Aerial Force to bomb the facility and forever eliminate this threat.” “You will have

five minutes from the time you call the aerial assault until the bombs begin to fly over the target, so you must be swift,” says Colonel Sanders.

“I can’t wait to see or not see this tank, but that depends if you see it or not see it.” “Do you guys understand?” “Never mind,” says Sgt. Big Dog.

“One last thing Alpha team, the general location of the secret base is pointed in your maps.” “You should not have any problems finding the base once you are in the vicinity.” “Unfortunately for us, Intelligence has not been able to pin point the exact location of the base.” “Do you have any questions for me?” asks Colonel Sanders.

“I think we have all we need Colonel, we’ll take it from here,” says Supreme Sergeant Cantos.

“Your team has the green light, the mission is a go; excelsior,” says Colonel Sanders.

On a mission they will go
to steal the enemy’s ghost
in a base far from the post
in the early morning rain

Since the arrival of the Voodoo Priest in the jungles of the Eastern Country he has been killing innocent people from every way of life, including innocent villagers, Eastern (northern and southern) soldiers, and Western soldiers. He travelled to the Eastern country with the single purpose of murdering people as a path to amplify his powers and fully immerse himself inside the dark waters of Black Santeria. He hopes to become an imperceptible entity that can cross the planes of existence at will, but his dream can only be achieved if his dark soul outgrows his natural body and destroys it as it exits the shell. Because there is a war going on within the

borders of the Eastern country, the Dark Shaman figured out that he could kill at random without getting noticed and the victims would be accounted as fratricide, military miscalculations, or death by enemy fire. Little did he know that his plan was going to be hindered by a group of monks from the temple Shin Lam Zen.

Deep inside the jungle the Dark Shaman is preparing himself to kill, to destroy, and to inflict pain and suffering on this upcoming night. As the rain falls over the dense vegetation, so does the light of the day fades away from the overcastted skies and moves to the west. Inside an improvised bamboo shack, the Voodoo Priest pulls twelve white polished snake vertebrae from a cloth sack that hangs from his girdle and shakes them vigorously with both of his hands. In front of him there is a clear section of freshly stirred ground that will serve as his spiritual tabula rasa. When the snake vertebrae fall to the ground they are immediately surrounded by a black neon light that fills the bamboo shack with the darkness of the grave. As the runes glow, they serve as a spiritual map that allows the Dark Shaman to know the position, current activities, and intentions of every living creature inside the jungle. This ability has allowed him to stay a step ahead of the Buddhist monks that have been tracking him throughout the jungles of the Eastern Country.

“Interesting, I can see a group of Western special soldiers searching for a new weapon the Eastern military has created.” “They are searching for a secret base hidden deep within the jungle and they will certainly find it on this night.” “The stupid Buddhist monks are doing some type of new training with their imbecile master.” “They will never catch me because they are not as powerful as I am.” “I see multiple patrols of soldiers searching each other throughout the jungle in an attempt to win a war that has no purpose.” “Only a handful of them will survive the nameless bullets and bayonets of their enemy.” “I see fathers hiding their children inside tunnels

as a protection from incoming soldiers.” “No one can protect them from death; no one can protect them from me.” “I love destruction, I love filth, I love the smell of rotting bodies being eaten alive by maggots, and I hate everything that represents good for I AM EVIL.” “I will sing to the snakes of the jungle tonight, and they will hear my song, and they will answer me, and they will kill for me, and they will blow innocent people to thousands of pieces, and they will die a painful death in the name of death itself,” says the Dark Shaman.

From the same cloth sack that holds the runes made out of snake vertebrae, the Voodoo Priest pulls out a rustic flute and plays a somber melody to the winds of the jungle. Minutes later, thirteen green jungle vipers enter the bamboo shack and coil themselves around his arms, neck, legs, and body. The pressure exerted by the snakes allows them to enter the body of the Dark Shaman through the flaccid flesh. As the snakes move inside of him, he smiles in utter delight as they become one with one another. Minutes later the snakes exit the body of their dark master through his mouth. As the Dark Shaman vomits the snakes, they fall to the ground with a new dark brown color of skin and covered in body fluids. In the blink of an eye, the Voodoo Priest notices that his runes no longer glow with the darkness of the grave and the bamboo shack is no longer illuminated in black neon light. He is no longer able to forward observe the imminent events that are taking place inside the jungle. He knows that the Buddhist monks must be behind the spiritual blindness that has fallen upon him.

“It does not matter anymore for tonight will be the last night of killing.” “As soon as my snake daughters kill the special soldiers and the Buddhist monks my soul will be strong enough to burst out of this carnal body.” “I will rule over hell itself if I must and there is nothing or no one who can stop me.” “Go my daughters; kill the special soldiers of the Western military, kill the stupid monks, and kill any woman or child who walks near you.” “Kill the dreams of the

young and the memories of the old.” “Pierce their bones with your fangs and let their deaths become a sacrifice to the grave.” “Let the darkness of the sepulcher cover the jungle and wreak havoc over the consciousness of men.” “Go my daughters, and don’t stop until they all blow to one thousand pieces!”

Snakes are waiving left and right
searching for a leg to bite
slowly they approach my site
in the early morning rain

Meanwhile, Sup. Sgt. Cantos and the rest of the Special Forces team are searching for the secret base that holds the invisible Super Tank. Through years of specialized training and combat experience, the soldiers of Operational Detachment Alpha have learned to be ghosts inside the jungle. Every move the soldiers make produces the least amount of noise necessary to complete the mission, words are exchanged with hand signals, bodies are covered in camouflage from head to toe to avoid visual detection, and soldiers refrain from wearing any type of body balms or lotions in order to smell as nature intends. A full moon stands firm over the wet vegetation and saturated grounds covered in humus. The monsoon season is active, and the precipitation continues falling in the form of a light drizzle that covers the jungle and mystifies the ambiance. As the moon light is casted over the dripping wet vegetation, the droplets of water look like minute light bulbs full of energy and life that explode as they touch the ground.

But the wet jungle is not alone on this bright night as a war ravages through it without any signs of slowing down. Sounds of artillery, human suffering, radio communications, aerial bombardments, wounded soldiers in agony, mortars, countless commands, and small arms fire combine to produce a symphony of destruction and hostility. As the soldiers of Operational

Detachment Alpha monitor the radio transmissions of combat units within their vicinity, they feel like abandoning their mission and going to help their comrades that are being slaughtered by enemy soldiers. Unfortunately, they know that they must complete their mission while maintaining their ghostly status unchanged.

“I think I found something covered in vines,” says Sgt. Mo.

“What is it?” asks Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“It’s a sign of some sort,” replies Sgt. Mo.

“Check it out and tell us what it says,” replies Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

As soon as Sgt. Mo removes the vines that cover the sign, a green anole jumps away from the sign, flies over his shoulder, and lands over the leaf covered grounds. The human presence was a stimulus large enough to provoke the involuntary response of the green lizard to take off running and disappear into the dense vegetation. The sign found by Sgt. Mo is painted in green olive latex and has black letters that read: “1.5 kilometers to the secret base.”

We have found the secret sign
that will take us to the base
we must now keep up the pace
in the early morning rain

Without wasting any time, Agustin Cantos and the rest of the Special Forces team heads into the direction where the arrow is pointing to. As the soldiers fast walk the muddy grounds toward the secret base, they thank serendipity for the directions to the targeted area.

“The possibility of us finding the secret base is at a 91.32 %,” says Sgt. Grundy.

“Thanks Sgt. Grundy,” replies Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“I see it guys, the secret base is beyond the tree line that is left and ahead of us,” says Sgt. Chico.

“Good job Sgt. Chico,” says Sgt. Cobra.

“Yeah, good job man,” says the rest of the team as they silently cheer.

The secret base is at the foothills of a granite mountain and is shaped like a giant dome. The dome is made out of reinforced concrete and has grass planted over the entire circumference as camouflage against aerial bombardments. The base has four soldiers on foot roving around the perimeter as well as one soldier outside the main doors.

“This is good news, the secret base does not have much security,” says Sgt. Tang.

“Don’t be so sure Sgt. Tang, maybe the entire beehive is inside or somewhere in the vicinity,” replies Sgt. Doogie.

“Sgt. Doogie is right, we have to be careful,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“Every secret base has a secret entrance on the back, we should go scout the back of the base and find out,” says Sgt. White.

“Good idea Sgt. White, you are a genius,” says Gross.

“Sgt Pascual, Sgt. Cobra, go check if there is a secret door on the back and return as soon as you can,” commands Agustin Cantos.

“The possibility of finding the secret door of the secret base is 68.34 %,” says Sgt. Grundy.

Twenty minutes later Sgt. Pascual and Sgt. Cobra return with good news about finding a secret door. As the scouts explain the location of the door to the rest of the team, Sup. Sgt. Cantos briefly remembers the way his helicopter pilot Chief Warrant Officer Thomas used to

crack jokes on every member of the team and wonders if his friend could have survived the hatred that is going on inside this god forsaken jungle.

“Sgt. Tang, Sgt. White, Sgt. Doogie, and Sgt. Felder will remain here to provide cover and assistance if needed.” “Sgt. Doogie will call Coronel Sanders as soon as we get out of the secret base with the Super Tank to request the Aerial Force to drop down the bombs.” “Make sure that the strike is not called ahead of time,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“Roger that,” replies Sgt. Doogie.

“Sgt. Felder and Sgt. Tang are the best snipers in the team, so I need you guys to shoot anybody that comes after we make our escape,” says Agustin Cantos.

“Roger we got it,” reply Sgt. Felder and Sgt. Tang in unison.

“Sgt. White you are the field surgeon, so hopefully we won’t need you,” says Agustin Cantos.

“Roger,” replies Sgt. White.

“Alright guys, let’s go,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

In another part of jungle Master Thanh rejoices the fact that his seven tracking monks have mastered the technique known as *The Third Eye of Buddha* and are ready to return to the field to catch the dark menace. The technique of *The Third Eye of Buddha* is used to visualize a specific person or action within a broad spectral perspective. In a sense this technique is similar to the runes made out of snake bones used by the Dark Shaman, but it has an added ability; *The Third Eye of Buddha* can be utilized in closed position as a way to blind an enemy’s ability to forward observe. Master Thanh is confident that his students have permanently blinded the Dark Shaman’s ability to foresight and believes that they will have no problem finding him.

“My dear students, you have mastered *The Third Eye of Buddha* technique and have spiritually blinded the dark assassin.” “I want you to use this technique again to find him and bring him to spiritual justice.” “Before you find him, you must first find the snakes he has sent to kill innocent women and children in our beloved country.” “Please be careful my students, this man has grown in strength and power and I fear that his dark motives in our country are almost complete.” “You must be swift, and may the force be with you,” says Master Thanh.

“Before we go master, there is a question I must ask.” “If the Dark Shaman decides not to cooperate, what must we do?” asks a monk.

“We are not in business of taking life my brothers, but if you find no other choice he must be destroyed,” replies Master Thanh.

“Yes master, we understand,” replies another monk.

We will find the evil man
we will track him day and night
we know forever he can't hide
in the early morning rain

In the intervening time, Sup. Sgt. Cantos and the rest of the Special Forces team are inside the secret base in search of the Super Tank. As it was expected, most of the people who work inside the secret base are civilian workers, engineers, scientists, and a small garrison of military police that work as the security force of the institution. The team slowly moves through the dim hallways in complete silence and hoping to find the vehicle and leave without a trace. As they walk, they can see the assembly line from an upper view working at full steam even during night hours. An array of conveyor belts, tank hulls, soldering robots, sparks, heavy tracks, main

guns, turrets, and human labor compliment the desire of the northern soldiers of the Eastern country to rid themselves of the southern government and their Western supporters.

“I found a map of the facility Sup. Sgt. Cantos,” says Sgt. Chico.

“Can you pin point the location of the Super Tank prototype?” asks Sgt Big Dog.

“The Super Tank is two levels beneath us and is guarded by two commando soldiers,” says Sgt. Chico.

“Good job guys, let’s move out,” says Agustin Cantos.

“The probability of us coming alive of this base is 64.76 %,” says Sgt. Grundy.

The team is a floor above the production line and two floors above the stealth tank. With steadfast speed, superb tenacity, and the stealth of a chameleon the team moves down to the production line floor through a set of narrow stairs. To their surprise, they discover that next to the production line there is an entire armada of stealth tanks that are getting the final touches before they are sent into combat.

“Look at that my brothers,” says Sgt. Gross as he points his finger at the tanks.

“They are installing the final components of the tanks and are getting ready to send them to the soldiers in the field,” says Sgt. Cobra.

“The intelligence report we received is a little bit outdated since these tanks are about to be operational in a few hours,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“Sgt. Gross, I bet you an entire weekend with your favorite prostitute that the attack on the Capital City of the Eastern Country, including our Command Headquarters was going to happen within a day or two,” says Sgt. Mo.

“I won’t take that bet because I think you are right, but we can still go hang with a pair of cuties I met last weekend, what do you say?” asks Sgt. Gross.

“I might take that offer if we get out of here alive,” replies Sgt. Mo.

“Let’s get going, we have to make it to the next lower floor, grab the vehicle, and leave this place like bats out of hell,” says Sgt. Pascual.

“Roger,” replies Agustin Cantos with a smile on his lips.

The tank is almost ready to fight
and the enemy to strike
our headquarters with delight
in the early morning rain

In the interim, Sgt. White, Sgt. Felder, Sgt. Doogie, and Sgt. Tang find themselves wondering about their friends inside the dome. They have not contacted the team inside the secret base as to avoid unnecessary interruptions. Almost unbelievably, the light drizzle has stopped falling down over the jungle and the stars in the sky have become visible again after so many days of constant precipitation.

“Look at the skies Sgt. White and tell me what do you see?” asks Sgt. Tang.

“I see the moon, I see a few nimbus clouds covering parts of the skies, and I see the constellations of Apus, Pictor, and Vulpecula,” says Sgt. White.

“How is it that you know about the constellations?” asks Sgt. Doogie.

“My father was an astronomer, and when I was a kid we used to sit on the back yard and he would teach me about the different constellations.” “Maybe I should have joined the Naval Forces instead since I have no need for this knowledge in the Army,” says Sgt. White.

“That is incredible Sgt. White.” “My father left us when I was three years old and I haven’t heard from him since.” “And even though my mother was a good person and a hard working woman, she did not know anything about constellations,” says Sgt. Felder as he smirks.

“Did you hear that guys?” asks Sgt. Doogie.

“I think I heard something, but it might just be a field rat or a mole,” says Sgt. Tang.

“Something bit my right calf guys,” says Sgt. White.

Immediately, the group of soldiers looks around the area where Sgt. White is sitting in search of the unknown animal. Sgt. Felder grabs the leg of Sgt. White and places a tourniquet above the punctured skin. Then he makes a small incision with his combat knife over the snake bite in an attempt to stop the poison from reaching the heart.

“This is a nasty bite but you don’t have to worry about it man, I got you,” says Sgt. Felder.

Sgt. Tang and Sgt. Doogie are searching for the snake with green military machetes on their hands. To their surprise and horror they find a group of thirteen snakes standing in front of them with only fifteen centimeters of tale touching the ground. As the light of the moon is casted over the brown vipers, their eyes ignite into living fire. When the snakes exhale, flares of fire come out of their nostrils and mouth and a loud hissing sound is produced. Sgt. Felder is so focused on saving his friend’s life that one of the snakes whips its body towards him and bites him on the forearm.

“They got me too man,” says Sgt. Felder.

“I am going to shoot these snakes into oblivion,” says Sgt. Tang as he gets a hold of his M20 rifle.

“No Sgt. Tang we can’t do that.” “If we shoot at them we will reveal our position to the enemy.” “Just grab your machete and defend yourself,” says Sgt. Doogie.

“I don’t think a machete can do much against fire breathing snakes,” replies Sgt. Tang.

As the snakes surround the battle tested soldiers, Sgt. White’s skin begins to move up and down as if his blood was effervescing. Within seconds, Sgt. White’s body explodes into the air and one thousand pieces of what used to be him are scattered throughout the jungle.

“Is that going to happen to me too?” asks Sgt. Felder.

“I don’t know man, but stay calm and don’t move until we get rid of these pests,” says Sgt. Doogie.

The evil snakes have completely surrounded the trio of friends. Blood, bones, and torn flesh are scattered everywhere including the camouflaged clothes of Sgt. Felder. The flames that come out of the snakes’ eyes move from side to side as the snakes bodies move from side to side.

We are surrounded by the snakes
and Sgt. White has blown apart
while Sgt. Felder holds his heart
in the early morning rain

The group of seven monks from the Buddhist temple of Shin Lam Zen is running through the jungle as fast as they can in search of the Dark Shaman’s serpentine daughters. With the newly mastered technique of *The Third Eye of Buddha* they are having no problems locating the whereabouts of the snakes.

“Right there my brothers, they are about to kill that group of soldiers from the Western country,” says a monk. “We must stop the snakes at once; we must chant the mantra of

Daimoku.” “Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo,” shout the seven monks.

All of a sudden the eyes of the monks turn blue and as they look at the snakes the jungle vegetation surrounding Sgt. Tang, Sgt. Felder, and Sgt. Doogie also becomes illuminated. In a split second, two of the monks perform the technique known as *The Palm of Buddha* and their bodies produce a burst of energy that destroys half of the fire breathing snakes. At the same time Sgt. Doogie avoids the lighting strike of one snake. As his torso swings away from the evil crawler he chops the head out without hesitation with his sharp machete. Three other monks pull out their swords and swiftly cut the evil snakes from the center of the top of their heads to the end of the tail. As the blood of the snakes oozes out of their lifeless bodies the vegetation on the ground dies upon contact.

“These monks have come to help us Sgt. Felder, they just killed the snakes and I’m sure they can stop the fiery poison from reaching your heart; just hold on,” says Sgt. Tang.

“I don’t think there is much time for me my brother, just say good bye to the boys and tell them that it was fun,” says an agonizing Sgt. Felder.

“Can you help our friend?” asks Sgt. Doogie to one of the monks.

“We can try,” replies the monk.

As the monk moves closer to Sgt. Felder in an attempt to save his life, the skin of the wounded soldier begins to move up and down as if oxygen bubbles were bursting throughout his inner body. In just a few seconds, his entire body explodes as if he had swallowed an entire grenade and the one thousand pieces of what is left of him had scattered everywhere.

“We were too late to save him, we are sorry,” says a monk.

“We still thank you for helping us,” replies Sgt. Doogie.

“We must leave now if we are to completely eliminate the threat that just killed your friend,” says a monk.

“You are telling me that someone send the snakes to kill us?” asks Sgt. Tang.

“That is correct.” “The assassin is still at large but we are on our way to stop him as we speak,” replies a monk.

“Can we assist you in any way or form?” asks Sgt. Doogie.

“We do not need your help at this time, but if you really want to help us please ask your government not to harm our beloved country with their war machines.” “For us there is no difference between the north and the south since we are all the same in the eyes of Siddhartha Gautama,” replies the monk.

“Thank you for helping us,” says Sgt. Tang as he sheathes his machete and returns to his post.

Felder and White have gone to rest
to a place that's out of sight
where everything is made of light
in the early morning rain

The group of seven monks has left the presence of the two surviving soldiers and is heading towards the location where the Dark Shaman is. As they run through the narrow jungle pathways made by the constant travels of villagers and soldiers, the moon light glows down on them and help them steer clear of combat units in the vicinity. Meanwhile, Sup. Sgt. Cantos and the rest of the Special Forces Team have found the stairway to the bottom floor and believe they have found the Super Tank prototype. As soon as they reach the bottom floor they find concealment behind a wall of wooden crates full of ammunition. The room is dark and has dim

incandescent lights all around it that hang from a utilitarian electric cord. With a specialized fiber optic night vision camera the team finally sees the tank resting over a set of concrete ramps. In front of it there are two unknown commando soldiers dressed in black fatigue clothes and holding fully automatic machine guns.

“Soon this prototype will be just another vehicle in the enemies’ armada,” says Sgt. Cobra.

“But that won’t happen since we are almost done with our mission,” says Sgt. Pascual.

“There are only two soldiers in front of the tank, we should have no problem getting rid of them,” says Sgt. Gross.

“I want Sgt. Grundy and Sgt. Cobra to go behind them and ambush them.” “We cannot shoot them from here because if we do the entire facility will wake up and then we’ll be opening a whole can of worms.” “Our mission is to be as stealthy as intelligence claims this tank is.” “We will cover you in case anything goes bad,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“Don’t get your butts whooped,” says Sgt. Gross as he shows his smile.

“Our probability of surprising the enemy is 52.87 %,” says Sgt. Grundy.

The rest of the team quietly waits behind the crates as the two non commissioned officers high crawl towards the rear of the tank. The only thing they can do right now is observe the movement of the two soldiers with the night vision camera and hope that the mission goes as planned. Within a few long lived minutes, Sgt. Grundy and Sgt. Cobra reach the rear of the tank and slowly begin moving forward towards the backs of the commandos. As they move, Sgt. Cobra is unable to see a can of empty beans that was left on the floor and stumbles upon it. Next to him, Sgt. Grundy grabs one of the commando soldiers from the back and slits his throat. As the blood gushes out of his neck, the other commando grabs his rifle and searches for the enemy.

Sgt. Cobra knows that he must engage the commando soldier in hand to hand combat as to avoid the machine gun from being shot. As Sgt. Cobra and the commando soldier struggle for the machine gun, the commando pulls out a knife and cuts Sgt. Cobra on the forearm. At the same time Sup. Sgt. Cantos and the rest of the team are running towards the tank in an attempt to help Sgt. Cobra. As they run, the commando's machine gun is discharged and Sgt. Cobra receives a bullet wound on his left thigh. Without hesitation, Sgt. Chico shoots his M20 rifle and puts a bullet through the head of the second commando. Within a few seconds a buzzing alarm goes off and red emergency lights start blinking throughout the secret base.

The enemy is waking up
or maybe it never went to sleep
and now our soldiers have to flee
in the early morning rain

“They know we are here,” says Sgt. Big Dog.

“Let's crank this tank up and let's get out of here.” “I need Sgt. Mo and Sgt. Grundy to get into the drivers station.” “Sgt Chico, I need you to take the frontal main gun and I need Sgt, Gross, and Sgt. Pascual to take the lateral main guns.” “Sgt. Big Dog you will stay in a corner of turret taking medical care of Sgt. Cobra and I will take the tank commanders seat,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“Roger,” replies the team.

“Fire up this bad boy and let's go home,” commands Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

The three thousand horsepower solar engine has no problem starting thanks to the fully charged batteries. It takes only a few seconds for the Special Forces team to familiarize themselves with the controls panels of the vehicle.

“This tank is so different from anything I have seen before,” says Sgt. Mo.

“Is the automatic loader on?” asks Agustin Cantos.

“Yes it is,” replies Sgt. Chico.

“Driver move out,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

The tank is stepping off the concrete ramps as it moves forward. The heavy tracks grab onto the ground under them as a baby grabs a mother’s nipple when hungry. In front of the tank there is a ramp that connects the inside of the dome with the outer field. A reinforced concrete wall is the only thing that separates the soldiers of Operational Detachment Alpha from the outside.

“Driver get us through that wall, maximum power,” commands Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“Roger,” replies Sgt. Mo.

The silent tank increases in speed and soon rams the reinforced concrete wall. As the tracked vehicle goes through it, the concrete breaks so easily that it appears to be made out of soda crackers. As soon as the tank tracks touch the muddy grounds of the secret base, the tank commander traverses the turret and notices that an entire regiment of armored vehicles is en route to his location.

“Sgt. Doogie, this is Sup. Sgt. Cantos, do you read me, over?”

“I read you lima-charlie, over,” replies Sgt. Doogie.

“Notify Coronel Sanders that the mission is a go,” commands Agustin Cantos.

“Roger,” replies Sgt. Doogie.

“Alright driver we need to start moving.” “Gunners take over, shoot at will.” “Sgt. Chico, turn on the computer for the self reactive rear gun and alter the target descriptions into the

schematics of enemy vehicles.” “Sgt. Grundy, engage the tank stealth and notify status,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“The stealth is running and operating at 100%,” says Sgt. Grundy.

Now I’m running for my life
and the enemy is behind
I am fine inside my mind
in the early morning rain

As the tank maneuvers through the open field as it moves away from the dome, Agustin Cantos spots an unidentified flying object inside the tank’s radar coming towards his location at a fast velocity. He knows that the aerial strike will commence soon since he is almost out the blast range.

“Tank commander, I think that we have another problem.” “There is a battalion of enemy tanks coming into our left flank,” says Sgt. Gross.

As soon as Sgt. Gross finishes his words, the self reactive rear gun shoots a sabot round into the regiment that is coming behind them. Immediately, the tank crew begins shooting heat and staff rounds from the gunner’s stations located on the frontal and lateral areas of the tank. Rounds fall left and right of the invisible tank, but thanks to the stealth ability the enemy rounds are unable to find a solid target. As soon as the fighter jet from the Aerial Force comes in visual contact with the secret base the pilot gives a final warning to the ground soldiers and says: “This is the final warning, please clear the blast area, bombs away.” Agustin Cantos recognizes the voice of the fighter plane pilot and grabs his lapel radio and attempts to communicate with him.

“Black Beetle, is that you flying the airplane?” asks Agustin Cantos.

“Is that you down there Agustin?” asks Aerial Force Captain Alberto Castro.

“Yes my best friend, it is me,” replies Agustin Cantos.

“It is so good to hear from you Agustin,” says Captain Castro.

“Likewise,” replies Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“There is something I need to tell you very quickly since for sure our time is limited right now,” says Captain Castro.

“Go for it,” replies Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“I have been selected for a special mission to the moon.” “I am going to be an astronaut soon and this is my final mission with the Aerial Force.” “I will be leaving the country in thirty days,” says Captain Castro.

“Congratulations Black Beetle, as soon as I get a chance I’ll stop by to see you before you get out of the country,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“God bless you and get out of there as soon as you can, the bombs are about to penetrate the secret base and everything will be destroyed,” says the best friend of Agustin Cantos.

Alberto flies a silver jet
and drops a payload of bombs
then he leaves with peace and calm
in the early morning rain

An eminent silence is followed by a large explosion that shakes the grounds of the secret base and levels it to unidentifiable rubble. Black smoke rises from the bombardment’s aftermath as the merciless fire consumes the remnants of the production line of the Super Tank. The countless souls of the people who worked the conveyor lines are now rising into the heavens from within the black smoke. The destruction of the secret base is ominous and ill-omened. As

Sgt. Pascual searches for enemy vehicles through his main sight he notices that the only thing the reticle can point at is twisted metal, fire, and smoke.

“The entire regiment that was following us was destroyed during the aerial assault,” says Sgt. Pascual.

“We are lucky to be alive,” says Sgt. Cobra as he rests over a foldable bench.

The tank continues moving into the direction where Sgt. Doogie and Sgt. silently mourn at their dead friends when all of a sudden it is abruptly shaken by enemy fire. To the crew’s misfortune, the approaching flanking battalion was not destroyed during the aerial assault and is in hot pursuit of the once invisible tank. At this time all four main guns (five if you count the extra gun the front has) are engaging enemy tanks and wheeled vehicles and receiving heavy fire as well.

“Our cloaking device, or whatchamacallit is no longer operational,” says Sgt. Mo.

“Commander, we are getting pounded by these enemy tanks.” “Even though our armor is holding, I do not know if we we’ll be able to make it against an entire battalion,” says Sgt. Gross.

“Sgt. Doogie do you read me, over,” says Sup. Sgt. Cantos.

“I read you lima-charlie, over,” replies Sgt. Doogie.

“I need you to call artillery on the approaching battalion.”

“Roger,” replies Sgt. Doogie.

“I need ATZ on grid 624 521.” “Fire mission tanks, wheeled vehicles, and troops in the open at grid 624 521,” says Sgt Doogie to the Fire Direction Center.

At the Fire Direction Center of Camp Lighting, the artillery men plot and board the grid and obtain the deflection and quadrant for the overhead fire operation. After that, the Howitzer crews begin sending the High Explosive rounds down on the enemy tanks. From inside the

jungle Sgt. Doogie and Sgt. Tang can see the rounds flying over their heads as they sparkle the few minutes that are left of this night.

The big guns are firing now
down the grid with enemy crowds
hopefully they will stay down
in the early morning rain

“No fire adjustments necessary, all rounds are complete, enemy tanks have been destroyed, over” says Sgt. Doogie to the Fire Direction Center as the Super Tank arrives at their hidden location.

As soon as the seven tracking monks find the bamboo shack where the Dark Shaman has been casting spells over the people of the Eastern Country, they find Master Thanh badly bruised, breathing heavily, and bleeding through his mouth, nose, eyes, and ears. The monks rapidly approach their master and bring him to a sitting position.

“The Dark Shaman is dead and he will never hurt the people of our country anymore.”
“Thanks to your dedication to Buddha and your country you were able to stop the snakes and the evil man was not able to transform into the entity he was trying to become.” “I have always known that you were not strong enough to face him and that’s why I didn’t teach you *The Third Eye of Buddha* technique before.” “I knew that I had to face the Voodoo Priest alone because you were not meant to cross the ninth threshold as such an early age.” “I have lived a good life, and now I am going to rest at *The Palm of Buddha*,” says Master Thanh as he closes his eyes and allows his spirit to enter a final nirvana.

The never ending cycle of the day taking over the night is starting its next rotation. The light of the day is everywhere and nowhere as the skies are no longer complemented by a canvas of stars but by grey nimbus clouds. The torrential monsoon rains are falling again over the jungle and over Camp Lighting. Two days have passed since the soldiers of Operational Detachment Alpha completed their mission and successfully brought the Super Tank inside the perimeter of the outpost. A day ago the tank was taken to Headquarters Command to be disassembled and studied by military scientist. Inside Camp Lighting's Command Center, Supreme Sergeant Cantos and the rest of the Special Forces team is patiently waiting for the arrival of their new helicopter pilot when they hear the this request over the Communications Station: "This is Sheppard Alpha requesting permission to land, how copy?" "I repeat, this is Chief Warrant Officer Thomas requesting permission to pick up my brothers in arms, do I have permission to land, over?" says the helicopter pilot.

Without saying any words, the team of Operational Detachment Alpha smiles with pride while they place their arms around each other as a metaphor of joy. The Command Center of Camp Lighting permeates with happiness as the recently found helicopter pilot comes to transport the team away from the outpost. Even though two of their brothers will not be returning to the Capital City of the Eastern Country, the team knows that their sacrifices were not in vain and that someday they will be together again.

Only death my eyes have seen
in this jungle that we're in
maybe someday we will leave
in the early morning rain

This chapter is dedicated to the gallant souls who have served in the United States Military, especially to the M1, M1A1, and M1A2 tank crewmen of the United States Army. To Specialist White and Specialist Felder, I pray that you have found rest in the presence of the Lord.

Song VII: The Colony

Joaquin Cantos has been using the same toothbrush since he was a kid. Even though he loves his toothbrush and swore when he was nine years old that he would never change it, he knows that the time to replace it for a new one has come since more than half of the bristles have fallen apart and the other half is faded and brittle. Lately, Joaquin has been using a little bit more toothpaste to compensate for the absence of bristles, but his mouth is not getting the same feeling of cleanliness he normally experiences and he fears that his oral health might be in danger. Joaquin's mother, Yolanda, has been waiting for this moment for most of her adult life and is happy because her son is thinking about getting a new toothbrush.

The same colony of bacteria still lives under the thin layer of white and green slime below the faded bristles of Joaquin's toothbrush. Years ago when Joaquin was a just a young kid, the mayor of the colony implemented an emergency system designed to protect his fellow colonists in case of an emergency. For the last few days, specifically at the moment when the thought of replacing the toothbrush appeared in Joaquin's mind, the same feeling that catapulted the mayor into creating the Emergency Preparedness System has been present in his immediate deliberation and he has been feeling uneasy. The mayor believes that doomsday has arrived upon him and his fellow colonists, and he must warn his fellow citizens before it's too late.

Joaquin Cantos graduated from college two years ago and became a middle school science teacher at The Stones Middle School. The twenty four year old teacher loves the education profession and firmly believes in his heart that he has chosen the right academic career. Every week the young scientist conducts experiments in his classroom and his students can't seem to get enough of them. In his short educational career he has guided his students through countless laboratory activities such as: bacteria staining (Gram + purple, Gram- pink), deoxyribonucleic acid extractions from onions, phototropism of invertebrate organisms, rocket building, crystallization of liquids, water sample testing, vertebrate organism dissections, geotropism of germinating seeds, classification of rocks and minerals, chemical reactions, and many more. But on this beautiful Saturday morning Joaquin is enjoying one the most important privileges that come with being an educator; having the weekends off.

“Joaquin your oatmeal is ready, come fast so it won't get cold,” says Yolanda.

“Yes mom I'll be there in a minute, I just want to enjoy this Saturday morning since I don't have to go to work,” replies Joaquin.

“I know, but you also need to replace the energy you lost during the workweek,” says Joaquin's mother.

“I'll be there in sixty seconds,” replies Joaquin.

The young philosopher savors every spoonful he gets out of his bowl of oatmeal and every bite he munches from his garlic-butter drenched island bread. As the mixed oatmeal and bread fall down his esophagus, the nervous system releases chemicals to his brain that produce a feeling of satisfaction and contentment.

“I love your oatmeal mom,” says Joaquin.

“I know you do my dear,” replies Yolanda.

“Today I want to take Maria Elena to the movies and later to a nice dinner.” “I think that she would like that,” says Joaquin.

“Seems like you have something special in your mind boiling for tonight,” says Yolanda.

“You know me too well mom, there is nothing I can hide from your eyes,” says Joaquin with a smile on his lips.

“Off course, I am your mother after all,” replies a proud mother.

“Yesterday night Bartolo and Eduardo accompanied me to the jewelry store and I got her a simple but yet delicate engagement ring.” “Today I plan to ask Maria Elena to marry me and I am so nervous that I feel like the butterflies in my stomach are eating their way out as they bust out of me.”

“I am so happy for you Joaquin, and I think that she will say yes,” says Yolanda.

“With the money I have saved from my teaching job I plan on buying a house for Maria Elena; a place where we can start a family,” says an eagerly excited Joaquin.

“Everything will be fine my dear boy, but before you buy a house she must first accept your marriage invitation.” “Make sure to do something special for her tonight,” says Yolanda.

After Joaquin finishes the breakfast conversation with his mother he enters the bathroom and brushes his teeth with his childhood toothbrush for what he thinks will be the last time. After he is done brushing, he throws the toothbrush inside the trashcan and replaces it with a new one his mother gave him the night before and then he returns to his bedroom.

“I have been waiting for you Joaquin,” says Plato.

“Hi Plato, how are you?” replies Joaquin.

“I am fine, but I do have a fast question for you,” says Plato.

“Yes, go ahead,” replies Joaquin.

“Did you just throw away your toothbrush?” asks Plato.

“Yes, it’s such a loss, but I had to.” “I have been using the same toothbrush since I was a kid and time and usage have taken a toll on it.” “I almost do a eulogy for it but since I was trying to get back to my room I decided not to,” replies Joaquin.

“You can’t do that Joaquin because there is a colony of living organisms living under the green and white slime.” “The colony of bacteria has one of the most organized governmental systems I have ever encountered and it would be a terrible thing to destroy what has cost them so much.” “Can you bring the toothbrush to this room, or is it too late?” asks Plato.

“I can get it right out of the trash can if you want me to,” replies Joaquin.

“Go as fast as you can!” says Plato.

With toothbrush in hand Joaquin returns to his room and shows the dental piece to Plato. When Plato sees that the green and white slime between the remaining bristles of the toothbrush is intact he exhales as a sign of relieve. Joaquin places the toothbrush over his dresser and listens to what the ancient philosopher has to say.

“We are going to visit the colony inside your toothbrush to see if everything is fine in there.” “We must not let this utopian society vanish into the darkness of a forgotten thought.” “It must be protected with our hearts and our souls.” “Are you ready to go Joaquin?” asks Plato.

“You always come when I least expect you Plato, but yes, I am ready; let’s go,” replies Joaquin.

“It seems to me like you have something big going on in your mind Joaquin,” inquires Plato.

“There is a lot going on in my head today, but I’ll tell you on our way to the colony,” says Joaquin.

“Make sure that your head is clear before we go; let your focus determine your reality,” says Plato.

“I am fine Mr. Plato,” replies Joaquin.

From the four corners of the Earth a sublime breeze is sent to the Caribbean Island in search of the City of the Stones. As soon as the breeze enters through the aluminum window of Joaquin’s room it caresses the faces of master and apprentice. As the pair of philosophers wait for the breeze to engulf them into the whirlwind that normally transports them into distant places of danger and adventure, they notice how this time the breeze materializes into a swarm of pristine clear butterflies. The butterflies are crystal clear and their soft bodies are made out of pure energy. As their sparkling wings flutter around the room in a choreographed aerial dance, Joaquin’s mind is captivated by the beauty of the butterfly rabble and extends his arms towards them in order for them to land on him. As the hundreds of twinkles embellish the soul of Joaquin Cantos, Plato enjoys watching his pupil as he reminisces the days in which their relationship started when he was just a young child. Similar to the movement a school of sardines make as they swim away from a predator, the butterflies begin flying in circles around Joaquin and Plato until a bright whirlwind made out of pure light engulfs them. As the energized butterflies continue their counterclockwise movement, Joaquin and Plato are reduced to a microscopic size and then the whirlwind takes them under the green and white slime of the worn out toothbrush.

Under the layer of white and green slime lies the colony, a community of four million bacteria that have lived in peace and harmony since Joaquin was given a new toothbrush at the

age of nine. The colonists have the same body and facial features that humans have, the same language structure, and identical mating practices. But there is a unique singular difference between the species, every colonist has a pair of pink antennae that protrude out their heads and have a reach of thirty centimeters upwards. The antennae have an extra sensorial ability that allows the bacteria to perceive what another bacterium is thinking by interlocking one or two of their antennas.

“The houses in this place appear to be made out of some sort of crystalline material,” infers Joaquin.

“Your power of observation serves you well my young padawan, but I’m sure that you can do better than that,” replies Plato.

“If we find ourselves in a colony of bacteria that lives under the white and green slime of my toothbrush, and my toothbrush is in the constant presence of toothpaste, and toothpaste uses an abrasive agent to remove minute particles and food stains by polishing the tooth surface, and the most common abrasive agent used on toothpaste is silica, then I must conclude that these houses are built with silica since it should be the most readily available material in this neck of the woods,” argues Joaquin.

“Bravo Joaquin, I couldn’t have said it better,” says Plato.

The mayor of the colony is named Eugenio Maria de Hostos, and thanks to his cunning and astuteness he was able to prepare his fellow colonists for the sudden earthquake that was felt earlier this morning that occurred exactly at the same time the toothbrush impacted the bottom of the trash can of Joaquin’s house. Even though the colony underwent the terrible ordeal this morning, the colonists have returned to the daily activities that normally take place on Saturday morning including shopping, lawn mowing, swimming, and playing baseball. As the duo of

philosophers walk through the plastic streets, they notice how the sky is identical to the sky they have come to know but it's green in color. It does not take a long time for the colonists to observe that the slender man with the curly hair and the elder gentleman with the tropical shirt, surfing trunks, and flip flops do not have antennas over their heads.

“By the way Mr. Plato, you never told me the reason why we came to this place,” says Joaquin.

“I think it is quite obvious by now, don't you think?” replies Plato.

“I guess so,” says Joaquin.

Even though four million colonists might sound like a lot of living beings, when it comes to spreading the news about events within the colony the information is disseminated quickly. While Joaquin and Plato stand in front of a diner, a group of armed policemen approach them and politely ask them to accompany them. At any moment Joaquin feels threatened by the law enforcement officers as he understands that even though they have never met face to face before, they have been in contact with each other for many, many years. No words are exchanged during the trip by either the law enforcement officers or the philosophers. After forty minutes inside a sports utility vehicle, Joaquin and Plato arrive at the capitol building of the colony. The capitol building is a beautiful structure that stands as a powerful symbol of self government and well being for all colonists. The building's architecture is based on neoclassical art as it has large round pillars in the frontal area, blank walls, an overall rectangular shape, and a large dome mounted over the top. Master and apprentice are escorted inside the impressive building by the heavily armed policemen and are received by a beautiful executive assistant.

“Please follow me,” politely requests the executive assistant.

Even though Joaquin is wondering what is about to happen to him and the ancient philosopher, he is certain that no evil shall come to pass since the behavior he has experienced from the colonists is one that reflects inner restraint and selfless love. At the end of the hallway there is a room with a large double door made out of red mahogany wood. As the trio reaches the room, the beautiful executive assistant opens the door and extends her left arm as she welcomes the only two individuals without antennas to enter the majestic room.

“Gentlemen my name is Eugenio Maria de Hostos and I am the mayor of this colony.”
“Next to me I have my cabinet members: Jose Campeche, Jose de Diego, Jose Gautier Benitez, Jose Hernandez, Juan Antonio Corretger, Julia de Burgos, Lola Rodriguez de Tió, Luis Llorens Torres, Luis Pales Matos, and Ramón Emeterio Betances y Alacán.” “Please take a sit,” says Eugenio Maria de Hostos.

“Thank you Mr. Mayor,” reply the visitors in unison.

“I apologize in advance for sending an armed escort to pick you up.” “At the time we became aware of your presence it was the fastest way in which we could transport you to my office in the safest possible manner,” says the mayor.

“Don’t worry about it Mr. Mayor, we never felt threaten at any moment by the policemen,” says Joaquin.

“We certainly would like to ask you a few questions if you don’t mind, and I’m also sure that you might have some questions for us as well and we will gladly answer them to the best of our knowledge,” says the mayor.

“Do you have anything to do with the earthquake we experienced a few hours ago?” asks the mayor.

“As a matter of fact I do.” “Even though I never intended to spread panic or to harm anybody in this beautiful colony, I am the one who unintentionally did it,” says Joaquin.

“We certainly would like to know how you were able to do that?” asks Mr. Maria de Hostos.

“I think that they will understand Joaquin, so don’t worry about it,” says Plato.

“Before I answer that question I would like to introduce myself, my name is Joaquin Cantos and I am from the City of the Stones in the Caribbean Island.” “My friend here is Aristocles, and he is from the ancient City of Knowledge.” “Even though you are not aware of it, you are also from the Caribbean Island.”

“I have never heard of such a place Mr. Cantos, can you please explain,” replies Jose Hernandez.

“You are a colony of micro organisms that live under the green and white slime of my toothbrush.” “Since I was a child I have been using the same toothbrush, but as time has progressed the bristles of my toothbrush have become brittle and half of them have fallen off.” “About a week ago I decided to replace the toothbrush with a new one, and this morning I actually threw the toothbrush inside the trash can.” “I believe that the earthquake you experienced this morning was the direct result of the sudden impact of the toothbrush with the bottom of the trash can,” says Joaquin.

“Fascinating,” says Julia de Burgos.

“This proves that there are worlds within worlds, and realms within realms, and so forth,” says Jose Campeche.

“Is the toothbrush inside the trash can right now?” asks Luis Pales Matos.

“At the request of my friend and master, I retrieved the toothbrush from the trash and securely placed it over my dresser,” replies Joaquin.

“Is the toothbrush secure?” asks Emeterio Betances y Alacán.

“The toothbrush is safe in my bedroom, so please don’t worry about it,” replies Joaquin.

“Mr. Cantos, would you like to continue this conversation over lunch?” “There is so much more to discuss in this matter, and I’m sure that you will enjoy our exquisite colonial cousin,” says Eugenio Maria de Hostos.

“I would like that,” replies Joaquin.

The dining room inside the capitol building is so luxurious that Joaquin feels as if he was royalty. Even though he has never tasted bacterial food, he is delighted by the different delicacies his appetite is experiencing. After all he is sitting at the same table with the mayor of the colony who happens to be the head of state of the four million colonists, and the cabinet members who serve as the legislative branch of the utopian government. For an entire hour the humanoid bacterium and the philosophers exchange information about how they came to be related to each other. Without any type of disbelief, the governing body of the colony accepts and understands that their way of life is subject to the decisions made at a larger world. They also hypothesize that perhaps Joaquin’s Caribbean Island is found under someone else’s toothbrush and that possibilities for infinite universes are endless. At the end of the conversation Joaquin promises that he will keep the toothbrush in a safe area and for the rest of his life he will make sure that the colony remains safe. In an attempt to maintain the typical atmospheric conditions, balanced biomes and ecosystems, an appropriate food supply, and a safe infrastructure, Joaquin assured the colony’s governing body that he will brush his teeth with his old brush on the third day of every month for the rest of his life.

“Now that we are acquainted with each other I would like to make you an invitation to experience one of the most important traditions that we have here in the colony,” says Mayor Eugenio Maria de Hostos.

“This might interesting Joaquin, I think we are up for a new type of adventure,” says Plato.

“I think so too,” says Joaquin.

“Every Saturday afternoon when the hour hand of the clock reaches the third number, every person in the colony attaches at least one of their antennas to the antenna of the person that’s next to him.” “Since we are extra sensorial beings we can randomly enter a state of dreaming that is and isn’t at the same time.” “Since the dreaming process is such a powerful tool in understanding the hidden thoughts found within our collective unconscious, we have been able to come to understand the fiber that binds us and makes us a unified colony.” “We believe that revealing what is stored in the unconscious allows us to understand each other at a closer level.” “The minute hand of the clock is now pointing at the eleventh number.” “When it reaches the twelfth number the hour hand will be exactly at the middle point of the third number.” “At this time we enter the world of the unconscious.” “Would you like to join us?” says Mayor Eugenio Maria de Hostos.

“It sounds like fun, but neither Plato nor I have antennas,” replies Joaquin.

“You don’t have to worry about that Mr. Cantos, all we have to do is hold hands and everything should be fine,” replies Jose de Diego.

“I’m in,” says Plato as he smiles in delight.

“I’m also in,” follows Joaquin.

The minute hand of the clock is exactly on the twelfth number, and the hour hand points at the center of the third number of the clock. All across the colony the life size organisms have their antennas interlocked and are entering the realm of living dreams. As the entire colony enters the collective unconscious, their bodies begin to levitate over the ground they were standing seconds ago. The colony is one and many at the same time. Begun the collective unconscious has.

The largest baseball stadium the universe has ever seen has the capacity to sit the entire colony of four million citizens. The stadium has four gargantuan size screens that allow the cheerful fans sitting over the upper levels to watch the game with pristine clarity. The cabinet members of the colony are sitting inside the executive skybox and are waiting for their mayor to complete the opening remarks. For the first time in their professional career, the colony's baseball team will face a rival team whose members do not have antennas on their heads and they are eagerly excited to test their well rehearsed skills against them.

The bacterium team has a traditional baseball uniform that consists of white buttoned shirts (jerseys) with green sleeves, a stamped logo on the back of the shirts that reads "The Colony," white tight pants with double green lines on the sides, green thick socks, cleats, and green baseball caps. On the other hand, Joaquin's team is wearing an identical uniform to what the bacterial players are wearing but instead of white and green, the uniforms are white and yellow and the logo reads: "The Shadow Gang."

The inaugural pitch is made by Mayor Eugenio Maria de Hostos and the crowd goes haywire when they see their supreme leader in the middle of the baseball diamond. The ball bounces in front of the catcher and is finally inside the cushioned mitt. As the mayor steps off the

pitcher's mound he waves at the citizens of the colony and they wave back at as a sign of love and respect. His white smile can be seen over the four giant screens and he feels happy to be the head of state of such wonderful people.

The Shadow Gang is sitting inside the dugout and is getting instructions from Plato, their head coach. The team is composed by Joaquin Cantos, Alberto Castro, Agustin Cantos, Yolanda Cantos, Maria Elena, Bartolo de Jesus, Patricia Nava, Matilda the Boxer, Eduardo Rodriguez, Ramón Cantos, Pachanga the Bus Driver, Coronel Sanders, Ms. Rosaura Perales, Captain Miguel Enriquez, and Captain Cofresi. In addition to the players, Operational Detachment Alpha will serve as the yell leaders for the team, Madam Le Mystique will have a booth with energy drinks and water to quench the thirst of the players, and Samantha will be sitting motionless in a dark and forgotten corner of the dugout.

“Alright guys, let's put our hands together and let us win this game!” shouts Plato to the Shadow Gang.

“I was never good at baseball before, that's why I became a boxer,” says Matilda.

“Don't worry about it Matilda all you have to do is swing at the ball,” replies Bartolo.

“Pachanga, you are up, Patricia Nava is second, and Joaquin's father Ramon is third,” says Plato.

Pachanga exits the dugout with a wooden bat on his hand. As he steps over the batter's box he swings the bat back and forth as a warm up and then positions it where he wants the pitcher to throw the ball. The pitcher launches the ball at seventy eight miles an hour and Pachanga misses it without even moving his bat. Again, the second pitch is made and Pachanga gets his second strike without moving or swinging the bat. The third time the pitcher throws the ball at eighty six miles per hour, Pachanga swings at it, the ball arrives at the catcher's mitt, and

the umpire calls the strike out. As Pachanga returns to the dugout Patricia Nava takes the batter's box and slightly taps her cleats with the wooden bat in an attempt to remove the packed dirt from under her. Patricia's beautiful blond hair slowly moves away from her face as a light breeze slowly blows around her. The pitcher shoots the first ball towards the catcher's mitt and the umpire shouts "ball" right after. The pitcher shoots again and as soon as Patricia sees the ball coming she swings at it and hits it. The ball is moving through the air but is caught by the second base player. The last attempt to score during the first inning is in the hands of the father of Joaquin and Agustin. Ramón Cantos is holding the wooden bat with his hands and a cigarette with his lips. As soon as the pitcher throws the ball Ramón Cantos swings the bat and gracefully sends it behind second base. With a half smoked cigarette still in his mouth Ramón attempts to run to first base but his chest begins to hurt and at the middle point between the home plate and first base he has to stop to catch his breath. Meanwhile, the center fielder picks up the ball and throws it to first base player thus ending the turn of the gang. As Ramón Cantos walks back to the dugout the paramedics approach him and ask if he would like to get medical attention. After declining medical help, Ramón Cantos walks to Madam Le Mystique's boot in search of refreshment.

"Can I get something to drink from you old lady?" asks Ramón Cantos.

"I know exactly what you need, here you go," says Madam Le Mystique as she hands out a beverage with a dense foam on top.

The Shadow Gang is posted on the field and is ready to stop the bacterium from scoring any runs. Plato designated Joaquin to stand over the pitcher's mound, Captain Miguel Enriquez over home base, Eduardo Rodriguez over first base, Alberto Castro over second base, Yolanda Cantos over short stop, Coronel Sanders over third base, Patricia Nava over the left field, Matilda

the Boxer over the center field, and Maria Elena over the right field. The rest of the players will remain in the dugout as back up, and Ramón Cantos decided not to play anymore. Joaquin throws the ball and the first batter makes it to first base without any problems. The second and third batters strike out at the merciless arm of Joaquin Cantos, and it is up to the fourth batter to score for the team. The team of bacteria sends their best player to the batter's box and it is up to him to take the early advantage. Joaquin throws the first slider at sixty eight miles per hour and the batter swings and misses, then Joaquin throws a curve ball and the batter misses again. The catcher, Captain Miguel Enriquez instructs Joaquin to throw a fast ball in order to neutralize the batting threat. Joaquin harnesses all of his energy and transfers it to a fast ball that travels at a speed of ninety eight miles per hour. When the ball encounters the center part of the outer end of the bat it moves away from the batter until it finally reaches the glove of an enthusiastic fan sitting on the bleachers. Without hesitation the slugger runs through the bases as he waves at the crowd of his admirers. When he touches the home base he is welcomed by his teammates while the entire colony celebrates the home run.

The first inning ends with a score of two runs for the locals and zero runs for the visitors. As the game goes on, the runs for the local team increment greatly while the visitors continue with zero runs on the scoreboard. The eighth inning ends with a score of seventeen and zero and the Shadow Gang knows that they must score at least one run on the final inning in order to uphold their pride.

“Alright team listen up, I have just developed a new plan.” “We are going to send all the ladies of our team this time and they will get us the run we need.” “I believe that women can give any difficult situation a brighter perspective than what men can do,” says Plato.

“I think that’s a heavenly plan coach, and I’m sure my dear Patty can help us score during our final inning since I know that God is on her side,” says Alberto Castro as he winks an eye at Patricia.

“We all agree with your plan coach, let’s do it!” shouts the gang in unison.

“Girl power!” shouts Yolanda.

“Ladies, what do you say?” asks Plato.

“We will get us the run we need.” “We will show the bacteria that we are baseball playing island warriors and that nothing can stop us,” shouts Maria Elena.

Patricia Nava takes the bat and makes a prayer that only God almighty knows what she is saying. But regardless of what words she pronounces, she makes it to the first base after the ball goes between the legs of the short stop. The second person holding the bat is Yolanda.

“Go mom,” shouts Agustin from the dugout.

“You can do it mama,” says Joaquin as he stands next to his older brother.

“Hey little brother, I bet you a bag of chocolate chip cookies that mom won’t make it to first base,” says Agustin.

“I think that’s wrong to bet against mom, so I’ll take your bet big brother,” replies Joaquin.

“Deal,” says Agustin.

The pitcher sends a slider that confuses Yolanda and she misses the swing. The slider is followed by two fast balls and Yolanda swings at them without even touching the ball. At this moment the main camera that transmits the game over the four giant screens focuses its lenses on Yolanda as she walks back to the dugout. Midpoint between the home plate and the dugout the cameraman gets a closer look of Yolanda’s face, and when Yolanda’s scary eyes are shown over

the giant screens the entire colony of four million bacteria becomes terrified and refuses to look at the screens anymore. The bacterial children hide themselves in panic under their mother's skirts as they attempt to forget the image of the scary eyes. A few seconds later Yolanda enters the dugout and the fear that moments ago overwhelmed the colony turns back into baseball excitement. The colonist children come out from under their mother's skirts as Yolanda's eyes are nowhere to be seen and the final inning continues. The camera operator focuses on the huge body of Matilda the Boxer and the screen only shows the upper part of her uniform that reads: "adow gan."

"Go Matilda, you can do it," says Bartolo from the dugout.

Matilda closes her eyes and waits for the pitcher to throw the ball at her. The catcher requests the pitcher to throw the fastest ball he has in his arsenal and he obeys. The ball is traveling at one hundred and eight miles per hour when Matilda hits it and sends the ball out of the stadium engulfed in fire. As the ball travels through the air the fire consumes it and becomes ash that spreads throughout the outside parking lot of the stadium. Patricia Nava and Matilda the Boxer touch the home plate and score two runs for the visiting team. While the members of the gang hug each other as they celebrate their two runs, Operational Detachment Alpha displays their dancing skills as they cheer the crowds with their superb choreographed movements. The Shadow Gang is so euphoric that they decide not continue playing since they have achieved what moments ago seemed to be impossible. Even though the bacterial team clearly won the game, Joaquin and his friends are celebrating as if they were the victors.

Meanwhile, the cameraman and Mrs. Rosaura Perales are having a pleasant conversation about the worlds that they belong to. Mrs. Rosaura Perales speaks about the days in which she was a social studies teacher and how her life has changed since she retired from the educational

trenches. The cameraman talks about how similar and different are the people from the colony and the visitors from the outside world. After the long conversation with the cameraman Mrs. Rosaura Perales excuses herself and goes to the bathroom to verify that her makeup is in good standing since she finds the colonist she is talking to very attractive. To her surprise, when she looks in the mirror she no longer sees herself as a spirit shaped like a human skeleton, dried, and without life. Instead, she sees herself as the beautiful young woman that set sail years ago to take over the world and was saddened by a lost love. As soon she comes out of the bathroom, the gang notices that Mrs. Rosaura Perales has turned twenty one years old again and her face is glowing with happiness.

“I have decided that I will remain here in the colony.” “I lived a life of sadness and loneliness in my own world and now I have a chance to start all over again.” “Joaquin, I thank you for bringing me here to this colony.” “I am in great debt to you all, thank you,” says the beautiful Mrs. Rosaura Perales as she walks towards the handsome cameraman with antennas over his head.

The game is now over and both teams are celebrating as if they were supposed to share the victory with each other. Mayor Eugenio Maria de Hostos approaches the gang’s dugout and tells them that he has a special surprise for them.

“In a minute we are going to have a special concert to celebrate your visit to our beloved colony.” “We will have Tony Joe Superstar on stage right in the middle of the baseball diamond and we would like you guys to stay for the celebration,” says the mayor.

“I love Tony Joe Superstar, he is the greatest musician ever,” says Eduardo Rodriguez.

“He is awesome, I have all of his recordings at home,” says Mrs. Rosaura Perales.

“I don’t care about him, I think that he is a punk,” says Ramón Cantos as he smokes his cigarette.

“Maybe a punk rocker, but not a punk Mr. Cantos,” replies Eduardo Rodriguez as he defends his favorite musician.

“I’m sure you were going to say something like that Ramón,” replies Yolanda.

“Off course we are going to stay,” says Joaquin.

“The concert will begin in five minutes, so please make your way back to the diamond,” says the mayor of the colony.

“Thanks Mr. Eugenio Maria de Hostos,” replies Agustin.

The lights are on, the cameras are rolling, and the fireworks are sparking the enthusiastic spirit of the colonists as they wait for the stage to be filled with the world’s greatest musician. Joaquin and the rest of his friends are standing in front of the stage with the cabinet members celebrating next to him. Mayor Eugenio Maria de Hostos enters the stage and slowly walks towards the microphone.

“My dear colonists, I would like to thank each of you for coming here today to support our national baseball team and to welcome our foreign visitors.” Now that the game is over I would like to introduce to you the greatest musician of the universe.” “Without further delay I give you Tony Joe Superstar,” says the mayor as the colonists go crazy in utter excitement.

The band is playing rock & roll music in preparation for the lead singer to appear. The stage is filled with white smoke and laser beams that combine into a technological spectacle. After the smoke settles down, the laser beams surround Tony Joe Superstar and his electric guitar as he appears in front of the microphone. The concert goes on and the four million colonists and everybody else in the stadium start jumping and singing and celebrating the songs they have

come to love. In front of the stage Joaquin and his friends celebrate with the mayor, the colony's baseball team, and the cabinet members the visit to the realm of living dreams.

"Mr. Plato, I have to go for a few seconds but I'll be right back," says Joaquin.

"Don't be afraid Joaquin, everything is going to be all right," replies Plato.

"I know," replies Plato.

The band is playing a power ballad and every person that has a loved is falling in love again as the beautiful music plays. In the middle of the song Tony Joe Superstar instructs the band to continue playing the love melody but at a softer note.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the colony, I have a young man that would like to make a special announcement on this beautiful evening." "He is one of the foreign visitors that bravely played against your baseball team." "Come on down Joaquin," says Tony Joe Superstar as he hands his microphone to Joaquin Cantos.

"My name is Joaquin Cantos and tonight I would like to make a special request to the woman of my dreams, to my one and only love, and to my best friend." "Maria Elena, when I was eleven years old I had a dream about you, a dream that is still alive in me today and that I will never forget." "It was during that dream that I came to know the essence of what true beauty is." "As time has passed, part of my dream of getting closer to you has come true since you are my girlfriend." "Today I don't want to be close to you anymore, I want to be part of you." "Will you marry me?" asks Joaquin as he holds an engagement ring on his left hand while standing on his knees.

The giant screens of the stadium are showing the beautiful face of Maria Elena while the entire colony waits to see the reply of the bronze skin young lady. With tears on her eyes, she moves her head up and down and Joaquin knows that she has accepted the invitation. Joaquin

handles the microphone back to Tony Joe Superstar and runs towards Maria Elena in order to place the ring on her finger. The music goes on as the lovers dream of perfect places in which love is the nutrient that fills the eternal hunger of the soul. The cycle of life continues without hesitation or regret.

This is going to be the first and last time that all the people that are involved in the life of Joaquin Cantos will be celebrating together as a group. For most of Joaquin's friends, this episode will be counted as another dream that for some unexplainable reason everybody they know was in it. For Mrs. Rosaura Perales this is a dream that will give her another chance to enjoy life the way it was intended. Since her unconscious mind is in a new body, she will wake up as part of the colony and will never remember that she was part of another society. Her body in the City of the Stones will be found by her neighbors after the smell of decomposition informs them. Since Maria Elena became a part of Joaquin since the moment she accepted the engagement ring, she will remember everything that happened during the living dream.

Joaquin and Plato wake up from the living dream and find themselves back in the capitol building of the colony. The cabinet members have released their antennae and are ready to go to their houses to enjoy family life. Each of the cabinet members embraces Joaquin and Plato and thanks them for saving their colony and for protecting it from ultimate doom.

"We should be on our way back to your bedroom Joaquin, are you ready?" asks Plato.

"Mr. Eugenio Maria de Hostos, I will never forget you and I promise you that your colony will always be safe," says Joaquin.

"I know that Joaquin" "Myself and the cabinet members are all philosophers, painters, or poets, and as you know a poet can read the heart of any person without having special powers."

"Good bye," replies the mayor as he walks outside the room.

“Yes Mr. Plato, I am ready to go home” replies Joaquin.

The butterflies return to the room and embrace the master and apprentice in a whirlwind of energy that will return them to their original size. As soon as the philosophers set foot on the room, Joaquin safely secures the old toothbrush inside a chest he has with his most valuable possessions.

“Joaquin, I just want to tell you that I’m very proud of you and I know that you will be a great husband to Maria Elena,” says Plato.

“Thanks Mr. Plato, but you don’t have to worry about it, our adventures are just beginning so don’t get all softy on me,” says Joaquin.

“How is your philosophical theory coming along?” asks Plato.

“The theory is named Labor Percolation, but I still haven’t developed it.” “I am trying to guide my way of thought into discovering what does Labor Percolation truly means,” says Joaquin.

“I am living now but you know I will be back for you when times dictate,” says Plato.

“I am looking forward to that Mr. Plato,” replies Joaquin as he watches Plato disappear into the night.

Song VIII: Moon’s Mystery

The Space Aeronautics Agency has completed all the preparations for the trip to the moon and is sending a group of astronauts and scientists to investigate the recent events that have startled the citizens of the Caribbean Island and the scientific community of the entire planet. Some time ago, a total solar eclipse lasted for an entire week and its shadow was casted solely over the Caribbean Island. At the moment in which the eclipse occurred, the scientific

community of the world hypothesized that the magnetic forces that attract and repel between the Earth and the moon became entangled and the incremental force allowed the celestial bodies to remain motionless for an extended period of time. But the solar eclipse is not the only event that has puzzled the scientific community of the entire world, the Caribbean Island also experienced a strange phenomenon in which people felt tired and lost the desire to go to work and perform their daily activities. On one morning when the sun rose forty seven minutes earlier than usual, the tiredness left the Caribbean Island unexpectedly and its citizens regained the energy that was mysteriously drained from them. Even though the scientific community of the world continues to investigate the events that have occurred in the Caribbean Island lately, they ultimately understand that a trip to the moon is necessary to unlock the secrets of those events. After a rigorous regiment of pain staking preparations, specialized training, and numerous mission rehearsals, the trip to the moon is about to launch.

Amongst the valiant crew of the spacecraft “Titan” is Alberto Castro; better known as the Black Beetle by friends and family. Alberto Castro was selected for the special mission to the moon after competing against one hundred other pilots from the different branches of the Western military. In all his years as a combat pilot, the Black Beetle has never made an in flight mistake and has broken the previous safety records for the entire Western military. It was a no brainer to select him for this mission since space exploration requires a combination of skill, superb safety awareness, and intelligent reasoning that without a doubt Alberto Castro has embraced throughout his years as a pilot.

The final countdown has begun and the crew of the spacecraft is ready to launch into the emptiness of space in an attempt to investigate and further prevent planetary cataclysms. As the mighty Titan patiently waits for the mixture of liquid nitrogen and oxygen to ignite and thrust it

upwards into the blue skies, Alberto prays for the safety and well being of the crew from his space bound seat.

“Dear Lord, if I have sinned in any way or form against You during my life, I ask You to forgive me at this time and to have mercy on my soul.” “I do not fear death because You defeated death on the cross when you spilled Your blood for us sinners.” “Going into space is not the same thing as flying a jet fighter over the jungles of the Eastern Country since this is a new experience for all of us, so I ask you to be the pilot and commander of this spaceship.” “I know that my life is in your hands, and I know that the life of Patricia and my son are in your hands; please protect them.” “But more importantly, let your will be done on Earth, on the heavens, and over the life of your humble servant.” “I pray to you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; amen,” prays Alberto Castro for a last time on this Earth.

Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, blast off. The spacecraft’s mixture of oxygen and nitrogen is burning into a ferocious ball of fire. Seconds later, and after hours of wait over the launch pad, the spacecraft finally moves upwards into the direction of the unknown. The gravitational forces of the Earth are no match for the powerful solid rocket boosters of the Titan. The spacecraft is fast ascending into the blue skies and is leaving a long trace of white smoke behind similar to a chain of cumulus clouds. A large crowd of people is watching the impressive event over the roofless amphitheater that stands next to the launching platform. As the Titan moves further away from the crowd of spectators, the crew communicates with ground control and notifies them that they are safe and sound.

Even though Alberto’s chair is shaking vigorously, the buckled black harness is holding his body so snugly that he stays in position without any trouble. Over his left shoulder there is a glass window that allows Alberto Castro to observe the features of the Earth as they become

smaller during every second of flight. Two minutes have passed since the Titan successfully launched from the Western Country and the spacecraft has reached an altitude of forty six kilometers into the atmosphere. As the spacecraft automatically jettisons the solid rocket boosters, Alberto Castro observes how they open their parachutes and begin to descend into the vastness of Earth's oceans. The space vessel is no longer shaking and the gravitational forces no longer have an effect over Alberto's body. A sense of peace overwhelms the collective spirit of the crew of the spaceship as they reach the gravity free area outside of Earth's atmosphere. The Titan is free floating in space and the buckled seatbelt is still holding Alberto to his cushioned chair. The rest of the crew is celebrating the efficacious trek from the launching pad into the vastness of space while Alberto observes the beauty of space through his large glass window.

“Deploy the foldable wings, ignite the ion thrusters, and prepare for space travel,” says Coronel Sanders from the commander's seat.

“Yes sir,” replies the ship's pilot.

The Titan is the first spacecraft in the world to use the new ion thrusters designed to travel long distances with a reduced usage of xenon gas as fuel. Scientists from the Space Aeronautics Agency have deemed ion technology to be safer, more cost effective, and more efficient than previous space age thrusters.

The spaceship Titan is deploying its foldable wings as it prepares to travel to the moon in search of unanswered scientific questions. Meanwhile, the ion engines are completing the pre-travel cycles for the trip that will last for three joyful days. Sitting over the commander's seat of the Titan is Coronel Sanders wearing his customary white suit, black bow, black glasses, white mustache, white beard, and polished white boots. The rest of the crew received a specially

designed blue space jump suit with a mission patch over the left arm that reads: “Ion Titan: Moon Odyssey.”

“Coronel, the wings are completely extended and the ion engines have completed the pre-travel cycles.” “We are ready to depart Earth’s orbit,” says the ship’s pilot.

“As you all know the trip to the moon will last for three days.” “In the meantime make sure the mission objectives are rehearsed for your individual as well as your group participation in this expedition.” “If everything goes as planned we can assure mission success and a safe return to our planet.” “As soon as we reach the moon the spacecraft will stay in orbit while the astronauts and scientists conduct their experiments over the surface of Earth’s only natural satellite,” says Coronel Sanders.

“Coronel Sanders, an optimal course has been plotted for the moon,” says the ship’s navigator.

“Pilot, fire up the engines, maximum speed; engage,” commands Coronel Sanders.

The next three days are characterized by training, rehearsals, and good times. The crew of scientists and astronauts enhances their labor relationship with countless jokes and gravity free summersaults throughout the hull of the spacecraft. For all them, this is the first time they leave the comfort of solid ground for a trip to outer space inside an ion powered ship.

The three day trip has ended and the spaceship Titan is orbiting the circumference of the moon. The anxious crew is ready to set foot over the rocky crust since this is the first time in over forty years that human beings have done it. Forty seven years ago a crew of astronauts from the Western Country landed on the moon but left after planting a flag and taking a few pictures.

The lunar exploration program was placed on hold over four decades and was reinitiated seven years ago at the request of the wives of the most preeminent scientists of the world.

“I wonder what Patricia might be doing right now.” “She might be taking our son Alberto Jr. to school, she could be cooking a delicious meal with bread fruit and cod fish, or she might be praying for me I hope.” “I sure miss her and I can’t wait to return to Earth so I can see her beautiful smile again.” “Lord, please keep my family safe until I return,” says Alberto Castro.

“Before we go over to the moon we must have a special banquet.” “I brought a special ration of secret recipe chicken, biscuits, coleslaw, and bubbly drinks so we won’t go hungry while we explore the virgin terrain of the moon.” “Enjoy it guys,” says Coronel Sanders.

One hour later the stripped bones of the drumsticks are lying on the table, the coleslaw cups have a few pieces of carrots floating over mayonnaise and pineapple juice, the soft drinks are no longer carbonated, and the crew is setting foot inside the shuttle that will take them to the surface of the moon. For this historical trip, Alberto Castro has been selected to pilot the shuttle ship to a suitable landing platform over the moon’s crust. Once the shuttle lands, the crew of scientists and astronauts will retrieve the moon rovers from the shuttle’s cargo bay and will conduct their research.

“Is everyone ready?” asks Alberto Castro.

“We are ready Mr. Castro, takes us to the moon,” replies the crew.

“This is shuttle one requesting permission to exit the Titan, over,” requests Alberto.

“Permission granted shuttle one, the Titan’s cargo bay is now open, you are free to proceed,” replies Coronel Sanders.

“Roger,” replies Alberto Castro as he exits the cargo bay of the Titan.

Shuttle one is flying towards the surface of the moon. Alberto's first spatial flight is not different from any combat mission he has flown over enemy lines in the past as he is precise, accurate, and has total control of the ion engines and maneuvering thrusters of the shuttle. Within minutes, Alberto releases the landing gear of the short range shuttlecraft and lands it over a flat field of lunar dust. Upon touching the surface of the moon, the crew celebrates with excitement their arrival and congratulates Alberto for a perfect flight and landing.

Alberto is looking outside of the shuttlecraft through the large glass panels that form most of his cockpit and notices that the surface of the moon lacks the colorful beauty of Earth's landscapes. Instead, the moon appears to be a barren land full of powder like dust and covered in large rocks that evidently serve no purpose. Large sand dunes are everything and everywhere. Since the moon does not have any known atmospheric gases, the deep space can be appreciated just by looking above the line that separates the horizon from the sandy hills. But if something can be deemed impressive about the panorama that Alberto Castro is viewing, it must be the life size northern hemisphere of planet Earth floating in the middle of the vastness of space.

The rear door of the shuttle opens and a bright blue light inside the bay reveals four lunar rovers connected to four large rectangular shaped trailers. Within the four containers lies the scientific equipment that will be used to determine if there are magnetic fluctuations within the core of the moon, if there is a problem with the moon's rotation and notation, if the moon has been impacted by large meteors lately, if there is water inside the moon, if there is volcanic activity within the moon, if there are lunatics (citizens) living on the moon, or if permanent changes in the moon have occurred, are occurring, or will occur in the near future.

The hydraulic system of the angled rear door of the shuttlecraft is activated. When the door descends into the dusty ground it becomes a ramp that allows the four rovers to exit. The

large rugged wheels of the lunar rovers allow for easy movement throughout the sandy areas while hauling the trailers with the scientific equipment. Besides the four scientific teams that have manned the rovers, a fifth team will conduct their scientific experiments in the area near the shuttlecraft in order to assure the safety of their transport. In addition, the shuttlecraft will be utilized as an improvised command and communications center between the Titan and the lunar rover crews.

Coronel Sanders has given the green light to the research teams and the rovers are moving in four different directions with exactly ninety degrees of separation. Forty five minutes have passed since the four crews departed from the base station and Alberto Castro is in command of the driver's seat of one of the lunar rovers. As he swiftly maneuvers through the rocky grounds, he notices that there is a large crater ahead of their current position and becomes intrigued by it.

“This is astronaut Castro; we are approaching a large aperture in the terrain ahead of us that appears to be a large crater.” “Would you like me to round it and continue moving further, or would you like to begin your research near the crater?” asks Alberto.

Without hesitation, the crew of scientists decides that they would like to investigate the crater as they have hypothesized that the magnetic forces of the moon might be easier to read around this area. After maneuvering the lunar rover for a few minutes, Alberto stops one hundred meters short of the crater and informs the crew that it is safe to exit the vehicle. The crew of lunar rover #3 has retrieved their equipment from the hitched lunar trailer and is walking towards the crater inside the new and improved space suits the Space Aeronautics Agency provided them for this mission. The suits are made out of a light material that allows the host greater flexibility and mobility without sacrificing the necessary safety features. The helmet has been drastically

reduced in size since the introduction of a lightweight material known as transparent Damascus steel that is almost weightless and can withstand extreme heat and pressure.

The first person to set foot over the edge of the depression is Alberto Castro. He soon discovers that the crater was not made by a fast impacting meteor but by the body of a large creature that seems to be half squid and half octopus. The magnitude of the circumference of the crater extends for twelve miles beyond Alberto's eyes. Alberto Castro notices that the crater that holds the remnants of the squidtopus is steep and is mostly composed of feldspar rock and lunar dust. Even though the terrain is rugged, the research crew should not have any problems in descending to it on foot. While Alberto's brain interprets what his eyes are observing inside the dip, he waves at the rest of the crew and signals them that it is safe to come and observe the large torso of his discovery.

"Rover #3 to Titan command, can you hear me, over," says Alberto Castro.

"Coronel Sanders here."

"We have found a crater that has the torso of what appears to be the remnants of a giant cephalopod of some sort." "At the bottom of the crater there are several entrances to what seems to be a system of lunar caverns." "As soon as we reach the bottom of the bowl we will attempt to determine the relationship between the moon and the body of this creature, and we will begin exploring the interior of the caves as well," says Alberto Castro.

"Proceed with caution, over and out," says Coronel Sanders.

It takes the crew of lunar rover #3 approximately forty five minutes to reach the bottom of the crater and face the giant head and torso of the squidtopus. The team of scientists does not waste any time and immediately begins the initial observation process of the creature.

"Notice how the giant creature is covered by wooden harpoons," says a researcher.

“It must have been in some type of fight before it came to this location,” says another researcher.

“From the way this beast landed on the moon I would hypothesize that a large explosion is what sent it up here,” says an astronaut.

“I concur,” says another researcher.

“This beast has hybrid features of octopus and squid,” says a scientist.

“It must have been a marine creature of some type,” says an astronaut.

“I can almost guarantee that somehow it must have had tentacles, but since the bottom portion of his body has been severed there is no way of knowing,” says a researcher.

“Have you noticed how the harpoons have ropes attached to them?” asks an astronaut.

“I believe that we have proven that there is life in other planets, and the organisms that live in other planets are apparently hostile,” says a researcher.

“That’s true, this cephalopod was attacked with harpoons that pierced its flesh,” says a researcher.

“The vacuum of space has preserved this carcass intact,” says Alberto Castro.

Half of the team is setting up their specialized equipment in order to study the remnants of the squidtopus in larger detail. Alberto and the other half of the research team will move onto exploring the nearby caves that somehow seem to be related to the strange maritime creature. A few minutes later the group of scientists reaches the bottom of the hill that leads to the entrance of the cave system and as they climb it, Alberto notices how the inside is not rocky or cavernous but smooth and bright as a summer day in the Caribbean Island. With great caution, the Earth travelers enter the lunar cave and discover that everything inside is made out of cheese.

“This place is made out of cheese; I can see sharp cheddar, gruyere, blue stilton, Gouda, Swiss, Colby, parmesan, asadero, brie, Oaxaca, and hundreds of other different classes in here,” says Alberto Castro.

“I wonder if the cheese is edible, or if it’s an unknown substance just shaped like cheese,” reasons the astronaut.

“My instruments tell me that we are inside a bubbled atmosphere that contains nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and oxygen,” says a scientist.

“That means that the air in here is breathable,” says a scientist.

“I am taking my helmet off,” says Alberto.

Without a subatomic particle of doubt, Alberto takes off his helmet and breathes the fresh air the cave has to offer. The rest of the team follows his venture and remove the helmets from their heads and breaths the pure, cheese scented air the moon has offered its visitors.

“If the air in here is breathable, then the cheese in here must be edible as well,” says Alberto.

“I’m in the mood edam,” says an astronaut.

“I want some Munster,” says a researcher.

“Can you hand me some manchego please,” says a scientist.

For the next hour the astronauts and scientists enjoy a well deserved break from the harsh conditions of the surface of the moon and savor the infinite cheeses and the clean breathing air they have found inside the cave. Since there are so many varieties of cheese inside the cave, each astronaut only savors a small piece of each kind as a way to save space for the other delicacies that surround them.

“Even if I move to this cave I don’t think I’ll ever get to taste them all,” says a scientist.

“I know, and the only thing we have seen so far is the entrance of the cave,” says a researcher.

“This cave probably contains varieties of cheese that are native to the moon and no human being has ever tasted before,” reasons a scientist.

“Titan command this is astronaut Castro, do you read me, over,” says Alberto.

“Sanders here,” replies the coronel.

“We have found an atmosphere suitable for human breathing and a cave full of countless varieties of cheese.” “Our other half of the team is still outside the cave studying the body of the creature and we are setting up our equipment inside the cave as we speak,” says Alberto Castro.

“Good work Mr. Castro, please continue, over and out,” says Coronel Sanders.

The scientists are no longer sampling the cheese with their taste buds but with their scientific equipment. For several hours the team places sensors and probes around the inside of the cave and gather important information about the origin of the cheese and the gaseous lunar atmosphere.

“We have discovered that with the exception of the moon’s rocky crust, the entire lunar body is made out of cheese.” “In essence, the moon was traditionally divided into three different parts which included the core, the middle-lunar mantle, and the crust.” “The core was made out of a semi-solid protein based circular mass that served as the electromagnetic nucleus of the celestial body, the middle-lunar mantle was primarily composed of a gelatin like organic material, and the crust which by now we all have seen without any evident changes.” “It is our belief that when the large cephalopod that lies at the entrance of the cave landed over the crust of the moon, an array of algae and bacterium stowed away with it.” “The microorganisms found the entrance of the cave and discovered that they could survive in this new environment by using the

middle-lunar mantle as a food source.” “For hundreds of years the microorganisms have been eating the middle-lunar mantle and have created a gaseous atmosphere and an entire world of cheese as a byproduct.” “It was just a matter of time for the organisms to reach the lunar core and transform it into these delicious types of cheese,” says a researcher.

“When the satellite’s core was transformed into cheese the source of lunar magnetic energy was weakened.” “That explains how the moon remained in place and casted its shadow over the Caribbean Island for an entire week.” “The magnetism of the Earth overpowered the weakened magnetism of the moon and so did the moon didn’t have a chance to repel the magnetism of the Earth,” says Alberto Castro.

“We concur with your theory Mr. Castro,” says a researcher.

“I believe the mystery of the moon has been solved; now we must find out if the other half of the team has determined the origin of the large cephalopod that lies at the entrance of the cave.” “Let’s go meet with them,” says Alberto Castro.

A few minutes later the team leaves the entrance of the cave carrying their scientific equipment as well as cheese samples for the rest of the crew of the spaceship Titan. Once they meet with their counterparts outside of the cave they share the results of their investigation and inquire about the origin of the large creature.

“We have determined that this humongous carcass is not native to the moon.” “The creature was fighting a group of much smaller individuals that used the harpoons to fend him off.” “A large explosion blasted away the bottom part of the organism that most likely was composed of tentacle like structures.” “We have calculated the trajectory vectors, the impact force based on the size of the crater, the azimuth based on the polar star, and compensated our calculations based on gravity pull and have reached a consensus that the strange creature came

from the Great Red Spot from planet Jupiter.” “We believe that there is intelligent life in planet Jupiter and this creature proves it,” says a researcher.

“Our mission has been a complete success today.” “We should climb out of this crater so we can get back to our lunar rover vehicle.” “Once we get back to Titan we can share our findings with Coronel Sanders and the other research teams,” says Alberto.

Forty five minutes later the crew of lunar rover #3 finds itself packing their equipment inside their specialized rugged vehicle as they get ready to return to the command and communications area where the shuttlecraft landed. A sense of camaraderie and joy overwhelms the crew since they know that they have found the answers they came looking for. Alberto is walking outside the lunar rover making sure that everything is secured in order to safely return to the lunar base when he notices the rays of the sun reflecting over his uniform. What Alberto Castro does not know is that at this specific moment the perpendicular rays of the sun are touching the upper lunar tropic and this event is known as a lunar solstice. Alberto notices how the same bluish/purplish waves he has experienced all his life during the solar solstice are moving up and down his body. The direct ultraviolet rays of the sun make a bigger and more powerful wave than what Alberto has experienced before since there is no atmosphere over the crust of the moon to filter the light. As the solar wave intensifies, Alberto tries to hold on to the lunar rover but the speed of the wave surpasses the speed of sound when the expected sonic boom explodes around him. With still his arms extended, Alberto flies out of the moon into the vastness of space at the speed of sound. Alberto can see how the Earth and the moon become smaller as he flies away from them. Minutes later he can see Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto, and the Milky Way Galaxy vanishing into a sad memory as he knows that in space an object will continue moving in a direct vector unless a net zero force acts upon it.

“Father God, now I know that I will never return to my home planet since I am no longer in my own galaxy.” “I have seen what no human eye has ever dreamed of seeing.” “I have flown by comets, ice rings, nebulas, galaxies, red giants, death stars, black holes, solar flares, and other phenomena that I have no words to describe.” “My body is flying at the speed of sound and when the oxygen inside my tanks runs out I will die of asphyxia.” “Please rescue me and have mercy of my soul.” “Send the same angel that delivered the old lady from my church the day I accepted your name as the name that is above all names.” “And above all, take care of my wife Patricia Nava and Alberto Castro Jr.” “Help my son grow up understanding that life without you has no meaning whatsoever.” “I ask you this in your name, amen,” says Alberto.

“Did you know that the God we serve is the God that created the entire universe?” asks Gabriel as he flies next to Alberto.

“Gabriel, is that you?” asks Alberto.

“The Lord always hears your prayers Alberto, and today is the day that your prayers will be made in His presence since you will be with Him on this hour.” “You will be in paradise with Jesus Christ today, tomorrow, and for the rest of your eternity.” “In the time of the Lord your wife and son will come to the presence of God and together we will all serve our Lord from generation to generation.” “Today your body will become that which is eternal in his presence.” “Let it be known, on Earth, in the heavens, and in the magnitude of space that Jehovah our God, his son Jesus Christ, and his Holy Spirit were, are, and will always be, amen.”

Song IX: A Visit To Madam Le Mystique

Two years ago: The walls of the waiting room are painted with somber and mystical colors that produce an environment of whispering sorrow. Mystical posters of horses with human heads,

tigers with ten eyes, stabbed dolls with steeled knives, a woman being bitten on the face by twelve brown snakes, the seven African powers, and white angels fighting dark demons adorn the mystical walls and welcome the mind of the incredulous to believe the unbelievable. Large cracks on the faded linoleum testify about the thousands of people who have walked through this hallway before in search of answers to their unanswered questions of life. A dust covered ceiling moves slowly above the head of Eduardo Rodriguez as he waits to see the ageless spiritual leader of the region; Madam Le Mystique. It is believed by many people in the Caribbean Island that Madam Le Mystique is over one thousand years old, but no one knows with exactitude if the information is accurate or not. Noises of cars can be heard outside the old concrete building where Eduardo is waiting for the mysterious foreteller. The constant honking of horns reminds Eduardo that he is the middle of the downtown area and that only mad people live inside the city. A strong smell of incense dampens Eduardo's clothes, nostrils, and mind, while a tingling sensation moves up and down his spinal cord as his anticipation grows stronger every moment. Eduardo can hear a set of steps approaching him on the other side of the wooden door that separates him from his unavoidable fate.

“Clack.” “Clack.” “Clack.” “Clack.” “Clack.” “Clack.” “Clack.” “Clack.” “Clack.” “Clack,” sound the approaching steps.

A sudden stop in front of the door and the clacking sound vanishes from Eduardo's sense of hearing. Eduardo's eyes are fixated on the wooden door that will soon lead him to the single answer he has been searching all his life. Suddenly, the door produces a shrieking sound unsympathetic to Eduardo's love for musical perfection and slowly begins to open. The shrieking sound coming from the rusty hinges of the door is harsh and in dire need of lubricating oil. The open door reveals a somber room full of symbols and strange writing that is foreign to Eduardo's

understanding. Eduardo's facial freckles sit still during this moment of discovery as he waits to see what will happen with him during this visit.

"There is no one here." "Who opened the door?" thinks Eduardo.

"You may enter," says a deep ghostly voice that reminds Eduardo that hell is a real place.

As soon as Eduardo enters the room the door behind him closes shut not by the hand of man but by the force of a strong gust that travels in and out of the room in no specific direction. The room is as dark as a cemetery at dusk, and soon Eduardo's eyes adjust to the somber scenario with the aid of the black, red, and white candles that stand on the table at the back of the room. As he walks towards his unavoidable destiny, Eduardo can see dusty tables holding numerous artifacts that belong to all known religions of the Earth: Buddhism, Judaism, Egyptian, Christianity, Santeria, Muslim, Voodoo, Taoism, Spiritism, Confucianism, Greek, Hinduism, and other agnostic beliefs. The artifacts are covered with giant spider webs and Eduardo hopes that he does not stumble upon the arachnid that placed them there. As he walks towards the silhouette of the body of the small woman that is waiting for him on the back of the room, he can feel the tingling sensation still present on his spinal cord as it continues to move up and down his vertebrae. The room is filled with the scent of ancient death, the same smell that permeates the pores of the skin of a rotting cadaver at a funeral home.

"My name is Madam Le Mystique, you may take a seat so we can get started Mr. Eduardo Rodriguez," says the voice of the small woman who sits in front of Eduardo.

"How do you know my name?" asks Eduardo.

"I know a great deal of things Mr. Rodriguez." "I know that you are a musician, I know the exact number of freckles you have on your face but it is not meant for you to know, I know that you limp when you walk because you had an accident at birth with your mother's vagina,

and I know that your two best friends are Bartolo De Jesus and Joaquin Cantos.” “But that’s not important at this moment, right?” “Please tell me why you have come to seek my help?” asks Madam Le Mystique.

The face of the witch is covered with bumps and small ulcers that look like petrified leprous cankers. The witch’s nose is long and pointy and Eduardo can’t help to stare at it and observe its features closer. A large black hat covers her gray hair and Eduardo firmly believes that she could pull rabbits out of it if she really wants to. An ancient large black witch dress covers her small and fragile body while her small feet find themselves inside a pair of high top laced up leather boots with a squared hill. Next to the table where Madam Le Mystique is sitting there is a large broom with a thick stick that she uses to fly when the weather is sunny and the winds are calm over the starry nights of the Caribbean Island.

As the tingling of the spine begins to dissipate, Eduardo feels like he is in some kind of trance that will take him to another realm in which what is commonly known as reality has a total different meaning from traditional knowledge.

“Madam Le Mystique, I would like to know what I can do to land a record deal.” “I am a thirty two year old guitarist that senses that his time in the music business is running short, and I would like to land a record deal before my youth runs completely out of me,” replies Eduardo.

“Interesting request, let’s see what the crystal ball can tell me,” says Madam Le Mystique as she starts moving her hands around the magic ball in all known angles and directions.

As the ancient foreteller performs the spiritual ceremony, white fog begins to rise from the floor of the room. The crystal ball is changing colors rapidly, one second is blue, the next second is yellow, and the following second is bright red. The early gust of wind is now moving the candle light abruptly, but the flame remains lit as it is not meant to be extinguished while the

medium unit communicates with the spiritual world. Eduardo's heart is pumping faster than the bilge pump of a boat that is about to sink over the waters of the Caribbean Sea. The witch slams her hands over the table continuously and screams words in a language that Eduardo has never heard before while the heavy white fog levels at the height of Eduardo's waist.

"I can see that there is an opportunity for you Eduardo, but it is not an easy thing to achieve; you will have to make sacrifices that can change the core of your existence," says the ancient woman.

The wind is no longer blowing the flame of the candles, and the fog is lying peacefully over the dark floor of the room. Eduardo is no longer feeling the ants moving up and down his back, and a sense of ease dominates the reasoning of his conscious self.

"I will do anything you ask me to do, just tell me what has to be done, and I will do it," says an exasperated Eduardo Rodriguez.

"My spiritual guides have asked to tell you that the only way in which you could make it big as a guitar player and finally land a record deal is to achieve the ultimate level, a level that can bring any talented musician to be acclaimed as a Rock & Roll god or a legend of legends."

"What is the ultimate level?" asks Eduardo.

"The ultimate level is a place that reaches beyond the shores of the Caribbean Island, beyond our atmosphere, and beyond the moon and the stars, and the galaxies that lie beyond our limited physical knowledge of the universe in which we live in." "It is the place where the known becomes the unknown, and the unknown becomes what is," replies Madam Le Mystique.

"I have no idea about what you just said lady," says Eduardo Rodriguez.

"I will give you a list of ingredients you need to gather, and clear instructions of what to do with them once you have found them all." "I will write two pieces of paper for you, one piece

has the ingredients, and the other one has the instructions that you must follow once you have found all of the ingredients.” “Do not read the second set of instructions until you have completed the first task,” says Madam Le Mystique as her wrinkled hand writes over the papyrus paper the two sets of instructions.

“I will follow your instructions with exactitude,” says Eduardo.

“You must, if you don’t want something bad to happen to you.” “The spirit world will give you the desires of your heart Mr. Rodriguez, but the spirit world is not to be taken lightly.”

“You must not fail the spirits...” says Madam Le Mystique.

“I will not fail,” says Eduardo.

“This is all I have for you Mr. Rodriguez, I have to go feed my hyenas now; farewell,” says the witch as her fragile and decrepit body gets up from the chair.

“How much do I owe you?” “When can I come back and see you to verify if I have gathered the ingredients correctly?” “Will you help me read the instructions when the time comes?” asks Eduardo.

“You don’t owe me anything young man, and you may never come back to see me since you are the last person from this world that will have a conversation with me.” “I am going into permanent retirement and to the place I’m going you are not welcome,” says the witch as she walks towards the back door.

“Thank you very much Madam Le Mystique, I will never forget what you have done for me today,” says Eduardo as he walks towards the main entrance of the room.

The door of the room opens on its own accord as it signals Eduardo that the time has come for him to depart from the presence of the mystical woman. As Eduardo walks towards the

exit door of the magical room that connects to the waiting area, the same deep voice that asked him to enter the room moments ago has a final advice for him.

“Wait musician, a warning I must give you before you exit this place of surreal vision.” “Sometimes it is difficult to return from the ultimate level.” “The ultimate level can be a place of sublime peace, but it can also be a place of doom and despair.” “Be careful my dear, be careful, you may like it in there too much and then decide not to return to the world of the living.” “If you decide to remain in the other realm, you will have unlimited happiness, but there is no return door that can bring you back to the world you know.” “On the other hand, if you decide to return to this world your wish will be granted, but the world will not understand you.” “Be careful Eduardo Rodriguez, and do not forget my words,” says a fading echo that will remain in Eduardo’s memory for the next two years.

One year ago: The main event of the night is about to begin, and this time Bartolo is fighting for the heavyweight championship of the world. The last time Bartolo stepped inside the ring he fought “The Sweet Potato” for the cruiserweight championship of the world and surprisingly lost again. After the disappointing defeat, he fired his lifelong trainer and asked his wife and friends to help him train for what will be his last opportunity for a championship belt of the world since he has lost every boxing bout beginning at the bantamweight (no interest in belts below this weight) and ending at the cruiserweight. Tonight is the first time in Bartolo’s boxing career that he has his wife Matilda the Boxer as his trainer, Joaquin Cantos as his assistant trainer, and Eduardo Rodriguez as his cut man.

Bartolo has trained harder for this fight than for any other fight he has fought before. Before Joaquin goes to work every morning to teach the riddles of science to his middle school

students, he takes his best friend Bartolo for a six mile run around the City of the Stones. In the afternoon, Matilda the Boxer and Eduardo Rodriguez train Bartolo at the City of the Stones Boxing Gymnasium where he punches the speed bag, the heavy bag, and his boxing partners for twelve grueling rounds. Bartolo knows that if he does not win tonight's fight, he will never get another chance for a championship bout since there are no weight classes heavier than heavyweight.

"Alright sugar bonbon, you go out there and show this guy that you want his belt and you are going to take it," says Matilda the Boxer before Bartolo faces his adversary on round one.

"You can do it Bartolo, make sure you use your jab and remember that we are here for you," says Joaquin Cantos.

"I got you water for your thirst, petroleum jelly for your eyebrows, and a comfortable bench so you can seat after each round man," says Eduardo Rodriguez.

Malanga Root is the biggest heavyweight boxer the world has ever seen and weights twice as much as Bartolo De Jesus. Since Bartolo barely weights ninety two kilograms (the minimum required weight for a heavyweight fighter is 91.7kg), he is able to dance around his opponent and connects beautiful punches on his face that certainly have no effect. After the first round, the boxing computer calculates that Bartolo had landed two hundred and eighty nine punches while his opponent connected only four. When Bartolo reaches his corner, Eduardo Rodriguez notices that his left eyebrow is open and is bleeding profusely. He cleans out the wound and stops over ninety percent of the bleeding before his friend has to step inside the ring again.

"You have to stick and move Bartolo," says Joaquin.

"You know I love you honey bun, don't get hurt please," says Matilda the Boxer.

“Avoid the left hook to your temple, we can’t afford to get the fight stopped by the doctor if your eyebrow is reopened,” says Joaquin.

“I can take him, he is going down soon; I can feel it,” murmurs Bartolo.

The second round begins and Bartolo does not waste any time with his opponent. Every jab, hook, counterpunch, and upper cut lands easily over Malanga’s face and body, but the champion does not seem to feel it. Malanga barely throws any punches, but the few ones he throws Bartolo avoids them with ease. The same fighting rhythm continues onto the end of the seventh round. Bartolo has been throwing and landing his punches and the champion is still coming at him without a simple scratch.

“This man is a beast,” says a tiresome Bartolo.

“Hi sugar pie, I like your red gloves,” says Matilda the Boxer.

“I have an idea Bartolo, evidently the champion is immune to your punches.” “He is so large that your offense has no effect on him.” “This is what I want you to do, I want you to harness all of your strength and punch his bellybutton.” “I guarantee you that he will not withstand this punch,” says Joaquin Cantos.

“Alright, but if I don’t get him with this punch I will be toasted,” replies Bartolo.

“The punch will be infallible,” says Joaquin.

The crowd is getting bored of the fight and begins cheering for the challenger as he leaves his corner into the eighth round. Bartolo harnesses all of his strength within the right fist and tunnel vision’s the champion’s navel. One Newton, two Newtons, ten Newtons, one hundred Newtons, one thousand Newtons, one million Newtons, and the punch hit the center of the champion’s belly button with lighting speed. The impact is so powerful that Malanga Root falls to floor without any air left inside his lungs. Unfortunately, Bartolo De Jesus does not move out

of the way in time as the champion falls to the canvas and is pinned down by the massive body. As the two hundred kilogram behemoth squeezes the oxygen out Bartolo's lungs, he loses consciousness immediately. The bodies of both champion and challenger are lying over the canvas unconsciously, and the referee decides that whosoever of the fighters stands firmly over the canvas first will be crowned the winner of the bout.

"Get up Bartolo," says Joaquin Cantos.

"That's my marshmallow prince lying over the canvas," says Matilda.

"If you get up, you win; it's that easy," says Eduardo Rodriguez.

For thirty seven minutes the motionless bodies of Bartolo De Jesus and Malanga Root lie over the harsh surface of the canvas. All of a sudden the champion opens his eyes and attempts to stand up. At the same time Bartolo regains consciousness after the heavy burden is lifted from him and tries to get up as well.

"Whoever stands firm will be crowned the champion guys," shouts the referee as the gladiators rise to the occasion.

By a difference of a tenth of a second Malanga Root firmly stands over the sweaty canvas and the referee raises his hands triumphantly. The crowd goes wild in excitement for the reigning champion has one more time retained his belt. The fight is over and Bartolo De Jesus just lost his last opportunity for a championship belt. The night has fallen over the consciousness of men and the group of friends does not have any energy to do anything else. The car trip back to the City of the Stones is calm and not much is said. After Matilda the Boxer drops Joaquin and Eduardo in their domiciles, she drives her battered husband to their lovely house where the milk of cows and goats is never far from reach.

When Eduardo Rodriguez arrives at his apartment, he takes a shower and goes to sleep for his body is as tired as the beaten body of Bartolo. After he sleeps for four restful hours, he feels like his feet are being pulled but he knows that it is impossible since he lives all by himself. Eduardo tries to get back to sleep thinking that he was just having a bad dream when he notices that Samantha, the dead woman that sits on the bus stop is the one pulling his feet. Eduardo abruptly sits over his head and does not say a word. Samantha is holding a green banana on her left hand and has a smile on her lips that reminds Eduardo that when he was eleven years old Bartolo warned him that the dead woman was coming to do this someday.

“I have something for you Eduardo Rodriguez.” “I am going to sit on your bed and I want you to eat this green banana while I watch you,” says Samantha.

“I will do it,” says Eduardo.

“I know you will,” replies Samantha.

Without hesitation Eduardo Rodriguez eats the green banana and hands out the peel back to Samantha. The dead woman places the banana peel in one of the pockets of her dress and stands up from the bed leaving a large amount of dust and putrid water over Eduardo’s cotton sheets. As the corpse walks outside of the room, she grabs a robot toy that Eduardo has saved from his childhood days that he likes to call “Mazinger Z” and walks outside of the apartment with it. The following morning Eduardo Rodriguez wakes up and goes to the bus stop to see if his robot toy is still in the pocket of the dead woman’s dress. As he slips his hand inside the pocket, the only thing that he retrieves is the green banana peel. Eduardo Rodriguez searches everywhere for his robot toy but he never finds it again.

Present day: Today is the day in which Eduardo Rodriguez will see the dream of his life materialize before his very own eyes. It has been two years since he visited Madam Le Mystique and the time to perform the ritual he has been patiently waiting to complete has come.

“Man, this is going to be coolest thing ever!” “I think that I am going to reach the stars, and the planets, and the parallel universes that no one has ever seen.” “I am going to get there today, and there’s nothing that can make me change my mind, nothing,” says Eduardo Rodriguez as he is about to end a chapter of his life and begin a new one.

The thirty four year old guitar player has never had a new guitar due to his uncanny belief that brand new guitars are absent of the “maestral spirit,” a link between the human soul and the soul of the instrument that grows with human bonding. Because of that reason, he buys his guitars and amplifiers at pawn shops and garage sales for he believes that the instruments have been baptized by the sweat of other musicians are ready to serve him.

Eduardo’s permanent musical scenario takes place at the clubs of the Capital City of the Caribbean Island where tourists enjoy the skills of the talented musician. Even though Eduardo enjoys playing in his home island, he would play in any city of the world if only an invitation was extended to him. The day for the musical invitation has finally arrived and it will be made by an unexpected singer he is about to meet.

Every time Eduardo Rodriguez plays guitar at a club he puts on a pair of dark sunglasses he received in the mail after reaching a total of fifteen years as a faithful member of Tony Joe Superstar’s fan club. The sunglasses have polarized lenses that filter undesired light and a minuscule picture of Tony over the right temple tip. It could be said that the pair of sunglasses have saved Eduardo’s life in too many occasions since he doesn’t like to show people at the

clubs that his eyes are beginning to cross each other. With firm exactitude, Eduardo's left eye is tilted twenty seven degrees northwest and his right eye is tilted fourteen degrees southeast.

Interestingly enough, Eduardo was not born a crossed eye person. Six months ago, on the day in which is impossible to use the number 4 in a mathematical equation, he visited the local zoo with his two best friends Joaquin and Bartolo and saw a pair of hippopotamus copulating inside their refreshing bathing area. At that moment his brain entered a state of paranoid arrest resulting in the polarization of his eyes. The same doctors that diagnosed his foot when he was born told him that his eyes would never return to the original position because his optical nerves are under so much stress that the damage is irreversible. The visual experience was so traumatizing that his eyes have not returned to the point of origin till this day. Sometimes when the skies are dark and the moon is pale he has nightmares of the pair of hippopotamus looking at him and smiling with an evil smirk on their lips as they incessantly mate.

When Eduardo Rodriguez was a high school student he told his mother that he wanted to be a bohemian guitarist for the rest of his life. At that early age he was already a talented musician and felt no need to pursue other academic interests like his friend Joaquin did.

"I want to jam with the greatest musicians in the business; Mike Perez, Tony Joe Superstar, Señor El Guapo, Robert Big Face, and Duckman Harris." "I want to have groupies following every step I take, I want to have the biggest entourage in the history of Rock & Roll, I want the paparazzi taking pictures of all the women I will be dating at the same time, I want to have a group of bodyguards that will eat nothing but cow liver and drink nothing but cod liver oil and will have black belts in Jujitsu, Tae Kwon Do, Ninjitsu, and Copoeira, I want to have so many record deals that I would have to hire a special staff just to sort out which record

companies are worthy of getting some type of personal consideration from me; that's exactly the kind of musician I am going to be, nothing less," said Eduardo to his mother sixteen years ago.

Little did he know that out of two million, one hundred eighty seven thousand, nine hundred and eighty seven (the same amount of freckles his sister counted on his face when he was a kid) tries to land a record deal, all of the answers from the record companies resulted in an absolute lack of interest.

As instructed by Madam Le Mystique's first letter, for the last two years of his life Eduardo saved all of his money with the intention of purchasing the most special of all special things that could be purchased in this world; so special that it is supposed to change him forever and ever. During this time Eduardo has not gone out on dates, has not purchased any guitars, and hasn't gone out to eat at the fancy restaurants of the Caribbean Island. The only thing that he has been doing this time is playing his guitar, making the usual money at the clubs, and saving it under his fluffy pillow. Five days before today the search for the ingredients began when Eduardo took all of his saved money and went down to the skid row to purchase all of the illegal drugs he could find. During this time he felt extremely awkward because contrary to the belief that most guitar players smoke marihuana, Eduardo has never had any contact with any type of drug as he knows that drugs can kill the hopes of dreamers. On the fifth and final day of the search, Eduardo spent the last money he had saved on a signature drug made by a local chemist and headed towards his apartment to open the second letter.

"Finally, the time has come, I will reach the ultimate level; I will make it big with my guitar," says Eduardo as he opens the door of his apartment.

The second letter is being held by Eduardo's hands and reads: "Now that you have gathered all the special ingredients, place all of them inside the black cauldron, cook them for as long as necessary, and please enjoy; that's it."

Eduardo grabs the plethora of drugs he has been saving for the last five days; LSD, PCP, barbiturates, marihuana, crack, cocaine, heroin, crystal methamphetamines, acid, opium, hashish, and thirty seven other rare illegal drugs and places them inside a cauldron that just appeared in the middle of his living room. He thinks that Madam Le Mystique must have brought the pot after he left the apartment because he is completely sure that he does not own it. Under the black and heavily used cauldron, he places nine different types of aromatic woods he found inside his car the day he visited the witch and sprays lighter fluid over them until the logs are completely damped. All of a sudden a fire emerges from under the cauldron even before Eduardo has a chance to ignite the wood. He knows that he is about to enter a spiritual dimension, a realm in which forces beyond his power and knowledge are operating; a gate where worlds intersect and divert energy into new horizons of existence. Eduardo is sitting patiently in front of the cauldron and does not move or says a word. From inside the black pot, he begins to hear strange noises that spread throughout his entire apartment.

"Hahahahahahaha."

"Aaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"Back in 1930."

"Shhhhhhhh."

"Remember me?"

"Welcome."

"I have a dream, that one day my four little children..."

“The war has ended.”

“The war has started.”

“Hail Mary!”

“I still love you.”

“I’ve never been in exile before.”

“There was something in the air...”

“Ground control to Mayor Tom.”

Eduardo remains seated over the dusty linoleum tile floor with his back erected at a perfect ninety degree angle. At this moment he looks inside the cauldron and notices that the drugs are no longer separate parts as they have turned into a liquid substance similar to the elixir Zeus drinks in his domain of power. The elixir is bubbling, the world is turning, and the wait is over for Eduardo Rodriguez. A cup made out of carved rustic stone appears on the left hand side of Eduardo and has a similar size and shape to the sacred chalice utilized by catholic priests during mass. The noises coming from the cauldron are now intensifying and Eduardo can hear voices from people that have been dead for a long time talking to him.

“You should not play with the forest snakes, the green iguanas, or wild mongoose because they can give you rabies,” says a deceased cousin that died of rabies in the year the spring rains up poured.

“Could I borrow a few bucks to pay the toll?” says his long dead uncle.

“Don’t forget to always be kind to others and eat plenty of vegetables everyday if you want to grow up healthy and fight the swine flu,” says his late grandfather.

Without any hesitation, Eduardo picks-up the stone cup and examines it with his five senses and notices that it has no symbols or writing; it is just a rustic piece of art. The cup feels

porous and harsh on his soft guitar man's hands. As Eduardo leans forward to observe the liquid that is inside the black cauldron, he finds out that it has no distinctive type of smell and can only wonder how it is going to taste like for he knows in his spirit that he must drink it.

The noises that bounce off the walls of the apartment spreading messages of past acquaintances are becoming distant as Eduardo's hand is about to fill up the stone carved cup with the mysterious orange liquid. As soon as the tip of the cup touches the strange orange color substance, the voices completely disappear from Eduardo apartment. As the cup enters the black cauldron, the orange liquid feels thick and semi viscous to the host's touch. Eduardo makes sure that the cup is completely submerged and that it comes out of the cauldron completely full and dripping. As soon as the cup is retrieved from the puzzling substance, the rest of the liquid vanishes from Madam Le Mystique's ancient cauldron. The red hot fire that was furiously burning a few seconds ago has completely extinguished, there is no residual smoke, there are no flying ashes or sparks, and only silence remains. The aromatic wooden logs under the cauldron are resting since their purpose of existence has now been completed. Eduardo's face can no longer feel the heat that seconds ago was burning his freckles. The stone cup is being held by both of the guitar man's hands and no aroma is participant in this experience; only expectations of a drastic life change that is way overdue. Eduardo is about to drink the mystical potion when the words of Madam Le Mystique resurface from the thoughts of his head for a last time: "Remember what I told you my dear boy, be careful."

"No hesitation man, this is your chance Eduardo; this one is for you," thinks Eduardo.

As soon as the liquid meets with Eduardo's taste buds, the result is stranger than strange as the orange potion is as cold as a winter storm over the North Pole. More strangely, the liquid tastes similar to a tropical fruit punch made out of guava, papaya, coconut, guanabana,

pineapple, and acerola berries. Not a drop of this frozen treat is left in the cup as Eduardo makes sure that all of its contents are properly retrieved. Eduardo is thinking that the fruit drink is going to make him feel sick or his body will be forced to vomit it since after all it was made out of a bunch of drugs he has never used before. For Eduardo's own decency, the drink feels good to his stomach and has refreshed him greatly without any side effects.

Eduardo stands up from the cold floor and walks towards a small end table that stands in the corner of his apartment and places the cup on it. The end table was a gift his mother received from her great grandmother and Eduardo has kept as a symbol of love for his family. Since his legs have become numb after sitting on the cold floor for an extended period of time, he sits on a bench he purchased three years and two months ago from a Middle Eastern businessman that visits the City of the Stones every year. When he turns his eyes to the end table next to him, he notices that the cup is no longer over its surface as it has gone to the same place the fire and the leftover orange potion have gone. In front of Eduardo Rodriguez there is a green frog standing on his rear strong legs. Eduardo notices that the frog is smiling at him and waving his left arm in a friendly manner.

"Hi, how are you sir?" says the friendly frog.

"Who are you, or better yet, what are you?" asks Eduardo.

"You have never seen a frog before?" says the frog.

"I have seen many, but never a talking one," replies Eduardo.

"I have seen guys with freckles before, but you have more than all them combined." "But going back to your question, I'm afraid to tell you that I don't have a first name if that is what you are referring to." "Since I never met my father or my mother, I was never given a name." "I guess that you can just call me frog since most people call me like that."

“Nice to meet you Mr. Frog, my name is Eduardo Rodriguez.”

“You must excuse my slow walk Mr. Rodriguez, I have arthritis on back.” “I was once told by a beautiful female tree frog that arthritis is a genetic condition that my species of frog suffers.” “Sadly for me, I will never be able to figure out if my condition is generic since I never met my parents, in fact, frogs never get to meet their parents; how strange is that?”

“I am sorry to hear that,” says Eduardo.

“So Eduardo Rodriguez, can you tell me the reason why am I here?” asks the little green amphibian with arthritis on his back.

“Ok, I’ll tell you how that happened, but it will take me a minute or two.” “I spoke to a witch a few years ago and asked her what I needed to do in order to make it to the next level in music, a level that is finally going to give me a chance in the music business.” “The witch gave a list of instructions and told me that if I do as she said I was going to see my dream come true.” “I followed all of the instructions the witch asked me to do and that is how you happen to be here,” replies Eduardo.

“Now I get it Mr. Rodriguez, it is all clear now” “Are you still in contact with the witch?” asks Mr. Frog.

“I haven’t seen her since I consulted her mystical powers two years ago,” replies Eduardo Rodriguez.

“Your story is very interesting Mr. Rodriguez, please go on,” says Mr. Frog.

“I am a gifted guitar player, but I have never been able to land a record deal or make it big in the music business.” “By the time I turn forty years old man my chances will be completely extinguished.” “Somehow I do believe that you hold the key to the door I have been trying to open all my life,” says Eduardo.

Eduardo and Mr. Frog move on to the faded blue corduroy couch and their conversation goes on for one complete hour. Happy faces express the mutual feeling that a strong bond has been established between the mammal musician and the singing amphibian.

“There are so many reasons why I enjoy being a guitar man Mr. Frog, for example, when I play I feel so happy that my freckles glow in the dark.” “Music makes sad people forget about the daily struggles of life, touches the spiritual fiber of the self, and most definitely allows me to meet very cool women,” says Eduardo with a big smile on his face.

“I can probably help you get a studio deal since I am singing frog, and believe me when I say this; I can sing better than anybody you have ever met before for I am gifted.” “I think that your guitar talent and my vocal cords can get help you fulfill your dream.” “I never thought that I would record songs, but I guess my dream of singing on stage has come as well,” says Mr. Frog.

“So what does your dream represents to you Mr. Frog?”

“I want to sing for the rest of my life, no holds barred,” answers Mr. Frog.

“So, what do you think Eduardo, shall we get started?” asks Mr. Frog.

“Sounds cool to me, do you want to do a jam session for practice?” asks Eduardo.

“Let’s do it!” replies Mr. Frog.

Eduardo goes to his bedroom and picks up his old and faithful guitar. He returns to the living room and sits once again on his heavily soiled blue sofa and begins tuning his precious instrument. As soon as the guitar is ready to play, Mr. Frog sings a Rock & Roll that delights the ears of Eduardo and he responds by streaming up and down the metal strings of his instrument. At this moment Eduardo knows in his heart that this is the part he has been missing in his life. He needs a counterpart, and he just found one. The guitar session lasts for three long hours,

maybe four, or even five, but for Eduardo and Mr. Frog it seems that only a few minutes have passed since they have enjoyed it to the fullest.

The night has fallen over the City of the Stones of Caribbean Island. A cool breeze squeezes through the aluminum windows and cools down the whole apartment. A bright full moon casts its light over the consciousness of man, bringing all darkness into obedience. The night is full of hidden surprises, and to some those surprises are serendipitous while to others it is the falling from divine grace.

“There is something I need to tell you Mr. Rodriguez before we continue making plans.” “As you have probably figured out by now, we are neither in your world nor in my world.” “We are in a collision vortex, a place in which different stages of the universe share space and energy.” “You must decide now what you are going to do with the rest of your life.” “If you want us to return to your world we will be able to get a record deal and the masses will come with it, but whenever the governmental agencies discover that the voice behind your music comes from a singing frog they will take me away from you and we will never see each other again.” “They will make all kinds of experiments on me as they try to discover a way in which I could be turned into a weapon of mass destruction.” “On the other side, if you come with me to my world we will be able to get ourselves a record deal as soon as we get there but many more records will follow in the years to come.” “Even better, we will never be separated from each other since the dimension where I come from is a place where musicians are rare, and because of that, we will live like kings and the pleasures of life will never leave us.” “There is no deception entwined in the words I just told you, but you must choose now,” says the fatherless amphibian.

Deep inside Eduardo’s thoughts the words of Mr. Frog begin to sink in as he knows that there is no deceit in the expressions of the amphibian. Eduardo understands that this is his

last change to land a record deal and the final opportunity to live the rest of his life with the dignity a great musician deserves. After all, he has been working pretty hard all of his life and it is time to harvest the benefits he has been planting.

“Do you have human women in your world?” asks Eduardo.

“Yes off course, and they are even prettier than the ones you have in your world,” answers the green animal.

“It might have been nice to make it big in this world, but since I can’t do it here, I am going with you Mr. Frog,” says Eduardo Rodriguez.

“Then we shall go,” says Mr. Frog.

“I will surely miss my two best friends Joaquin and Bartolo, but they already have their wives to take care of them.” “This one is for me,” says Eduardo Rodriguez.

Eduardo picks up his guitar, places it inside the sticker covered case, and closes it. He grabs Mr. Frog with his left arm and places him over his left shoulder. The guitar case is now tightly gripped in his right hand. A new door made out of oak with a brushed nickel handle appears in the middle of his living room. Eduardo takes a final glance at his apartment and smiles. Mr. Frog remains quiet as his new friend bids his final good bye to this world. Eduardo opens the door and enters. The door is shut forever.

Song X: The Gathering

On the first day, of the twelfth month, in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ two thousand and ten, Joaquin Cantos wakes up early and informs his wife that he has an important matter to attend with Plato and will not be going to work.

“Please say hi to Plato for me,” says Maria Elena.

“I will pretty girl,” replies Joaquin.

“Will you be back for dinner?” asks Maria Elena.

“Most likely yes, but you how it goes,” answers Joaquin.

“I’m making rice and beans with fried plantain, so you don’t want to miss it,” says Maria Elena.

“I promise you I’ll be back by dinner time, you know I can’t say no fried plantain,” says Joaquin.

“That’s how I like it!” “You have a good day my love; I’ll see you when you come back,” says Maria Elena.

Joaquin kisses his wife good bye and drives his family van for a few minutes until he reaches his parent’s residence. As it habitually happens every morning before he goes to work or anywhere else, Joaquin makes a short stop to savor a delicious breakfast with his mother Yolanda. When Joaquin enters his parent’s house, he can smell the cornmeal cream his mother has made for breakfast. The smell produced by the cornmeal cream enters through his nostrils and his hunger increases exponentially making Joaquin’s mouth a splashy pool of saliva and digestive enzymes.

“Bless me mom,” requests Joaquin.

“God bless you my dear son,” replies Yolanda.

“Hi Joaquin, how are you?” asks Ramón Cantos.

“Bless me daddy,” replies Joaquin.

“God bless you my son,” replies Ramón Cantos.

“How are you feeling dad?” asks Joaquin.

“I just take it one day at a time Joaquin.” “I feel a little weak this morning, but you know this cancer is not going to get me.” “I am way too hard headed to let a few crazy cells try to do me wrong,” says Ramón Cantos.

“Tell me about it,” replies Joaquin.

“Remember this Joaquin; I always loved you even if at times in which I didn’t show it to you or your brother Agustin.” “I was just so focused on trying to make good for myself and my family that I forgot the simplest aspects of being a good father and husband,” says Ramón Cantos.

“I know dad, and Agustin knows that too.” “Anyway, today is your last chemotherapy session and tomorrow should be the last day in which your body will get bombarded with heavy ions during your last radiotherapy visit; how is the treatment going?” asks Joaquin.

“I think they’re killing the cancer and killing parts of me with it at the same time.” “But there is no doubt in my mind that I will survive this ordeal since I plan to enjoy whatever time I have left on this Earth with you, your brother, your mother, and especially my grandchildren,” says Ramón.

“You will be fine dad, you have always been strong minded and that is the key to survive under duress; at least that’s what Agustin taught me from his military training,” says Joaquin.

Joaquin enjoys the culinary pleasure of eating the best cream of cornmeal the world has ever tasted. For as long as he can remember, Yolanda has prepared a variety of breakfast creams and they have become nothing but a necessity for Joaquin. After a brief breakfast conversation, Yolanda departs to the local hospital with her husband for what the entire family hopes will be the final chemotherapy visit. As Joaquin walks through the hallway that leads to his former bedroom, memories begin to surface from the days in which him and Agustin fought for the

early bathroom, memories of rainy mornings wishing he did not have to go to school, memories of the odium the smell of second hand smoke that gave cancer to his father used to produce in him, memories of Agustin leaving for the initial training of the Western military, memories of the opening of Christmas gifts that were clandestinely brought by the three magi kings, and memories of the first time Plato materialized in his room before their first adventure in a long forgotten memory of the Caribbean Island.

“Nothing has changed in Agustin’s room, and neither has something changed in mine.” “Mom has kept the rooms the same way we had them since the time we were kids because she likes to remind our own children about our humble beginnings.” “I am sure my own kids as well as my brother’s kids will surely appreciate that.” “Anyhow, it is eight fifty five in the morning and Plato should be here within the next five minutes for the time has arrived for me to deliver the philosophies that have been borne in my unconscious self by having being Plato’s sidekick for so many years.” “I am not nervous, but I can’t deny that I’m anxious to stand in front of the Committee Members and share with them the journey that has brought me to their presence.” “Even though I have never met the Committee Members, I believe somehow we are connected to each other religiously; in a philosophical kind of way.” “I believe philosophy is not simply a theoretical way of life that guides the children of wisdom of this world, it is much more.” “Philosophy is an invisible force that binds the entire universe in a cohesive mechanism that defines the essence of what constitutes the beginning of everything that is, was, and will take place in the minds of those who dare to hatch outside the cocoon of ignorance that engulfs the contemporary system of tangible reason,” thinks Joaquin.

In a dark corner of Joaquin’s room a gas like fog materializes out of thin air. Immediately Joaquin’s spirit rekindles the same feeling he felt the first time Plato introduced himself when he

was an eleven year old boy getting ready to go to bed. The fog takes the shape of a human silhouette and slowly levitates towards the entrance of the room in the same manner it happened during their first encounter. As soon as the specter touches the cold floor of the room it transforms into an elder man wearing beach trunks, a flower shirt, dark sunglasses, and comfortable shower shoes on his feet.

“I’m so glad to see you Mr. Plato,” says Joaquin.

“And so am I my good friend,” replies Plato.

“As soon as I saw the fog in the corner of the room my mind went back to the first time I saw you,” says Joaquin.

“I thought it would be a good idea to reminisce about our early times on this important day,” says Plato.

“You are beginning to sound like I’m never going to see you again.” “Today is just another day in our calendar Mr. Plato; the adventures will never end,” says Joaquin.

“That much is certain Joaquin.” “For those of us who have embraced the belief that there is a perfect world of form and idea far beyond the shores of our natural minds, adventures never die away,” replies Plato.

“That’s the spirit Mr. Plato.”

“Joaquin, the Committee Members will meet with you at the eleventh hour of this day.” “We will leave your parent’s house an hour before so you can have enough time to settle in and prepare yourself for the gathering.” “The Committee Members will listen to the philosophical theory you have developed and to the context that surrounds that paradigm of truth.” “They will question the core of your knowledge with the purpose of testing and retesting the accuracy and reliability of your proposed theory.” “If you succeed, you will not only earn the respect of the

Committee Members, but you will also achieve the level of ‘Doctor of the Love of Wisdom,’ a title that represents your commitment to wisdom and your everlasting desire to prepare the next generation of minds in the paradoxes of perception that define good judgment,” says Plato.

“I am ready Mr. Plato, and I believe the clock has reached the tenth hour of the day; I sure don’t want to be late for the event I have been waiting for most of my life,” says Joaquin.

“Then we shall leave at once,” replies Plato.

A soft breeze enters the room that used to belong to Joaquin Cantos at the time he was living under the roof of his parent’s house. The early morning breeze travels around the walls of the alcove spreading the aroma of wild flowers it carries within. The fragrance produced by the mystical blend of rose, lily, humid Earth, begonia, tulip, and Maga spreads throughout the entire house leaving a fresh aroma that relaxes the soul and the spirit of Joaquin before he leaves for his philosophical defense. As it customarily occurs before the duo transports their bodies to a different place or time, the morning breeze surrounds the pair of philosophers and encircles them inside a ferocious whirlwind. This time the rapid twister will transport them inside the Realm of Form and Idea, a place that only philosophers are allowed to visit.

The whirlwind disappears from the presence of master and apprentice and leaves them in front of an architecturally majestic building known as: “Harrington Tower.” The square shaped building is made out of white marble and has flat walls without any visible windows. Each of the walls has six squared pillars that reach five meters from the bottom of the floor into the ceiling. The two main entrances of the building are attached to the central hallway that stretches between the eastern and western walls. A large double stairway stands in the middle of the hallway and it serves as the path to arrive at the upper level of the structure. The roof of the majestic building is

made out of sheets of polished copper and is shaped with a hip roof style. The combination of copper and white marble produces a feeling of academic beauty that Joaquin has never experienced before and his spirit feels overwhelmed.

“This is Harrington Tower Joaquin, the place where the Committee Members call their eternal home,” says Plato.

“Mr. Plato, my physical senses tell that the place in which we find ourselves is similar in every way to the world that I come from, but my spiritual senses tell me that I’m not even in my home planet,” says Joaquin.

“Indeed you are correct Mr. Cantos.” “You are no longer in your home world, for the world that you have come to see as real is a mere reflection of the world you are standing on today.” “As you can see, we find ourselves in the perfect world of form and idea.” “This world is the world that is found in the realm that is and always has been.” “The world that you call home is a mere reflection made out of weird shapes that reflect and retract from this world,” says Plato.

“Are saying that this is the genuine world of everything that is, and my world is just a shadow of the true form of reality it represents?” asks Joaquin.

“That is correct Joaquin.” “Look at it this way, when you see a tree, a cup, a book, or Harrington Tower, you are watching the original piece that has existed since the moment in which the idea was created.” “The objects found in this realm of existence are in the perfect form or the perfect idea of what they truly are in other planes of existence.” “Every object that is found in your world is only an imperfect replica, it is the shadow of what is being casted from the original perfect object that is found in this world,” says Plato.

“If I destroy a perfect object in this world, will it be destroyed in the world I call home?” asks Joaquin Cantos.

“You can only destroy that which is meant to be destroyed Joaquin, but ideas that radiate that which is perfect are indestructible,” replies Plato.

“In other words, the shadow of the perfect object can be destroyed, but not the idea from which it sprung at the beginning of existence,” says Joaquin.

“I believe that you can see it now Joaquin,” replies Plato.

“The more I look around, the clearer every object becomes.” “I feel like everything in this realm, the trees, the sidewalks, the air, the skies, the people, and even my own hands are made out of ‘high definition’ material.” “I was never able to see so clearly in my life.” “I feel like my senses can perceive everything there is in the world of form and idea with cunning and astuteness.” “But there is a question I have for you Mr. Plato,” says Joaquin.

“Go ahead, ask me,” replies Plato.

“I completely believe and understand what you have explained to me about the world of perfect form and idea.” “But if I am part of the world that is a mere reflection of this world, then I must only be a casted shadow as well.” “Because of you, I am able to visit the dominion of perfection where we stand right now.” “If I, being an imperfect form, could plant an idea in this world that is perfect, could my idea be casted over the imperfect world that I come from or is it just impossible for an imperfect idea to plant a perfect idea in this world and to be casted back to the imperfect world in order to help my world to see the true light of their possessions?” asks Joaquin.

“You do ask an excellent question my philosopher friend, but I think you will get your answer in due time.” “After all, only you have the power and ability to determine if such action can be accomplished in your world, this world, or in any other known or unknown world.” “One thing I can tell you, the reason why you are able to enter the perfect world of forms and ideas is

because you have embraced the fundamental idealistic nature of what wisdom truly means.”

“You should be able to figure it out from there,” replies Plato.

The conversation continues as the sound of their footsteps bounces against the walls of the white building with a polished copper roof. Joaquin can smell an air of higher learning and intelligent reason that permeates the thin air he is breathing. The double stairway leads Joaquin and his philosophy teacher to the upper level of Harrington Tower where the Committee Members wait for the arrival of the thirty five year old truth-seeker. When the duo of theorists reaches the upper level, both the hour and minute hands of the clock reach the eleventh number. Joaquin recognizes that in five more minutes he will propose to the Committee Members the knowledge that he has harnessed throughout the many adventures he has shared with his mentor Aristocles. Plato goes inside the philosopher’s chamber to notify the scholars that his pupil has arrived and is ready to defend his newly developed postmodernist theory.

“The time has come Joaquin, the Committee Members are waiting for you,” says Plato.

“I am ready,” says Joaquin.

Joaquin Cantos enters the philosopher’s chamber and encounters three men and one elegant woman sitting over a set of executive raised benches that stand over a white platform. The walls of the room are covered with the most magnificent oils that Picasso, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Leonardo Da Vinci, Salvador Dali, Michelangelo, and other great artists have created.

“These are the original pieces Joaquin.” “The ones you have seen in your world are only replicas,” says Plato.

“This world is simply ideal,” replies Joaquin with a smile on his face.

The four thinkers receive Joaquin Cantos with fair smiles on their faces and professional gestures. The spirit of Joaquin can immediately sense the individual hearts of the Committee

Members and determines that their strength of mind is benevolent and that the main purpose of the meeting is to provide guidance and to facilitate his personal growth as a philosopher and scholar.

“My name is John Dewey, and these are my friends next to me.”

“Jean Paul Sartre is my name, Mr. Cantos.”

“My name is Marie Curie, nice to meet you.”

“I am Aristotle, and I’m happy to meet you Joaquin Cantos.”

“These are the Committee Members Joaquin, the ones I promised you would meet some future day during our first encounter,” says Plato.

“I could never forget that day Mr. Plato,” replies Joaquin.

“I told you that you would be here at the age of thirty and five years, and my promise to you has come true,” says Plato.

“I am honored to meet you all on this beautiful today, and I’m looking forward to share with you some of my philosophical beliefs,” says Joaquin.

“I am sure you have been waiting for this day Mr. Cantos, but you should know that we have eagerly been waiting for this day as well,” says Marie Curie.

“Days like today are the reason we exist Mr. Cantos,” says Jean Paul Sartre.

“We have gathered today to listen to the philosophical theory that Mr. Joaquin Cantos has prepared and is ready to present before this committee.” “For many years Joaquin Cantos received his philosophical guidance from Plato.” “Today he stands alone for Plato, my former pupil, is not allowed to intervene during this meeting.” “Mr. Cantos will now be given an opportunity to present to this committee the conjecture he has developed,” says Aristotle.

“Mr. Cantos, behind you there is a Foucault pendulum.” “We will use the pendulum to mark the amount of degrees that you are allowed in order to complete the presentation of your theory.” “Overall, you will have a total of fifteen degrees to convey your message taking under consideration that you find yourself at a location that lies at the Tropic of Cancer,” says John Dewey.

“You may begin,” says Jean Paul Sartre.

Foucault’s pendulum is hanging from a large metal bar that stands at the back of the philosopher’s chamber, and as soon as it begins swinging Joaquin readies himself for the final adventure he will have next to his philosopher master during his air breathing days. The Committee Members have taken their seats over the white platform and are waiting for the apprentice to begin the philosophical discourse. Plato looks at Joaquin in the center of his small brown eyes and smiles with pride and delight. Joaquin’s spirit feels reassured.

“Today I have come to you to present a postmodern philosophical theory that I have titled: ‘Labor Percolation’ and that was developed based on my personal view of certain modern and contemporary avenues of decision that are currently affecting our society.” “These issues have surfaced during these existing times and have had a direct influence over the individual self as well as others within the structure we know as the social order,” says Joaquin.

“In order for me to explain the theory of Labor Percolation, I must first bring to this committee the traditional concept of how water is filtrated through porous rock in the creative process of caves, underwater rivers, caverns, and sinkholes.” “In the initial stages of cave formation, the carbonic acid contained in rainwater begins the process of weathering the surface of the rock.” “As time passes by, limestone (which is the most common rock involved in cave formations) begins to slowly dissolve thus creating the magnificent hollow structures that serve

as the abode for bats and other creatures that live in eternal darkness.” “The process that water undergoes as it passes through the porous rock is called percolation,” continues Joaquin.

“In Labor Percolation, I compare the amount of potential energy that must be exerted or produced by an individual or entity to one hundred milliliters (100ml) of water inside a graduated cylinder that holds a maximum of one hundred milliliters (100ml) of water.” “If the water is poured over a piece of limestone it will enter through the porous surface and will travel through the inside cavities.” “This is called the performance of labor.” “Finally, if a beaker is placed under the piece of rock the water will percolate downwards until the entire one hundred milliliters (100ml) will fall inside of it.” “This is what I call completed work.” “In Labor Percolation energy is used to complete work.” “As soon as the *laboral* task is completed, the work is considered complete and no further energy use is necessary,” says Joaquin.

“A cluster of what I call ‘*laboral* statements’ will be discussed as the specialized basis for what the universal laws of Labor Percolation draw its significance from.”

“The first statement of Labor Percolation is called Identical Inequalities.” “During Identical Inequalities it is proposed that every piece of work regardless of the perceived amount of energy that it requires to be performed is always equal to one hundred percent (hundred milliliters of water in its liquid state).” “For every situation that requires an instance of labor to be conducted, a predetermined amount of energy is necessary to complete the amount of work and it always equals one hundred percent.” “For example, it takes one hundred percent of the necessary energy that is needed to take a group of sixth grade students to a fieldtrip to the local museum.” “When the students return to the middle school after visiting the museum, one hundred percent of the amount of the work needed to visit the museum was completed and the labor results of visiting the museum reflect the experience that was lived by the students at the

site.” “Within our social constructs the visit to a museum can be considered a simple task to complete in comparison with the building of a space ship or creating a government sponsored genocide that will take the lives of twenty million people from an ethnic group living in a hostile country.” “Regardless of the apparent size of the task, the necessary labor needed to do a fieldtrip to a museum, build a spaceship, put on a pair of shower shoes, or murder twenty million people is always equivalent to one hundred percent,” says Joaquin.

“The second statement of Labor Percolation is called Individualized Potentiality.”

“During Individualized potentiality it is proposed that even though the amount of labor that is necessary to complete a task is always equal to one hundred percent, the modus operandi that is utilized by the very distinctiveness of human beings is not delivered equal amongst the parts.”

“The relationship between an idea and its creator is anchored on the potential development the creator has for that idea.” “The uniqueness of human reason is strongly correlated with the uniqueness of the ending form of the performed labor.” “An analogy of thought can be appreciated by the commission of two middle school science teachers to design a physical sciences laboratory activity that covers three state mandated objectives.” “The first teacher designs a laboratory activity that is completely different to the one produced by the second teacher, but both laboratory activities perfectly include the three state mandated objectives and are designed with accuracy and precision.” “Even though one hundred percent of the work was completed by the two teachers that set out to complete a task of identical functionality, the end result is individualized based on the diversified potential that every unique individual has,” says Joaquin.

“The third statement of Labor Percolation is called Temporal Exclusion.” “Temporal Exclusion is rooted under the understanding that the theory of Labor Percolation is primarily

based on the accountability of the amount of energy that is necessary to complete one hundred percent of the work and not the amount of time needed to complete the task.” “As we take into consideration the Individualized Potentiality of the uniqueness of the individual or group of individuals under scrutiny, we arrive at the conclusion that the value of chronological presence is excluded and no further installation of it is deemed necessary.” “Within an educational environment two students who fall under the same independent variables (age, gender, height, race, grade, demographic location of school, nationality, and socio economic status) set out to learn the process of photosynthesis with a science teacher as the method of instructional delivery.” “It takes the first student a one hour session to complete one hundred percent of the work and academic mastery is achieved.” “The second pupil needs a total of seven academic sessions with the science teacher in order to complete the assigned task of learning the process of photosynthesis.” “At the moment in which both students master the science objective, the performance of labor has been completed (work) in its entirety and the amount of time was never accounted,” says Joaquin.

“The fourth statement of Labor Percolation is called Accountability of Structures.” “During Accountability of Structures the responsibility for completing one hundred percent of the work does not belong to a single individual but to a group of individuals that as a group have the responsibility (whether is moral, intrinsic, or professionally related) as well as the potential energy to complete one hundred percent of the work that is necessary for the individual, group of individuals, or ideas that are being subjected to completion.” “For example, a middle school science teacher has the responsibility (whether is moral, intrinsic, or professionally related) to complete one hundred percent of the work that is necessary for his students to meet the requirements to pass his class.” “But in addition to that, the grade level teachers as a group have

the collective responsibility to help students individually as well as a unified order of students to pass the grade at the end of the school year.” “In this case, every teacher in this group of teachers within the same grade have to complete one hundred percent of the work that is required of them individually as a subject matter expert and gregariously as a member of a larger group of individuals,” says Joaquin.

“The fifth statement of Labor Percolation is called Product Asymmetry.” “A variable that has not been accounted until now is the presence of the absence of the projected results after one hundred percent of the work has been completed.” “During Product Asymmetry, those variations found in the expected product of the work are accounted as a conscious, inoperable, unwilling, or undesired response on behalf of the individual, group of individuals, or ideas under scrutiny.” “If one hundred percent of the work has been completed in regards to a specific idea, and the idea does not yield the estimated results that were previously projected, then the result is adjudicated to circumstances that exist outside the realm of responsibilities of the person or group of persons performing the work.” “For example, if a middle school science teacher completes one hundred percent of the necessary work a student needs to pass his class, and the group of teachers within the same grade perform one hundred percent of the work necessary for all students to pass onto the next grade and one of the students still fails to meet the necessary requirements to pass the science class or the grade, the discrepancy of the final product is not attributed to the performance of labor but by the accountability of responsibilities outside of the realm of possibilities.” “The undesired result can be attributed to the student’s personal lack of interest, problems at home, medical issues, an intrinsic defect in the idea, or countless other problems that will not be accounted during the present explanation of this theory.” “The theory of Labor Percolation is primarily concerned with the energy used to perform the work and the

percentage of work that is accomplished with the spent energy; it does not account for the discrepancies found within the choices made by the individual or group of individuals or by intrinsic defects found within the idea.” “Product Asymmetry proposes that if a different result is obtained after one hundred percent of the work is completed by the individual or group of individuals that are responsible for the completion of the work, the responsibility is uplifted from the laborer and passed down onto the piece of work or idea,” says Joaquin.

“The sixth statement of Labor Percolation is called Ethical Functionality.” “Ethical Functionality is described as the sum of the moral, ethical, and justice applied principles that relate to the amount of energy necessary to complete the work.” “Ethical Functionality is to be applied simultaneously to the energy that is applied to complete the work.” “The entirety of the completion of the work is never accomplished without the application of the ethical functions that are required within the innate knowledge that separates good character from immoral iniquities.” “The omission of the application of Ethical Functionality within the energy applied to conduct *laboral* activities momentarily restrains the possibility of achieving the culmination of the work and one hundred percent of the work is never achieved.” “If Ethical Functionality is later applied to a previous individual, group of individuals, or ideas, it is possible to achieve the completion of the work but it does not come to pass as an automatic response.” “In some instances the damage may be irreversible even if Ethical Functionality is later applied and the completion of the work is never achieved at a level of one hundred percent.” “Within an educational environment, a middle school science teacher can deliver to his students all of the tasks, conditions, and standards that are required of him according to the rules and regulations established by the laws of the land.” “The teacher was also aware that several students in his classroom needed individualized instruction and he failed to provide it since he was not required

by law or instructed by his principal that he was supposed to do it.” “Even though the teacher completed an apparent one hundred percent of the work that was required in regards to his students, since Ethical Functionality was not applied the completion rate can never reach one hundred percent.” “Even though Ethical Functionality is part of a postmodern theory, the idealist nature of the statement allows it to be an exception to absoluteness,” says Joaquin Cantos.

“The seventh and final statement of Labor Percolation is called Reduced Culmination.” “Reduced Culmination refers to the completion of the work without achieving a percentage of one hundred percent of it.” “Until now, we have been dealing with the achievement of the work in its entirety and work was never considered complete until one hundred percent of it was achieved.” “In rare occasions or under exigent circumstances such as the diagnosis of a terminal malady or unforeseen death, a person or a group of persons may not be able to complete the necessary amount of work that was established at the moment the task was started.” “At the exact moment in which a person or a group of persons becomes incapacitated and is unable to complete the work due to the lack of necessary energy, the work is considered to be complete even if it is incomplete.” “When a person dies the work is considered complete even if it is incomplete.” “When an active member of a group dies the group may or may not have the ability to compensate for the loss of that member.” “In either situation (able or unable to compensate) the work will be considered complete.” “Only one restriction applies to Reduced Culmination, if the person or group of individuals was not following the application of Ethical Functionality at the time in which the loss of potential energy occurred Reduced Culmination cannot be achieved and the entirety of work will be lost forever,” proposes Joaquin.

“Now that I have presented the basis for underlying the principles that encompass the criteria that applies to work in relation to the totality of its completion, I bring forth the argument

in which work can percolate into different venues and become an endless vacuum of lost and forgotten incompleteness.” “Within the individual (self) and social (others) environments that are found in our modern social order, the presence and importance of labor has shifted from being valued as an entity that requires completion to an optional form.” “The traditional requirement for the utilization of energy that aims to complete a specific designation of work has been wrongfully delegated to the different tribulations that our modern society has to offer,” says Joaquin.

“The sole responsibility for the utilization of energy and the completion of work lies solely within the structures in which the potentiality of labor has been entrusted.” “It is the responsibility of the entity or organization to which the responsibility has been given to make sure that the completion of one hundred percent of the required labor is achieved,” says Joaquin.

“From an analogical standpoint, a comparison is made by which the postmodern philosophical theory of Labor Percolation is compared to one hundred milliliters of water inside a graduated cylinder (100ml H₂O), a piece of porous rock, and a beaker.” “The water in its liquid stage represents the potential energy necessary to complete the work, the water moving inside the porous rock represents the work being performed (performance of labor), and the percolated water inside the beaker represents the amount of work accomplished,” says Joaquin.

“When water is poured inside a piece of porous rock such as limestone, it goes through the mazes inside of it and later it percolates inside a beaker that sits underneath it.” “The beaker is designed to hold one hundred milliliters of water and it represents the completed form of the labor.” “The percolation process utilizes the planetary gravitational forces (9.81 m/s²) as the force that yields the movement downwards.” “During the time in which the water is moving through the rock, microscopic particles of the rock will be dissolved and will end up inside the

beaker as well.” “The microscopic particles dissolved inside the water represent the changes in the individual, group of individuals, or changes in the idea that take place during the performance of labor.” “At the end of the performance of labor one hundred percent of the water is accounted inside the beaker representing the culmination of the work,” explains Joaquin.

“If a person, a group of people or an entity is tasked with the completion of a *laboral* process and the task is not completed by whom it was assigned, the work is often attempted to be completed by external sources that are found in our society.” “This is represented by the addition of a relative amount of other beakers under the porous rock.” “In this case I will use four beakers instead of one, but the amount of beakers present depends on how many sources attempt to complete the work.” “For example, if one hundred milliliters of water are poured over the rock and it percolates over four different beakers, at the completion of the work every beaker receives twenty five percent of the water that represents the culmination of the *laboral* process.” “Out of the four beakers, only one of them was supposed to receive one hundred percent of the water since the task belonged to an individual person or an individual group.” “The three extra beakers represent the social structures that attempt to take the place of the structure that was assigned to complete the work.” “Since the primary beaker only received twenty five percent of the water, the completed work is an equivalent of just twenty five percent,” says Joaquin

“In order for me to better illustrate the addition of social structures in the form of beakers, I bring onward an educational example in which a father and a mother are one hundred percent responsible to raise their child with a responsible attitude geared towards the love for school and the academic responsibilities that are inherent to academic work.” “The parents have one hundred percent of the responsibility (potential energy) to guide (percolation of water through the rock) the child into the completion (water inside the beaker) of the necessary work that starts

in kindergarten and ends at the high school graduation.” “If by the time the child is in middle school the only thing the parents are doing is sending him/her to school without being an active part of the *laboral* process, external sources (added beakers) will attempt to complete the work in lieu of the parents.” “Within our social reality, those external sources take the form of criminal activity, drugs, prostitution, robberies, alarming student attrition rates, teen pregnancies, pornography, incarceration, death, etc,” says Joaquin.

“The theory of Labor Percolation states that the amount of potential energy will always be consumed and the amount of work will always be completed.” “If the entity responsible to complete the work elects to do a small fraction of the work or no work at all, the external sources (which by the way are countless) that run free within our society will attempt to complete the work until all percolation has ceased and the work is considered whole.” “In all legality, the work can never be completed by an external source, but sadly the external sources take the place of the entity that is responsible and a false sense of completion is created.” “At the end of the percolation process one hundred percent of the water should be found inside one exclusive beaker, but despondently, our society’s desire for indolent behavior is growing and chaos is the result of merriment,” says Joaquin.

Foucault’s pendulum stops swinging after it moves for the allocated fifteen degrees. Joaquin Cantos body is exhausted, his throat is dry, his feet are swollen, but his spirit and soul are energized after delivering the grounds for the theory of Labor Percolation that he had prepared for the Committee Members. The presentation is followed by a round of questions that intend to test the validity and reliability of Joaquin’s proposed theory.

“How your theory does responds to the existentialist notion that we create our own values through the choices we make?” asks Jean Paul Sartre.

“From a scientific standpoint, how do you account for the water that does remain inside the limestone or to the transformation of liquid water into gas water that evaporates into the atmosphere?” asks Marie Curie.

“In regards to aesthetics, can this theory be considered ubiquitous, or does it have to be appreciated by a firm believer of what it represents in order to be considered true?” asks John Dewey.

“Do you believe in the terms proposed in your own theory, or did you create an eye pleasing speculation for the satisfaction of this group of philosophers in order to receive a title?” asks Socrates.

The onslaught of questions falls over Joaquin like hail during a thunderstorm, but he answers them wisely and without hesitation. The Committee Members inquire about the different segments that compose the theory of Labor Percolation in order to clarify any doubts they might have before they conclude the gathering. Next to Joaquin, Plato remains silent for he understands that his philosophical training ended outside of the door of the philosopher’s chamber.

The questioning has finally been brought to a close by the Committee Members. Joaquin and Plato are waiting for the final decision to be adjudicated by his philosopher counterparts. Plato has a smile on his lips as he prophesizes that his pupil will achieve the level of “Doctor of the Love of Wisdom” he has been training for such a long time.

“The members of this committee of philosophers have listened to the philosophical theory of Labor Percolation that Plato’s pupil, Joaquin Cantos has presented to us on this early day in the month of December.” “It is the solemn decision of this committee to not adjudicate the level of “Doctor of the Love of Wisdom” to Joaquin Cantos under the basis that his theory is too extensive and mind-numbing,” says Socrates.

Joaquin remains standing next to his philosopher master and not the simplest expression is seen on his countenance. His thoughts are a whirlpool of ideas and questions that bounce off the walls of his cranium in search of the reasons that inhibited his philosophical performance into rendering the desired result.

“Be nice to him Socrates, he must be nervous,” says Marie Curie with a soft and beautiful voice that produces peace and tranquility in Joaquin’s heart.

“Alright Marie, I’ll be nice to him,” says Socrates as he smiles.

Jean Paul Sartre, Socrates, and John Dewey are hard laughing at the comments made by Socrates. Plato joins the laughter as he knows that evidently Joaquin has passed his test and the rest of the philosophers just want to make him feel welcomed to the ranks.

“It is the solemn decision of this committee to adjudicate the title of ‘Doctor of the Love of Wisdom’ to Joaquin Cantos of the Caribbean Island.” “This committee is most pleased with your academic performance and we have thoroughly enjoyed the presentation of your postmodern philosophical theory of Labor Percolation,” says Socrates.

“I like your analogical juxtaposition of work and the process of weathering.” “Good job Joaquin Cantos,” says Marie Curie with a voice that juxtaposes sexiness and intelligence.

“I somehow knew that my former master was going to play a practical joke on you Joaquin.” “After all, having fun has always been in Socrates philosophical nature,” says Plato.

Joaquin Cantos and the Committee Members are having a conversation in which each member personally congratulates the thirty five year old philosopher. The conversation continues as Joaquin asks questions about the philosophies and scientific discoveries that they have achieved for the greater good of mankind. Joaquin can feel in his spirit that he has achieved a

status that cannot be measured by titles or certificates for he believes that he has become part of realm that goes beyond anything he knew or experienced before.

“We must be on our way Mr. Cantos for our lives are always in motion,” says John Dewey.

“Until we meet again young philosopher,” says Jean Paul Sartre.

“May the force be with you,” says Socrates with a smile on his face.

“You did an excellent job Mr. Cantos, you should be proud of yourself,” says Marie Curie.

“I am Ms. Curie, I surely am,” replies Joaquin.

The group of scholars is walking out of the room known as the philosopher’s chamber for the gathering has come to an end. Plato and Joaquin wave the logicians good bye until they disappear from their immediate view. On the back of the room Foucault’s pendulum sits in a perfect vertical position as the force of inertia is no longer being exerted over it. Even though the meeting culminated minutes ago, a feeling of sadness overcomes Joaquin’s spirit as he senses that this is the end of the end.

“This is the end of our journey,” says Plato.

“Somehow I have always known that the day of the gathering was going to be our last encounter Mr. Plato,” replies Joaquin.

“Today is the last time you will ever see me with your carnal eyes Joaquin Cantos.”

“From now on you will use your philosophical skills to benefit the world, to help the minds of those in need of guidance reach higher levels of consciousness, and to serve as a beacon of light in a world that is surrounded by the darkness of ignorance.” “I am a proud teacher, as you are a proud teacher Joaquin Cantos.” “It has been a great honor to learn from you,” says Plato.

“Even though you have been my Shadow since the moment you materialized in my room, I feel like our friendship is just beginning.” “My heart is saddened by the news you give me, but I do understand that you came to my life with a purpose and that purpose was completed inside this room today.” “I must tell you before we leave this place that you have been like a father figure to me Mr. Plato and I will always miss you,” says Joaquin with tears in his eyes.

“You have the power in your hands to continue the work that we started together and that will never be complete since the search for knowledge is an endless endeavor that the human mind will never reach its final level in its entirety.” “Today marks the beginning of the days in which you begin to learn.” “My friend John Dewey said one day that we learn in order to continue learning, and I definitely agree with him,” says Plato.

“Will I ever see again Mr. Plato?” asks Joaquin.

“If you search deep inside your heart you should be able to answer the question on your own,” replies Plato.

Joaquin closes his small brown eyes for a moment and reminisces about all of the adventures they’ve had since the moment they met. In front of him, he can see a slide show of images from every epic moment that he lived next to Plato. As the images circumvent his spirit, the feelings surrounding those visions return to him like hurricanes always return at the end of summer to the Caribbean Sea. Joaquin reopens his eyes and smiles with the beam of a little child.

“Yes Mr. Plato, I am sure that I will see again,” says Joaquin

“When the four winds arrive to pick us up and transport us back to the realm of shadows and imperfect form where we come from, I will go to my place of dwelling and you will arrive at your parent’s house,” says Plato.

“I want to thank you for everything Mr. Plato.” “My heart will always miss you,” says Joaquin.

“And I want to thank you Joaquin Cantos for allowing me to be your Shadow for so many years of your life,” says Plato.

The Shadow and his apprentice embrace in a hug that shows the love that has grown between them after so many years of philosophical adventures. Tears run down their eyes as if the Tigris and the Euphrates were born again in a fertile New Mesopotamia. From the four corners of the world of forms and ideas, the four winds arrive inside the philosopher’s chamber and bounce against its walls in all known directions. Foucault’s heavy pendulum remains motionless as the velocity of the winds increases. The distinctive flower patterns on Plato’s tropical shirt are forcefully moving in all directions as the winds embrace the duo. On this occasion, two separate whirlwinds will individually transport Joaquin and his Shadow to two different locations. The tornadoes are swirling around the floor of the philosopher’s chamber and soon will vanish into the vastness of existence. From now on Joaquin will walk over the face of the Earth without his Shadow.

Everything happened just like Plato had said to Joaquin. For the first time in his life, Joaquin arrived at his parent’s house by himself and Plato never visited him again. After that day, Joaquin lived a life full of success, and love, and all of his dreams became true in due time. But not only his dreams came to pass, with the cleverness he gained after spending so many years next to the Shadow, Joaquin became a well known philosopher during his era and was able to impact the lives of many people upon the Earth with his narrative writings of magical realism, poetics, and his philosophically derived theories.

Maria Elena became a painter that received national and international acclaim. She remained married to Joaquin Cantos, had many children, and lived a life that was dedicated to raising her children with all the love they deserve under the laws of God and men. It can be said that Maria Elena, together with her husband achieved one hundred percent of the necessary work that is required to raise the children they procreated under the theory of Labor Percolation. She always supported Joaquin in all of his new adventures, and in some occasions she had to use the technique of the *Palm of Buddha* to get her husband out of trouble.

Joaquin Cantos never heard from his best friend Eduardo Rodriguez again. It has been hypothesized by the same doctors that helped his foot disengage from his mother's vagina at the time of his birth that he was abducted by aliens from a galaxy far, far away. No one knows with exactitude his whereabouts.

Ramón Cantos survived his cancer and continued building kitchen cabinets until the time of his death. Even though he was not a very good husband or father during his early days, the cancer experience he underwent made him realize that he had been given a second chance and became the best grandfather the world has ever known for the children of Agustin and Joaquin.

Yolanda Cantos died exactly five years after the death of her husband Ramón Cantos. Joaquin ate breakfast with her every morning before he went to his job as a teacher at the local middle school. Every Saturday evening she cooked a large meal for her entire family and always made sure that every member was present. Her grandchildren stayed with her during the weekends and she became the person they loved the most in the world. Her scary eyes remained beautifully eerie until the day she died.

Bartolo De Jesus was inducted to the Boxing Hall of Fame because he was the only boxer in history to lose every single championship match in his professional career. Bartolo failed all of

his attempts from bantamweight (no interest in belts below) to heavyweight and never reached his dream of becoming a champion. At the time he was inducted, he received a large sum of money that allowed him to purchase a large milk farm that pastures one thousand cows and five hundred goats. Bartolo is the largest producer of artisan cheeses in the Caribbean Island. Him and Joaquin still hang out every weekend with their respective wives and children and hope that their friend Eduardo Rodriguez returns someday.

Mr. Frog is the singer of the hottest band in the universe.

Matilda the Boxer is still married to her husband Bartolo de Jesus and is the executive manager of the milk farm she owns with her husband. All of her children learned the rigors of cow milking and occasionally they get suspended from school after they use their natural boxing talents on other children. Off course they were just defending themselves.

Agustin Cantos retired from military service and returned to the City of the Stones in order to be closer to his family and friends. He enrolled at the local university and became a licensed horticulturalist. Agustin Cantos is the owner of the largest landscaping company in the Caribbean Island and offers residential as well as commercial services. He is married to a beautiful woman he met at the war torn Eastern Country before he left.

Patricia Nava became the pastor of the *Christian Renewal* church after Pastor Elias Vega rescinded Christianity. She firmly believes in her heart that her late husband Alberto Castro is standing in the presence of the Lord and that someday she will see him again. Her son, Alberto Castro Jr., produces a sonic boom every year during the summer solstice.

Alberto Castro is in heaven.

Operational Detachment Alpha is an elite black operations unit; it never happened...

Elias Vega is married to Madam Le Mystique and is no longer a pastor of the church.

Madam Le Mystique moved to a different realm of existence with her husband former pastor of the church, Elias Vega. She does not want to have children with her obnoxious husband.

Coronel Sanders became the president of the Western Country. After he left the Oval Office he established his own chain of fried chicken restaurants.

Mrs. Rosaura Perales is a movie star in the colony. She is married to the cameraman and has beautiful kids with antennas on their heads.

Pachanga continued to drive the school bus.

Eugenio Maria De Hostos remained the major of the colony until the time of his death. His teachings transcend the walls of the small nation he steered into the abstract direction of universal knowledge.

Tony Joe Superstar was inducted to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Samantha is still sitting at the bus stop.

It is a sad evening. As the dimmed sun is overpowered by the arrival of the night, the soul of Joaquin Cantos prepares to enter the world of the dead. The yellow color in the far distance is saying good bye to the man that was, barely is, and soon will not be. The horizon is a canvas being painted by the late feelings of the poet that is writing with his heart the last poem of his life. The light of day is disappearing, and the night is about to take control of the absoluteness of the essence of everything that is. The night is about to tell the dwellers of the Earth that she has the power to make them dream about the world that is hidden deep inside their unconscious reality without the touch of treason being present. This is one of those evenings that make you think about what will happen with the spirit of life once it detaches itself from the systems of the

modernized society that dictates our every step. And in this capricious night our main character appears...

Now old and full of wrinkles, his body ready to rest after living a life full philosophical adventures and poetic illumination. His sight no longer can see far objects with clarity, but his mind and spirit are as sharp as the day in which he defended the theory of Labor Percolation when he wore a younger man's clothes. These are the days that complete the circle of life, and once the circle closes, it can never be reopened again.

His thoughts are a whirlpool of ideas that he can no longer write down on a piece of paper with his fragile hand, but at last his thoughts are nothing but a happy memory. At this moment, his mind is brainstorming about new poetry, new stories, and new philosophical theories that will go to the tomb with him and will never see the light of day. One question bounces inside of him at the same speed Alberto Castro traveled as he was leaving the solar system.

"Why?" asks Joaquin.

And with all the feelings present in Joaquin's mind, the night finally arrives. During this night the moon is shining brightly, just like the night that Plato materialized out of thin air inside his room. The sky is clear, and the stars of the heavens are shining brightly over the spirit of the old man. A slow breeze caresses the Indian valley while the patient mountain dew falls down over the consciousness of men. The Lady of the Night flower is spreading her essence over the air that surrounds the City of the Stones.

The old man cannot restrain the feelings he holds inside his spirit. Tears of happiness begin to fall from his small brown eyes as he thanks God for the life of blessings that he was able to live next to his friends and family. Immediately, a soft laughter comes out of his lungs

bringing peace to his inner self. The same question continues to rattle in his eternal world of ideas.

“Why?”

“Why?”

“Why does it have to come to an end?”

“Why do we need to give up the ghost when our minds are at the peak of reason and intelligent assumptions are sharper than ever?”

“Why does it end?” asks Joaquin Cantos.

Darkness becomes intense as the hold of the night grows over the face of the Caribbean Island. Joaquin’s knees are weakened, and his fragile skinny body is tired. As the old man rests over a granite boulder, he pulls out a faded handkerchief from his shirt pocket and wipes out the tears of happiness that moments ago flowed down overwhelmingly. Even though the granite stone is coarse and spiky, Joaquin’s body feels as if it is made out of a sea sponge; soft and cushiony. The rock itself is adjusting to the contours of Joaquin’s body as it tries to make the body of the old philosopher comfortable. Now his sobbing has been completely extinguished, and the tears of happiness are dry and absent from his wrinkled face. Even though a little bit slower than usual, his heart continues to pump the same valiant blood through his hollow veins. His metabolism is stable, but it slows down after every second that passes.

“I am going to take a nap on this boulder.” “It feels so comfortable that I could stay here for the rest of the night, or better yet, for the rest of my life.” “It is time to dream again,” says Joaquin for a last time in his physical life.

Joaquin awakens from his nap and immediately stands over the granite boulder that served him as his final resting place. Next to him lies the old and fragile body that used to hold

his everlasting soul. With his eleven year old small brown eyes he can observe the wrinkled lines that create a map of memories all over his former host. The facial features show the happiness his spirit felt before the moment in which he gave his last breath to the four winds of the Earth.

Joaquin's young eyes observe the Indian valley and all of its beauty.

“Certainly the City of the Stones is the most beautiful place in the entire Caribbean Island.” “I have been to every city over this island and haven't seen greener mountains or clearer skies than in my own town.” “I am so happy to be a son of the mother of all the stones.” “God, please bless my island and protect it from the evils that soon will try to harm her, please do not let anything bad happen to the children that live under your heavens, please let the sun always come down in the morning and shine over the consciousness of men, and please God, let my own offspring be proud of the place in which our entire family has always called home,” says Joaquin.

The stars in the skies are shining like they have never shined before over the City of the Stones and the Caribbean Island. Their beautiful light is casted over the crystal waters of the rivers, the rocky valleys, the green mountains, and the youthful face of the spirit of our main character. An early owl flies over Joaquin's head as it searches for pray inside the green pastures that surround everything and everywhere. The song of the crickets and the tree frogs can be heard all over the canopy that covers the green valley and its beauty. This is a beautiful night to be a new born spirit.

From the four corners of the Earth a slight breeze is sent to caress the young spiritual face of Joaquin Cantos. A beautiful aroma accompanies the winds with the essence of wild flowers it carries within. Next to the large boulder, the leaves begin flying in all known directions as a forceful wind crawls underneath them. The wind turns in a counter clockwise direction until a

forceful tornado appears in front of Joaquin. When the winds of the tornado vanish, a man wearing dark glasses, a tropical shirt, surfing trunks, and a pair of flip flops appears in front of Joaquin.

“Mr. Plato, you are back!” shouts the young boy from the top of his lungs.

“I have always been your Shadow Joaquin, but you had to face the sun on your own in order to discover the world,” says Plato.

“I am so happy to see you Mr. Plato,” says Joaquin with tears in his eyes.

“I am very happy to see you too young Joaquin,” replies Plato as he kneels in front of the eleven year old spirit and hugs him with the love a father has for a son.

“Are we going on a new adventure?” asks Joaquin.

“Off course Joaquin, there is a war going on between two species in a planet nearby, and if we don’t do something about it the entire quadrant might be in danger,” says Plato.

“Let us go then Mr. Plato,” says Joaquin.

The philosophers are standing next to each other. A soft breeze turns into a tornado and takes them away into their next adventure. Let the good times begin...

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

The utilization of the derived analysis from the dreams, memories, and reflections of the unconscious self of the participant/researcher has proven to be an effective source of inspiration to be used in the creation of narrative form and linguistic art. A ten chapter/song narrative document was effectively created with the autobiographical/ethnographical knowledge that was derived from the unconscious reality surrounding the self and others of the participant. Ellis (2004) states: “as a form of ethnography, autoethnography overlaps art and science; it is part auto or self and part ethno or culture.” (p. 31). In addition, Richardson (1997) points out: “recognizing the historicity of writing practices, scholars in a host of disciplines are concretely analyzing both literary and scientific work.” (p. 39). The present project unified the literary arts as well as the scientific structures found in qualitative research paradigms as a method to create an autoethnographic study of the unconscious.

A total of fifteen dreams were interpreted during the present study and their revelations served as the inspirational insight for the narrative document titled: “The Shadow of Joaquin: A Poem of the Unconscious.” For instance, the dream titled: “A snake in the house” provided the inspirational basis for the creation of the Dark Shaman used on the sixth song. The dream titled: “A tricycle trip” allowed me to create the mysterious character of Samantha. The dream titled: “My cousin Eduardo” supplied the inspiration for the creation of the character named Eduardo and his decision to leave this world for a parallel universe. In addition, the actions performed by the soldiers in this dream represented the ideal unity of the group of soldiers from the Operational Detachment Alpha. The dream titled: “A trip with my dad” made available the

forces that repel and attract from the Earth and the Moon, the magnetic forces felt by Joaquin during his dream stage, and the electromagnetic wave that formed around the body of Alberto Castro during the day of the summer solstice. The dream titled: "Lust" provided the inspiration for the symbolic carnal acts of Edelmira Morales and the demonic women from the cavern. The dream titled: "Jogging with a famous boxer" offered me encouragement for the creation of Bartolo de Jesus' love for boxing and the entire fifth song of the autoethnography. The dream titled: "The cure for AIDS" presented me the idea to create a plague that symbolizes the destruction of man in the spiritual, emotional, and physical manner as it was seen during the fourth song of the narrative document. The dream titled: "A boxing match near the military base" granted me the brainwave to place Joaquin, Agustin, and Alberto in as many possible adventures as I was able to conceive or imagine. The dream titled: "In search of home" allowed me to exemplify my personal feelings towards my wife in the form of Maria Elena; the wife of Joaquin. The dream titled: "Emilio returns" supplied me the muse to represent the final destination that experienced Alberto as he was leaving the surface of the Moon. The dream titled: "A trip home" endowed me with the opportunity to express the inability of acceptance that Joaquin, Agustin, and Alberto had in regards to the challenges they faced (war, plague, death, destruction of knowledge, ignorance of the unknown) throughout their lives. The dream titled: "Big birds" presented me the stimulation to write about the spiritual realities that were represented in the life of Alberto and the need he had in his inner self for salvation. The dream titled: "The other woman" gave me inspiration to create the changing abilities that were inherent to the demonic creatures of the cave. The dream titled: "The Moon" afforded the idea to place the actual physical satellite as a force that can affect the lives of all the people of the City of the Stones, the Caribbean Island, and the entire globe. The last dream of the present study is titled:

“Ceiling fan” and it gave me the idea to create every character of the novel as a unique part of my mental, physical, and spiritual constituents.

In addition to the fifteen dreams, a total of five memories were analyzed and the findings were utilized as an integral part of the autoethnographic document. The first memory is titled: “Becoming a Christian” and its analysis served as the basis for the creation of the second song in its entirety. The second memory is titled: “My fight against a midget” and it provided the inspirational forces for the ordeals that Bartolo endured as a professional fighter and the creation of the entire fifth song. The third memory is titled: “Spiritism” and it offered me the encouragement for the utilization of the spiritual aspects found throughout the entire narrative document; especially on songs six and nine. The fourth memory is titled: “Sixth grade” and it afforded me the idea to place the beginning era of the characters in the sixth grade of elementary school as well as the place of employment of the main character of the narrative document. The final memory is titled: “Squidtopus” and it supplied me the insight to create the aquatic monster found on the second and seventh songs.

A final analysis that consisted of five reflections was incorporated unto the present study and the results were used in the creation of the autoethnographical literary document. The first reflection is titled: “Puerto Rico” and as I reflected upon my home island, I was able to center the writing stage around the social constructs surrounding our modern society. In addition, I was encouraged to create a utopian society based on the endless possibilities we (the people of Puerto Rico) have as a country and it was depicted on the seventh song of the autoethnographical document. The second reflection is titled: “The allegory of the cave” and it gave me an opportunity to create my own version (song four) of Plato’s vision of enslaved souls found in the darkness of ignorance. The third reflection is titled: “The U.S. Army” and it offered me the

stimulation to create the fictitious characters of the Operational Detachment Alpha as well as the military missions that developed during the sixth song. The fourth reflection is titled: “Laziness” and it made available brainwave to create the postmodern philosophical theory of labor percolation found on the tenth song of the narrative document. The final reflection that was analyzed in the present study is titled: “Life after death” and it offered me an opportunity to vector an azimuth into the possible futures that my unconscious self has projected in regards to my life as a scholar and researcher.

The unconscious self has a distinctive unpredictable nature that even with our most current knowledge about traditional psychoanalytical approaches, modern psychoanalytical approaches, or alternative methods for the interpretation of the unconscious; it is not completely possible to understand it wholly. According to Jung (1912), we ourselves are a psychic process that we can only partly direct since we don’t have total control over it. Also, according to Freud (1900), dreams are of a strange and obscure nature. While working under the notion that the unconscious is an unstable entity in itself, the methodology utilized in the present study proved to be an effective system to harness the autoethnographical/biographical realities of the participant. The Dreams, Memories, and Reflections questionnaire was specifically designed to interpret the unconscious material within the historical certainties of the participant. The data gathered from the DMR questionnaire served as the primary source for the creation of a literary document that utilizes the unstable nature of the unconscious with the imaginative consciousness of the researcher. Following William Pinar’s (2004) systematic study of *carrere*, the present study regressed to the existential experiences of the researcher/participant through the psychic data that was gathered through the DMR questionnaire. After the data was gathered, the researcher progressed into possible futures based on the initial observations of the gathered data.

After the progressive step was conceived, the psychic data was analyzed through the questionnaire questions and the revelation of that data became an amalgamation of the past, present, and future in regards to the participant's reality of self and others. The final step in Pinar's (2004) systematic study of currere is the moment of synthesis. The moment of synthesis occurred during the completion of an entire chapter/song within the autoethnographic work described as a literary document. Since Pinar's (2004) systematic study of currere is not a strict empirical method, all the steps were revisited during the process and appropriate redeterminations were made.

The autobiographical/ethnographical realities of the researcher/participant were presented in the present study in a format that not only raises the curiosity of the reader; it binds the reader with the unconscious self of the researcher/writer creating a connection that transcends the physical realm of reality. According to Chang (2008), imaginative-creative writing opens up the creative possibilities to the writer as well as the participants in a less structured format that engages the senses. In addition, according to Richardson (1997), autoethnography touches the sensory and cognitive speech of both listener and reader. More importantly, the final chapter/song within the narrative document illustrates a postmodern philosophical theory known as Labor Percolation in which an analogical appearance is made between work and the percolation of measured water through porous rock. Within the structure of the Theory of Labor Percolation, a social approach is highlighted in regards to the place in which the energy to perform the work, the responsibility of the performance of the work, and the completion of work are connected to the individual and/or the social entities to which they belong.

Within the process of understanding prior work in the field of autoethnography and autobiography, I have come to realize that the present paper does not possess the traditional

Socratic methodologies or the linear narration that characterizes the inherent aspects found within the field of study. As described by Richardson (1997), autoethnographical work often contains an interplay of stories written from a fixed point in time that explore the contexts and pretexts of the everlasting structures of the society. The present research is not directly related to the anthropological notion of the mere observance of a social structure or the literal interpretation of socially experienced participation. The autoethnographical/biographical narrative document that was conceived in the present study as the direct result of the data analysis attempts to observe the planes of reality found within that which was abstract in the beginning. The “Shadow of Joaquin” is an autoethnography/biography of the unconscious that explores a diversified format (poetics and prose) within the structures of apparent consciousness that are found within traditional autoethnography and biography.

The educational implications of the present study are focused towards creating curriculum that enables students to make sense of their own works, to make connections to their own personal lives, and to construct meaningful approaches to knowledge. Green (1995) states: “the arts in particular can bring to curriculum inquiry visions of perspectives and untapped possibilities.” (p. 90). Even though the present study utilizes the analysis of dreams, memories, and reflections in order to further analyze the unconscious self of the participant and its relations with its social order, the psychoanalytical work is considered an intermediary process that was specifically designed to provide the basis for the creation of a final product in the form of a narrative document that is similar in shape and form to a literary novel. The use of imaginative forces was paramount in the creation of the literary document for it is poetic in nature. According to Green (1995), the language of imaginative literature provides alternative ways of being and thinking about the world that is not found in the modern curricula that is used in schools and

colleges. Also, Eisner (2002) states: “the arts refine our senses so that our ability to experience the world is made more complex and subtle; they promote the use of our imaginative capacities so that we can envision what we cannot actually see, taste, touch, hear, and smell; they provide models through which we can experience the world in new ways; and they provide the materials and occasions for learning to grapple with problems that depend on arts-related forms of thinking.” (p. 19). Furthermore, Pelias (1999) states: “poetic writings are imaginative constructions whose truth lies not in their facticity but in their evocative potentiality.” (p. 54). The ten chapter/song model that was created for the present doctoral research proves that the unconscious can be used as trustworthy source of poetical muse or building blocks for a narrative document of artistic value. Every chapter/song within the narrative document is the direct result of the interpretation of three different areas (dreams, memories, reflections) in which the unconscious revealed information that the human mind of the researcher/participant was not consciously aware of it.

Another relevant educational implication of the present study takes the form of a postmodern philosophical theory that was discussed in larger detail during the final chapter/song of the autoethnographic/biographic narrative document. The creation of new meaning and the social constructs surrounding that meaning is an integral part of what should be included and implemented within curricula. Pinar (2004) states: “Curriculum in this sense becomes a place of origin as well as destination, a ground for which intelligence can develop, and a figure for presenting new perceptions and reviewing old ones. (p. 246). The basis per se of the Theory of Labor Percolation was proposed during the present study as an initial plan that deals with the performance of work and the requirements for its completion. The functionality of the Theory of Labor Percolation in other fields of knowledge and investigation such as: physics, chemistry,

psychology, business, medicine, arts, music, mathematics, sports, etc, is yet to be applied in order to develop the full amount of the theory's applicative potential. The postmodern theory of Labor Percolation has been proposed under the understanding that it is a living entity that can be adapted to changes in our social and educational environments.

Several shortcomings are found on the present study and they will now be discussed. First, the unstable nature of the unconscious may divert unreal ideas into the realm of the possible. According to Lacan (1966), it is impossible to completely anchor down the signifiers found within the unconscious. In addition, the level of condensation that is found in dreams, memories, and reflections is often not removed during the process of interpretation in its entirety. As stated earlier, the psychoanalytical interpretation of data was targeted to be used as an inspirational source for the creation of a narrative document; not for the cure of neurosis as it has been traditionally used by psychoanalysts worldwide. According to Freud (1900), an assertion cannot be made about the revealed meanings of a dream since much time could be spend upon the psychic event in order to draw further discussion. The third and final shortcoming that is inherent within the present project is in regards to the complexity involving the amalgamation of the different academic paradigms of thought that are present within the study. The present study combines autoethnography, autobiography, unconscious interpretation theory, educational philosophy, narrative, creative writing arts in the form of literary prose, and educational curriculum within the methodological structures that constitute its entirety. Prior research is abundant within the different structures of the method, but as a combined entity this type of research is still in its infancy. Even though the uniqueness of the philosophical interpretation of dreams, memories, and reflections is the strongest aspect of the present study, the absence of prior work in the distinctive field can also be considered a shortcoming.

Future research is needed in regards to the functionality of the narrative approach to the philosophical interpretation of dreams, memories, and reflections of the unconscious through the use of autoethnography/biography. The research methodology that was utilized in the present study provided the fundamental elements for the creation of a narrative document that portrays the autoethnographical and autobiographical realities of the unconscious of the researcher and/or participant in regards to self and others. Due to the fact that the unconscious is a distinctive aspect of every human being, further research in the area may reveal a completely different type of autoethnographical/biographical literary document if the independent variables (gender, race, socioeconomic status, age) of the study are altered. Furthermore, the postmodern Theory of Labor Percolation has been briefly explored within the last chapter/song of the literary autoethnography. An enhancement of the theory is required in order to account for the variables that are found within the theory that at this early stage of its creation have not been accounted yet. In addition to that, the philosophical Theory of Labor Percolation has not provided any categories of practical solutions that teachers and educators can implement within their classrooms in order to minimize the effects of incompleteness found within the pupil body as it was described in the narrative document.

As a final statement, I would like to point out that the present study has given me an opportunity to discover the fields of psychoanalysis, English literature, educational curriculum, autobiography, and autoethnography in a more personalized manner from what I had experienced before. In addition to that, I was able to create a literary piece of poetic art that narrates the history of my life from an unconscious perspective. The present study serves as an instrument for harnessing the self-socio-historical constructs that surround the limitless realities and dimensions that are found within the measurable structures of the unconscious.

REFERENCES

- Bachner, A. (2001). Anagrams in psychoanalysis: Retroping concepts by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Jean Francois Lyotard. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 40(1), 1-25.
- Boeree, C.G. (1997). Biography on Jung. Retrieved June 13, 2010 from: <http://www.webspace.ship.edu>
- Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as method*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Eisner, E. (2002). *The arts and the creation of the mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner A. (1996). *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.
- Finders, M. (1992). Looking at lives through ethnography. *Educational leadership*, 50(1), 60-65.
- Gall, M.D., Gall, J.P., & Borg, W.R. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Green, J., Camilli, G., & Elmore. (2006). *Handbook of complimentary methods in education research*. Mahwaw, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jung, C.G. (1912). *Memories, dreams, and reflections*. Great Falls, MT: Winston.

Lacan, J. (1966). *Ecrits*. New York. Norton & Company.

Pelias, R., J. (1999). *Writing performance: Poeticizing the researcher's body*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Pinar, W.F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Pinar, W.F. (2009). *The wordliness of a cosmopolitan education: Passionate lives in public service*. London. Routledge.

Reed-Danahay, E. (1997). *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the self and the social*. New York. Berg.

Research in the Teaching of English Journal (1996). Debate between Howard Gardner and Elliott Eisner at the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved November 15, 2009, from <http://www.aera.net>

Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Roth, W.M. (2005). *Auto/biography and auto/ethnography: Praxis of research method*. Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.

APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

- 1) What is being analyzed? Dream, Memory, Reflection.
- 2) Connect the elements of condensation of the DMR to past historical events in your life (they may be relevant or secondary).
- 3) Explore the work of displacement of the DMR and determine what the true meaning of the element being studied is.
- 4) Regard of representability: Are abstract thoughts exchanged for concrete ones? If yes, what is the relationship between self and others within your personal context?
- 5) Develop the contextual reality in which the imaginative symbolization elements of the DMR have surfaced from the unconscious. What is the reason? What does the symbol represent within an autobiographic and ethnographic realm?
- 6) Relate the absurdity of the DMR within your historical reality and determine its relevance.
- 7) Connect the feelings experienced in the DMR with the feelings that are relevant towards that person or group of people.
- 8) Describe the Jungian archetypes present within your DMR and define their meaning within your autobiographic and ethnographic reality.
- 9) In which Lacanian order does the DMR fall? Symbolic, Imaginary, Real. To what percentage have the signifiers become signified?
- 10) How does the DMR make you feel in regards to your relationship to self and others within your past, present, or desired future?

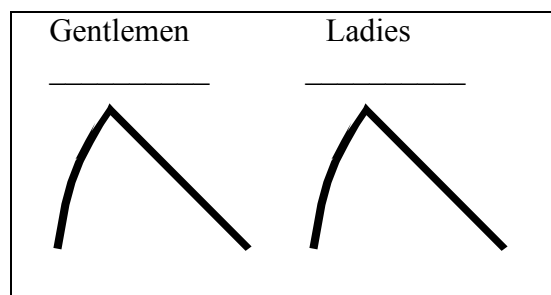
Figures

Fig. 1. Lacanian S/s algorithm.

APPENDIX B

Table 1
List of Primary Characters

| Name | Description |
|-------------------|--|
| Aristocles | Commonly known as Plato, Joaquin's philosophy teacher |
| Agustin Cantos | Joaquin's older brother, military minded, special forces, loves his team |
| Alberto Castro | Agustin's best friend, known as the Black Beetle, Aerial Force pilot, humble beginnings, kind hearted, the love of Patricia Nava |
| Bartolo de Jesus | Joaquin's best friend, cow milking specialist and boxer, raised by grandmother, not very smart, panics, believes in conspiracies, the world is out to get him, the love of Matilda the Boxer |
| Eduardo Rodriguez | Joaquin's best friend, guitar musician, bohemian, limps, red hair, freckles |
| Joaquin Cantos | Philosopher, science teacher, intellectual, straight forward person, can be serious at times, but can always crack a joke and have a good time |

Table 2
List of Secondary Characters

| Name | Description |
|-----------------|---|
| Buddhist Monks | A group of monks that live in the Eastern Country |
| Cabinet Members | Legislative branch of the Colony |
| Coronel Sanders | Military commander |
| Dark Shaman | Evil man, a voodoo priest, has spiritual powers |

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Edelmira Morales | Lives to one hundred and twenty years, good Christian |
| Elias Vega | Pastor of the Christian Renewal Church |
| Eugenio Maria de Hostos | Mayor of the Colony |
| Gabriel | Archangel |
| Gospels | Mathew, Mark, Luke, John |
| Jean Paul Sartre | Existentialist, a committee member |
| John Dewey | Art educator, a committee member |
| Madam Le Mystique | A spiritual woman who can read the future, ageless |
| Maria Elena | Joaquin's love, beautiful, independent, the silent warrior |
| Marie Curie | Physicist and chemist, a committee member |
| Master Thanh | Head master of the temple of Shin Lam Zen |
| Mr. Frog | A singer from a different realm |
| Mrs. Rosaura Perales | Teacher at the Giralt High School |
| Matilda the Boxer | Bartolo's love |
| Operational Detachment Alpha | Special Forces team under the command of Agustin Cantos |
| Pachanga | School bus driver |
| Patricia Nava | Alberto's love |
| Thoros | A demon |
| Tiresias | Foreteller, blind entity |
| Ramon Cantos | Joaquin's father, smokes, absent, drinks, builds kitchen cabinets |
| Samantha | The dead woman who sits at the bus stop |
| Socrates | The first philosopher, a committee member |

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Squidtopus | A maritime creature, half squid and half octopus |
| Tony Joe Superstar | The best musician in the world |
| Yolanda | Joaquin's mother, loving person, beautiful, green scary eyes |

Table 3
List of Places and Organizations

| Name | Description |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Aerial Force | A branch of the Western Country's military |
| Army | A branch of the Western Country's military |
| Bright Star | The local newspaper |
| Eastern Country | A country divided between the north and the south, at war with the Western Country |
| Camp Lighting | Western military outpost in the jungles of the Eastern Country |
| Capital City | Metropolitan area of the Caribbean Island that holds the government offices |
| Caribbean Island | Home country of the characters |
| City of the Stones | City of the Caribbean Island where the characters live |
| Boxing Gymnasium | Place where Eduardo Rodriguez trains |
| Sand Ward Elementary School | Elementary school in the City of the Stones |
| Shin Lam Zen | Buddhist temple |
| Space Aeronautics Agency | Space exploration agency of the Western Country |
| Giralt High School | High school in the City of the Stones |
| Stones Middle School | Middle school in the City of the Stones, Joaquin's place of employment |
| Western Country | A world superpower, the Caribbean Island is a protectorate of it |

VITA

Name: Antonio Rivera Rosado

Address: Texas A&M University
College of Education and Human Development
Teaching, Learning, and Culture
Mail Stop 4232
College Station, Texas 77843-4232

Email Address: a_rivera75@hotmail.com

Education: B.A., Middle School Science Education,
Interamerican University San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2001
M.Ed. Bilingual Education,
The University of Texas at El Paso, 2003
Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction,
Texas A&M University, 2011