

the ZANY
TIME TRAVELS
of WARBLE
McGORKLE

(Book II of a Trilogy)

by Blackbird Crow Raven

THE ZANY TIME TRAVELS OF WARBLE MCGORKLE

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF WARBLE'S TRAVELS INTO THE PAST TO ALTER HISTORY,
WHEREIN HE BUNGLES EVERYTHING UP ALMOST BEYOND BELIEF
AND GETS IN *BIG* TROUBLE

FEATURING:

- THE INIMITABLE **WARBLE POUNDCAKE MCGORKLE**
- HIS LONG-SUFFERING WIFE **MARY**

AND INTRODUCING:

- WARD ROBESPIERRE, WARBLE'S IMAGE CONSULTANT AND RIGHT-HAND MAN
- JACQUES LARUE, WARBLE'S PERSONAL FITNESS TRAINER
- MARIANNE TRIESTE-TRENCH, WARBLE'S SECURITY EXPERT
- MULLAH GITANI, WARBLE'S INDIAN CHIEF, COOK, AND BOTTLE WASHER
- COMFY STOLEN, ARODNAP SALESMAN
- ALBERT JOAD, ARODNAP MECHANIC

-AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST (A DRUMROLL WOULD BE APPROPRIATE HERE),
ALBERT'S PET POOCH, THE LABRADOR RETRIEVER PUPPY/DOG **"TATERSKIN"**

CAUTION!!!

IF YOU ARE ALLERGIC TO IRONY, IRRITATED BY IRREVERENCE,
INTOLERANT OF SARCASM, UNAPPRECIATIVE OF PUNS, AVERSE TO
ALLITERATION, SUFFER SADLY WHEN SUBJECTED TO SILLINESS, HATE
HYPERBOLE WITH A PURPLE PASSION, OR UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER
OF MEIOSIS, DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES READ THIS BOOK!!!

✧ CONTAINS NO PROFANITY!

✧ CONTAINS MEGADOSES OF HILARITY AND HYSTERIA!

PREFACE

You may not be familiar with Warble McGorkle, unless you've read a book called "the Wacky Misadventures of Warble McGorkle" by a certain Blackbird Crow Raven, who I think is some sort of mysterious recluse or other type of lunatic (okay, you probably figured it out anyway—I'm actually him).

If you are unfamiliar with this book's protagonist, it will help you to understand this tale if you first know at least a few things about him. For example, you should know that Warble McGorkle started out as a megalomaniacal, paranoid "lower tax bracket" type of person and then became a megalomaniacal, paranoid filthy rich (no taxes at all via myriads of loopholes discovered by fancy-pants lawyers) person by means of several silly but serendipitously 'successful' schemes.

Since you probably want to get filthy rich, too, you might want to know just how Warble did it. Without further ado he, among other things:

- 1) Started a new musical genre when he formed a polka punk band.
- 2) Created a no prison bars-barred reality TV show called "Bad Boys Behind Barz" (which was filmed in federal penitentiaries).
- 3) Re-invented himself as a swankily-outfitted superhero, namely 'The Color-Blind Chameleon.'
- 4) Founded a Biotech concern that altered people's personalities by means of custom-manufactured 'designer' pills.

At the end of his so-called "Wacky Misadventures," Warble resigned his post as President of the United States (a job he was able to finagle his way into after learning 'the ropes' of dirty politics as Governor of Wisconsin under the tutelage of crafty old Whortleberry Dane) and returned to private life.

Not one to lay in a hammock or play golf all day, though, in the mean time Warble has increased his personal fortune through connections he made during his tenure in public office.

It may interest you to find out just *how* Warble increased his already

substantial real-estate holdings, stock portfolios, and enormous bank account (but do not try this at home, folks).

First, Warble contracted with the United States government to eradicate all spam. While the government intended to have unwanted emails--which were wasting everyone's time and killing the GDP--nipped in the bud (or "nipped in the butt" as Warble puts it), Warble had the pressed meat in mind. To kill the market for Spam(™), Warble sent everyone in the country an email containing a rumor that SPAM is an acronym for the ingredients used in the substitute ham. In the mass email he disseminated, Warble claimed that these ingredients were:

Spinach

Possums (called Opossums by librarians, wildlife biologists and other snobs)

Arsenic

-and-

Marshmallows.

Thus, Spam(™) was ruined and went bankrupt.

Naturally, the government brought suit against Warble in an attempt to avoid paying him the exorbitant fee he had successfully negotiated (3.14 billion dollars), but Warble came off victorious in the resulting court case. After all, to be technical (which lawyers tend to be), Warble *did* rid the country of Spam (the ham replacement), and the contract did not explicitly specify that unwanted email was the type of spam that was meant.

Following his victorious day in court, Warble emailed everyone in the country with news of his glorious and splendiferous vindication in the proverbial Halls of Justice. He also let them know that it was now safe, after all, to eat Spam(™)--which, in actuality, contains no spinach, possums, arsenic, or marshmallows, but rather CPSMSWSSN (Chopped Pork Shoulder Meat, Sugar, Water, Salt, and Sodium Nitrite).

Our "hero" (anti-hero, more like) made a few million more by writing a best-selling diet book, wherein he guaranteed that anyone who followed his eating regimen would lose a minimum of 25 pounds or 10% of their body weight (which ever was the smaller net amount, a qualification that was printed in an

exceedingly tiny font size). The guarantee was null and void, though, if the dieters failed to keep secret the details of the diet. The crux of "Warble's Incredible Shrinking Wonder Diet" was that the dieter enumerated his ten least favorite foods, and these then became the only foods he was allowed to eat. For those who didn't want to read his book (or didn't know *how* to read, for example many well-cushioned members of Congress), Warble also set up a consulting practice, wherein he (not personally, but represented by smooth-talking, glad-handing, back-slapping, bright-smiling salesmen) dispensed the same advice contained in his book at a cost of \$314 for a fifteen-minute session. The salesmen were mostly former talk-show hosts and wannabe actors, who had been sworn to secrecy. Warble paid them \$3.14 an hour for their services.

Seeing an unfilled need in the pharmaceutical market, Warble also realized a nice hefty profit on a drug he engineered. Recognizing that most of today's world travelers are old hippies who converted to crass commercialism and capitalism once their parent's money had run out--and are either traveling on business or spending their hard-earned dough on exotic vacations in the far-flung corners of the world eco-touring and otherwise soothing and pampering their tortured souls--Warble designed and marketed a new medication to prevent air sickness called "Om." Warble named it *Om* because it is a "transcontinental medication." As Warble foresaw that it would be, *Om* was a big hit with the jetset, jetlag crowd.

So then, to make a long tedious story *somewhat* concise: After making oodles of money in the music, television, and pharmaceutical businesses, as well as the post-presidential Spam scam, Warble doesn't have any real need to earn cash--and it is hard to get motivated to make money when you have all you can conceivably need, want, or even dream of, especially when it's just you and your wife to support.

With no kids to whom to leave the estate, no political affiliations to support (since serving as President, Warble has lost all respect for politicians), no religious mendicants on the dole, no feelings of great responsibility towards alma maters (Warble was a high-school dropout, thinking he already knew everything all the teachers (combined) knew), there is just no incentive to amass any more money or material goods. "Altruism" now drives Warble—or so he thinks, or at least claims. But old (predatory) habits die hard, as we

will see.

Note: A word to the wise and all others who have read this far: When Warble speaks, what he says and what his listeners hear (i.e., the illocutionary as opposed to the perlocutionary) are not always—or even all that often--the same thing. To make clear Warble's thought process, his words are spelled according to what *he* is thinking, not what is perceived by others, and certainly not always according to what is correct from an orthographical perspective.

For those still in the dark, a couple of examples should suffice:

- 1) When Warble tries to say "no buts about it," he actually says, "no butts about it" because he thinks a person's fundament is being referenced in that saying.
- 2) Also, when Warble says "by the way," it is written herein "buy the whey," as our anti-hero considers the expression to have its roots in the children's poem about Little Miss Muffet sitting on her tuffet (which last word Warble thinks is a medieval euphemism for a person's derrière, or keister) .

So...do not think the editor was incompetent, inattentive, drunk or otherwise shirking his duty when you see 'anomalies' in Warble's speech.

CHAPTER 0

It's not easy being the richest man in the world. You would think it would be: no more cares or worries about money. You can just lay around eating bon bons all day long, if you like. But no; unfortunately for those who attain to this blessed state of supposed bliss, being rich is not really like that. With wealth comes responsibility; with abundance comes danger; with fame comes envy. Also, appeals for money from charitable organizations, sleazy salesmen, and shirt-tail relatives seem to never cease.

Perhaps worst of all these burdens, though, is the envy. The jealousy the poor feel towards the rich can engender hatred by the party of the first part towards the party of the second part. Of course, if Warble had made his money creating a vaccination against polio or in some such way, it might've been different. But Warble, as you may already know, has earned himself a reputation for having made his fortune, if not illegally, at least unethically.

Not *everyone* considers Warble to be a crook, though. Warble himself, for one, believes he's done nothing at all wrong. He thinks the envy shown by others is just sour grapes on their part--if they had been able to thrust in the dagger and twist it, to stomp jackbooted on faces as he had, his detractors would've done it, too. They would've done exactly the same thing if they were as intelligent and resolute and inspired and decisive as he. Those pseudo-bleeding hearts just weren't clever enough to have done so.

Nevertheless, Warble's unpopularity with the majority is a thorn in his side, a bur in his saddle, a pain in his patooty. Thus, he wants to do something to make himself more popular with the masses.

CHAPTER 1

One morning, Warble feels the nascent onset of an epiphany—or is it the three boxes of PopTarts(™) he had for breakfast? (only his proctologist knows for sure).

"Mary, a man can only wear so many clothes, live in so many houses, eat so much food, and drive so many cars."

"Finally, Warble!" Mary says, thinking her husband is willing at last to downsize his stable of automobiles to just one or two. "It will be great to convert our 30-car garage into a nice guest house, so when my mother comes to visit..."

"Hold on there a minute, Mary!" Warble says, holding his palm forward in a defensive gesture. "You're always jumping to conclusions. I didn't say I was going to get rid of *all* of my cars. It's just that I've come to the realization that a man doesn't need a different car for every day of the *month*. I figure *seven* cars, after all--one for each day of the *week*--would do me almost as well. And that will allow me to fire one of my mechanics, saving us a fortune."

"You call *minimum wage* a *fortune*?" Mary asks, shocked.

"Most definitely, Mary!" Warble confirms. "It *is* a fortune to Juan. He can feed half his village in Old Mexico for what I pay him. And it's not like I'm *obligated* to pay him that much—what's he going to do if I pay him less, turn me in?"

"You should at least pay him the going wage for mechanics, Warble."

"Mary, my hands are clean, my conscience is clear, and I sleep considerably better than your average, run-of-the-mill baby at night," Warble says, in a self-satisfied tone. "I didn't know Juan was an illegal alien when I hired him."

"You didn't?"

"No! He didn't tell me, and I didn't ask him."

"But you know *now*," Mary prods, trying to awaken Warble's dormant conscience.

Warble claps his hands over his ears. "I know nuh-*think!* I know nuh-*think!*"

"Sure you don't, Sergeant Schultz," Mary says, crossing her arms and turning away.

"I think you've got your cartoon characters mixed up, Mary," Warble says, removing his hands from over his ears. "I've heard of Sargent Shriver, and I knew Charles Schultz personally, but this Sargent Schultz character you invoke is, I'm afraid, a figment of your addled cranium."

"Forget it, Warble," Mary sighs.

"Forget what?" Warble asks, deadpan.

"Thank you," Mary says.

"You're welcome," Warble responds, absent-mindedly (even more absent-mindedly than normal, that is). Warble looks out the window, with a wizened gaze blanketing his visage. Or so he thinks, anyway.

"Mary," he finally says, "I've come to a decision. I've realized who I really am, what I want to do—what I *must* do."

"Oh, no," Mary involuntarily says, expecting the worst (although she has no idea what it is Warble might decide to do, having given up trying to figure out her husband and his whims years ago).

"Oh, yes, Mary!" Warble says. "I'm going to become a philanthropist!"

CHAPTER 2

"You? A philanthropist?" Mary questions, having a hard time wrapping her mind around the concept.

"Yes, Mary. My mind is made up, like a bed at the Paris Hilton around 11:00 a.m. or so," Warble affirms.

Now that Warble is rich as Croesus, he wants fame. While it's true that he *has* fame--of a sort and after a fashion--Warble realizes that he is really more *infamous* than famous. As nice as he once considered that to be, he's no longer quite satisfied with it. He wants respect, admiration--even reverence.

So, Warble's plan is to work things out so that his genius is recognized as altruism, not cynical selfishness or greedy-guts capitalism (as he knows some people think and, in fact, have explicitly charged). In short, Warble wants to become famous for saving the world.

In actuality, Warble thinks things are going just swell in the year 2009—the rich are getting richer, unused land in the countryside is being made productive by paving it over, and thus all birds (having no longer any habitat) are being made extinct. Warble thinks this latter situation is "a good thing," because as a direct result thereof there will be no more:

--Bird flu

--Bird poop (pigeons in the cities, seagulls at the beach, as well as geese in the parks will no longer plague their unfeathered friends and benefactors with their copious offscourings)

--Roosters rudely awakening gentlemen farmers (rich guys who live on farms in the country but don't do any real farm work themselves).

Soundtrack note: "Big Yellow Taxi" by Joni Mitchell and/or Counting Crows

Additionally, as Warble sees it, eradicating all birds has a side benefit: Parents will only have to discuss bees with their kids, saving half the time and trouble. This will give parents everywhere more time and energy to give

attention to the important announcements from sponsors on television shows.

Warble's only problem with the way things are going in the world is that he is so excited about future prospects that he is impatient to see the eventual fruition, the natural outworking, of matters. Specifically, Warble can hardly wait for the complete eradication of "unused" land, and the shifting of all material things from the inefficient poor classes to the fitter, stronger, wiser, smarter wealthy segment of society.

So, seeing great things ahead, but being unwilling to wait for their gradual appearance, Warble decides to help things along a little by going back in time to implement the positive trends early, so that progress toward his heart's desire can be arrived at more quickly. This way, he thinks, he can eventually return "home" to 2009, and live in a world that will already be in a perfect state of balance—something he thinks would otherwise take perhaps another century or so to reach.

Soundtrack note: "Born on the Wrong Side of Time" by Taste

As a means to further his ends, Warble wants to speed up, among other things:

- Globalization
- The forced extinction of all "non-productive" animals
- Genetic Manipulation (so everyone can be like him, creating a master human race)

It may very well be, if you are familiar with Warble's quirks and foibles (in other words, his psychopathic personality, megalomaniacal methods, and his nerdy nature), that none of this surprises you much. Except maybe the time travel element—how does Warble intend to be able to go back in time to reverse-engineer the past?

The next chapter will tell you all about that, so turn the page already.

CHAPTER 3

As wealthy and eccentric men often are, Warble is on the mailing and cold-calling list of all sorts of companies who produce expensive and unique gadgets (in other words, toys for the rich).

Even among the most well-heeled, though, few are considered daring (crazy?) enough to purchase an as-yet untested time machine. Arodnap Inventions Unlimited, though, has run out of R&D money, and must get an infusion of cash from *somewhere* if construction of their flagship product, the Arodnap, is to continue apace--or continue at all, for that matter.

A human behavior expert contracted by AIU has targeted Warble as the most likely candidate meeting the two key qualifications for potential investors (being filthy rich is the initial requirement, and being borderline insane is the second).

Comfy Stolen, boy-wonder salesman, is selected for the crucial assignment: Get Warble interested enough in the device so that he will purchase one in advance, based on the prototype, to be delivered once the device is perfected.

Smooth-as-silk salesman that he is, Comfy is able to set up an appointment with Warble to show him the prototype of the Arodnap. When the agreed-upon day and hour arrives, so does Comfy, along with the Arodnap's chief mechanic, Albert Joad. Comfy and Albert pull into the McGorkle's long, winding driveway leading to their mansion on a hill in a brand-spanking new full-size pickup. On a trailer, under a tarp bearing AIU's insignia, rests the prototype time travel vehicle.

Warble sees the pair pull up to his gated entryway on his surveillance camera, presses the button to open the gate, and descends via elevator to the ground floor and out the door to await their arrival at the top of his circular driveway. When Comfy sees Warble, he waves and smiles to his potential customer from the passenger seat (Albert Joad, certified Arodnap mechanic, is driving). Sitting between the seat is Albert's puppy Taterskin, a

yellow Labrador Retriever who never leaves Albert's side.

Comfy begins to step out of the pickup before Albert has put it in 'Park.' Warble waves him back in, though, and points to the back yard, yelling, "Pull around back; drop it off there, and we'll take a look at it."

Albert deftly maneuvers the pickup to the McGorkles' spacious back yard, shuts off the engine, jumps out, removes the tarp, and begins loosening the straps securing the Arodnep before Warble has even walked around to the back of he and Mary's new mansion (the McGorkles had it built following the Spam scam, tearing down a slightly smaller mansion they had just completed in order to make room for the new one).

"Mr. McGorkle, I presume?" Comfy says, stepping forward to offer his hand to Warble.

"That's my name, and saving the world is my game. Don't wear it out," Warble replies. He had meant to say 'Don't wear it out' right after 'That's my name,' but when he realized he had forgotten to do it, just tacked it on at the end.

Comfy is confused, but ignores Warble's seemingly nonsensical nonsequiter. He *expected* Warble to be eccentric, based on what he'd heard and read about him, though, so he's not *too* surprised or taken aback by the multi-trillionaire's strange speech and behavior.

"My name is Comfy Stolen, head salesman for Arodnep Inventions Unlimited. This," he says, indicating his workmate who is busy winching the Arodnep off the trailer, "is Albert Joad, Arodnep mechanic. He knows everything there is to know about this wonder machine, Mr. McGorkle."

"You can call me *Consumer Warble*, Comfy. This Mr. McGorkle jazz makes me feel as old as them thar hills," Warble says, indicating with a wave of his arm the meadow across the road from his house.

Comfy sees no hills, but lets it go, and makes a mental note to call the potential customer by his self-appointed title and given name.

"Fine! Consumer Warble it is," Comfy says, walking around to the Arodnap, which is now sitting, gleaming in the sun, on Warble's back lawn.

Soundtrack Note: Play "Cadillac Ranch" here, but see if my buddy Bruce (I don't need to say, speak, or write his last name, do I?) will rework the lyrics, replacing "Cadillac" with "Arodnap"

"This, Consumer Warble," Comfy says, presenting the machine to Warble with a flourish of his hand, "is a prototype of the most amazing vehicle ever contrived by the mind and hands of man: it's a time machine, Consumer Warble, that will take you any place, at any time, that you want to go."

Comfy looks at Warble to gauge his response. Warble seems to be, indeed, quite interested, but at the same time perhaps a little skeptical.

"So what's it good for?" Warble asks. "Just joking," he quickly adds, and turns serious. "Has it got four on the floor?" he asks Comfy.

"Whaddaya mean, 'has it got four on the floor?' Are you kiddin' me?" Comfy replies, feigning amazement that Warble would even feel the need to ask such a question. "Of course it does! In fact, not only does it have four on the floor, it's got one on each wall, ten or twelve on the roof, and there's even a few hanging from the ceiling."

"What're we talkin' about here?" Warble wants to know, lost in the shuffle.

"Beats me--you started it," is Comfy's repartee.

Yes, Comfy is a pretty decent salesman. He controlled the situation by tipping the confusion back onto Warble's own head, and mildly chastised him for his lapse in logic—not enough to irritate Warble and lose the sale, but enough to give himself a slight advantage in the game of mental parrying and thrusting that goes on between salesman and potential customer.

"The most impressive thing about the Arodnap, though," Comfy says, "is not how many speeds it has, or its gear ratio, or anything of that sort, but rather its trippy GPS/CPS gadget.

"GPS, as everyone knows, stands for Global Positioning System. With this built-in capability, the driver, or more accurately *pilot*, of the Arodnap can choose a latitude and longitude to which to fly using a trackball-like globe. Spinning the miniature representation of the earth with your thumb to the continent that tickles your current fancy, you can "pop out" that continent by pressing on it, and continue pressing and popping until you have selected the exact spot to which you want to travel. Visually, this has the effect of a jack-in-the-box, albeit one that has lost a good portion of its springiness. Of course, the "springy" parts are really holograms.

"Once a location has been selected, the pilot (or the navigator, should the pilot delegate this duty) turns his attention to the CPS—the Chronological Positioning System. By entering a year (and overriding the default date and time, if desired), not only the precise location, but also the exact time of arrival at the chosen location is set.

Warble still feels a little uncomfortable, having 'lost' that last conversational joust with Comfy. To impress the salesman with his superior intellect and command of facts, Warble comes up with a tidbit of arcane trivia, something that he thinks will derail Comfy, or at least knock him off his high horse: "Speaking of default locations, Daniel Boone was a Spaniard, you know—I think he was Don Quixote's cousin, or something. He was a frontiersman errant."

"Daniel Boone was a Spaniard, you say?" Comfy replies, not knowing what that has to do with the price of coffee at Starbucks, even if true.

"Sure—everybody knows that," Warble bluffs. "I'll bet you can't guess what ol' Dan's favorite food was?"

"I don't know--venison?" Comfy ventures, wondering where the conversation is leading.

"Venison!? Are you crazy?" Warble squeals. "Danny boy had never been to Italy in his life. It was *nachos* he was crazy about. He was practically a univore for nachos—at least, nobody ever saw him eating anything *but* that. As long as there was a restaurant around, you knew what ol' Danny Boy (that song was written for him, you know) would order: three plates of nachos. But

he spoke Spanish (being a Spaniard, after all), so he would lay his long gun on the table, yell out, 'Hey, señorita! Tres nachos! Tres nachos! Andelé! Mach schnell! And hurry it up, while you're at it.' He was known far and wide for that 'Tres Nachos' business."

"Man, Warble, who put a dime in your slot?" Comfy asks rhetorically, under his breath. Taking an entirely different tack, though, Comfy wants to direct attention back to the matter at hand: the Arodnep, and getting Warble interested in it. "Let me demonstrate this little beauty to you, Consumer Warble," Comfy offers, presenting the Arodnep anew with another flourish of his hand.

Soundtrack Note: At the appropriate spot earlier, first "Danny Boy" should play (artist choice yours), then the theme song from the "Daniel Boone" television show

CHAPTER 4

"The Arodnap," Comfy explains to Warble, "was patterned after—as far as its appearance goes, that is—George Jetson's space ship."

Albert, enthused as he is about the machine, can't help expounding on Comfy's pitch: "In fact, it's full name is Arodnap JNG—for Jetsons Next Generation."

Comfy waves Albert to silence, saying, in effect, 'Let me handle this.' "And furthermore," Comfy explains to Warble, "the Arodnap can comfortably carry eight passengers: two in the front, with the pilot's seat on the left, the control console in the middle, and the "co-pilot's" seat on the right—although a co-pilot isn't strictly necessary, as it's basically an honorary designation; three on the bench seat behind, and three more in the bench seat at the rear of the craft."

Again Albert can't control his enthusiasm, which knows no bounds as regards the Arodnap. He just has to tell Warble: "Basically, the Arodnap is flown like a combination airplane/helicopter: it has V.T.O.L. capabilities, like a helicopter, but once hovering at the desired altitude, moves forward like a jet."

"V.T.O.L.?" Warble asks.

"Oh, excuse my pushy and verbose friend," Comfy says, making an apologetic gesture with one hand, and whispering to Albert behind his other hand to keep quiet. Facing Warble again, Comfy explains: "V.T.O.L. stands for 'Vertical Take Off and Landing'--you don't need a long runway, or *any* runway, for that matter—you can land anywhere, as the Arodnap has rotatable jets."

Warble is confused. "All down but nine; set 'em up on the other alley, pard."

Albert tries to explain it this time: "The jets can be moved from the rear of the Arodnap to the center, or even to the front, allowing you to fly in

reverse—something no conventional plane can do.”

“I see,” Warble says, still not understanding.

Comfy perceives that Warble still doesn't quite get it, regardless of what he claims, so he takes up where Albert left off: “When taking off and landing in V.T.O.L. mode, the jets automatically rotate to the bottom...”

“On this sliding rail,” Albert notes excitedly, proud as can be of the Arodnap and its bleeding-edge features, pointing to the forward terminus of the rail, ending at the craft's nose.

“Right,” Comfy says, resuming his explanation. “But you, the pilot, don't have to worry about that. The position of the jets are rotated automatically when you press the “Start” button (to take off) or the “Land” button.”

Albert jumps in again: “Actually, when you do so (press the “Land” button, that is), the jets are first moved to the front, for reverse thrust, to slow down the forward momentum until you are moving neither forward nor backward. When you begin to hover in place, the jets are then rotated to the bottom, and the pressure emanating from the jets is gradually reduced until you touch down.”

“Right,” Comfy again agrees with the mechanic. “So, really, all you have to do to fly this beauty is to press the “Start” button to take off and the “Land” button when you want to come in for a landing. It's very simple and user-friendly. You steer it exactly as you would a car, using the steering wheel...”

“Yoke,” Albert corrects.

“Whatever,” Comfy says, getting a little miffed at Albert's constant interruptions and corrections. “And, you control your speed and rate of acceleration using this lever here,” he adds, pointing to the handle between the two front seats which looks more or less like a car's “shifter.”

“You can think of it as a sort of gas pedal,” Comfy explains to Warble. Albert rolls his eyes and grunts, obviously disagreeing. Comfy fixes Albert with a stare and repeats: “It *is* basically like a gas pedal, isn't it, Albert?”

Albert shrugs. "You *could* say that," he admits, "but rather than operating on a graduated continuum, it has eleven click-levels, and once you let your hand off of it, the Arodnap will remain at the corresponding TPM."

Comfy gives Albert a dirty look. *He* knows what TPM stands for, but he doesn't want to confuse the potential customer with arcana like that.

"What's TPM?" Warble predictably asks.

"Thrusts Per Millisecond," Albert answers. "It's how many units of propelling energy are sent through the thrusters, or the jets."

"So it's basically speed, or miles per hour?" Warble asks, sure he's got it and wanting to impress Albert and Comfy with his quick understanding of the details.

"That's right" and "Not exactly" Comfy and Albert simultaneously, respectively (if not respectfully, in the latter case) say.

Comfy throws Albert another dirty look. Albert ignores it and goes on: "Actually, your speed is based not just on the TPM setting but also your attitude."

"What's my attitude got to do with it?" Warble asks defensively and a little huffily, misunderstanding again, and wondering if Albert is trying to make a fool of him by pulling his leg.

"Not *your* attitude--the attitude of the Arodnap," Albert explains.

Warble is more confused than ever and says: "Don't throw down another chip until I've had a look at my cards. What do you mean, 'the attitude of the Arodnap'? How can an inanimate object have an attitude? You're not trying to tell me this thing is actually *alive*, are you?" Warble asks, looking suspiciously at the craft and warily taking a step back.

Comfy elbows Albert aside, and steps between Warble and Albert. "No, not at all," he explains, gently grabbing the tip of Warble's elbow and leading

him back around to the side of the Arodnap, to a position from which Comfy thinks the craft looks best. "What Albert means by 'attitude' is engineer-speak, or techno-jargon, for the *angle* of the airplane through the air," he explains, using his right hand as an example, holding fingers and thumb together and pointing straight out from his wrist, raising his hand shoulder-high and changing the position of his hand in relation to the horizon, first angling his hand up, then down, then rolling it to the left and the right.

"Oh, *now* I get it," Warble says. " *That* kind of attitude."

Comfy adds the final bit of information Warble will need to know to control the craft: "To change the attitude, or pitch, of the Arodnap, pull the steering wheel, or yoke, toward you to pull the nose up and gain altitude, or push it down, into the steering column, to push the nose down and reduce altitude."

"Just like an airplane," Warble says, positive he understands this time.

"Just like an airplane," Comfy echoes. "Now, for the final exciting feature: the Arodnap's patented (not to mention copyrighted and trademarked) shrinker/deshrinker device."

CHAPTER 5

Albert nervously clears his throat. He doesn't want to upset Comfy, but he can't help correcting his overly-simplistic nomenclature. "Actually, what Comfy calls the 'shrinker/deshrinker'," Albert softly, caustically, and derisively chuckles, "is the Material Compressor/Decompressor, or MC/D for short."

"Technically, Mr. Joad is correct," Comfy says to Warble, "but it's not necessary to use mechanic-speak when referring to these gadgets," he adds, giving Albert a meaningful look.

"Nevertheless," Warble responds, "I do like to call things by their proper names. Tell me more, Albert. Just how does the Compressor/Decompressor—the MC/D, you called it?--work?"

Albert flashes a gloating glance at Comfy, as if to say, 'So much for your simplifications, smarty-pants.'

"Oh, before I forget, let me show you *this* little doo-dad," Albert says, reaching into the Arodnep and flipping on the Contextual iPod, a device that, when activated, automatically downloads music whose lyrics or theme correspond to what's going on at the time in the immediate vicinity. Albert briefly explains its function, and activates it to demonstrate just how it works. Jimmy Buffett's "Boat Drinks" begins playing over the Arodnep's octophonic speaker system.

Note: Henceforth, all Soundtrack Notes refer to the songs automatically chosen by the contextual iPod. Occasionally, this potentially irritating or embarrassing behavior (automated song selection) is overridden by direct human intervention

"Anyway," Albert continues, "To expand on an earlier discussion, you use the GPS to pick the spot you want to travel to, and the CPS to enter the date you want to be there—not just year, but also month, day of the month, and time of day. If you don't select a specific date or portion of a date, it just

defaults to the current one."

"How do you mean?" Warble asks, who wasn't paying close attention, instead listening to the Jimmy Buffett tune.

Soundtrack note: Obviously, Jimmy Buffett's "Boat Drinks" should be playing during this scene (obvious if you're a Parrothead, anyway)

"Well, for instance, say you pick a spot but no date. You will just be doing space traveling but not time traveling—the date remains the same. If you pick a year, but don't explicitly change the other parts of the date, they will remain what they are—for example, if you choose 1492 as the year but don't specify anything further, it will take you to the spot you chose (or remain here if you don't pick a spot) on this date of that year—that is, since today is May 29th, it would take you to May 29th, 1492."

"Oh, I see," Warble says. "In other words, the only things that change, space-wise or time-wise, are those that you explicitly change yourself."

"Exactly!" Comfy says, trying to regain control of the conversation.

"So what's the MC/D, now?" Warble asks.

Comfy again steps between Warble and Albert. "The *MC/D*," Comfy explains, "shrinks things when its force field passes over them. This way, you can take along a lot of gear without it taking up a lot of precious cargo room. As you can see, the Arodnap's trunk is, for aerodynamic and stylistic reasons, quite limited in its carrying capacity."

"I think what you really mean to say is that it's downright puny," Warble says.

Comfy nods his agreement with that assessment. "But it doesn't *need* to be large, as you can shrink everything you need down," he says. "Once you need the shrunken stuff, you simply change polarity on the shrinker/deshrinker by flipping this switch on its barrel..."

"Material Compressor/Decompressor," Albert insists.

Comfy shoots him a dirty look. "Albert, when are you going to learn to leave half of what you know in your head? If you were expendable, I'd expend you right now," he whisper-growls into Albert's ear. Albert just smiles.

"As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted," Comfy continues, "when you need your shrunken goods to regain their normal dimensions, you flip this switch on the Compressor/Decompressor, which changes it from shrink to deshrink mode" (Albert places himself in Warble's line of vision and mouths 'toggles it from compress to decompress mode') "and—voila! You've got your medications, science books, barbecue grill, or whatever you brought along, back at their original size."

"Neat," Warble says, wondering why he would want to take those kind of things along.

"Ah," Albert interjects, pointing his finger into the air, "if I may, there's a feature of the MC/D I'd like to point out."

"Sure," Warble assents, all ears.

"While it's true that you *can* go to the trouble of toggling the polarity switch, in actual practice and by default the MC/D is 'smart' enough to know whether you're compressing or decompressing things."

"Really!?" Warble responds, half questioning, half expressing his delight.

"Yep," Albert continues, "The MC/D knows if something is to be made smaller (compressed) or larger (decompressed) based on its size as the MC/D wand is passed over the item: If the item to be acted on is larger than a bread basket, it is compressed; if it's smaller than a bread basket, it's decompressed."

"Ah," Warble says, wondering what would happen if a bread basket were the object in question (which is, by definition, the size of a bread basket and thus is neither smaller nor larger than a bread basket).

Warble is about to ask Albert about that very possibility, when Comfy

intrudes on his reverie by saying: "Those are the features of the Arodnep in a nutshell, Consumer Warble. Now, what say we take this prototype for a test ride? It's not quite 'ready for prime time' yet, but we do have one location and time that has been fully tested which we *can* demonstrate to you—1956 at the Ed Sullivan Show in New York, when Elvis Presley made his debut!"

"Elvis Presley?!" Warble says. "Why would I want to see Elvis Presley? I can go to the Citizen Page* in town any time and gawk at him there all I want."

* Note: For those who haven't read book 1 in the trilogy, "Citizen Page" is the fast-food burger joint that Warble frequents most frequently

CHAPTER 6

Have you seen the scene at the end of "Streetcar Named Desire" where Marlon Brando yells out "Stella! Stella!"?

If not, then surely you've seen an episode or two of the Flintstones where Fred imitates Marlon and yells out "Wilma! Wilma!"

If you're familiar with neither, you may as well close up this book and chuck it on the sofa, or better yet donate it to someone who will read and understand it, such as to your local insane asylum or something, because you won't get much out of it if you're not familiar with basic American culture (classic movies and TV shows, for example).

In any case (for those of you still reading, as opposed to those who are wondering if they can find their receipt and get a refund for this book), Warble imitates Fred imitating Marlon and yells out, "Mary! Mary!"

Warble's wife soon comes out of the house, wiping her hands on her apron (she had been making apple pies). As you probably guessed, she's more your Barbara Billingsley/June Cleaver type than, say, Britney Spears.

Warble waves her over. He wants Mary to see the Arodnep. As she walks up, though, Warble pulls his cell phone out of his shirt pocket and, without introducing Mary to anyone or vice versa, walks a few steps away from the group.

Now that he knows how to pilot the Arodnep, Warble has a plan, and is itching to implement it.

CHAPTER 7

Warble calls Ward Robespierre, his image consultant, chief of staff, and right-hand man: "Robespierre, this is your meal ticket. Call up the rest of my people. I want all of you to meet me here at my villa—pronto!"

"But..." Ward begins to object (he's about to take his daughter Rhonda to her school team's soccer game, something he had solemnly promised her months before—which obligation he had informed Warble about well in advance).

"No butts about it, Robespierre," Warble barks. "Get your donkey over here, or you'll be like a clay vase in a potter's bake oven."

"What?" Ward replies, confused, as he often is when talking to his boss.

"Fired!" Warble fires back. "Fired! F,I,R,E,D—Fired!"

Warming up to the task, Warble is mad enough now to swallow a horned toad backwards. If he had a conventional phone, he would slam down the receiver, perhaps breaking off one of the hardened plastic prongs that hold the transmitter on the cradle when the phone is "at rest." But, since it's a cell phone, Warble simply throws his head back and lets loose with a primordial scream, somewhat akin to Kenyon Martin after an in-your-face monster dunk: "IT'S HARD TO GET GOOD HELP NOWADAYS!!!"

Warble has overtaxed himself a tad. He takes a few deep breaths, presenting a tolerably reasonable facsimile of a man breathing along with his wife at a Lamaze class. Finally getting a grip on himself, but not yet willing to let go of his anger without another denunciation, Warble adds, "I've stuffed the gullets of sluggards too long!"

Mary tries to ignore Warble's tantrum. "Warble," she asks in a honeyed tone of voice, "What is it you wanted to show me? I'm right in the middle of baking some apple pies."

"Forget the derved pies, Mary!" Warble says, dismissively waving his hand. "But speaking of pies, call up Papa Murphy's and have them deliver a bunch of pizza pies, and a few cases of Jolt Cola."

"Why, are we going to watch a Packers game on TV tonight?" Mary wonders.

"Mary, THINK!" Warble replies, tapping his head with his forefinger. "It's *May*—the Packers aren't playing yet."

"Oh, that's right—so what's up?" Mary asks.

"We're going on a trip far, far away, and to a different time," Warble says, expecting to pique Mary's interest.

"That's nice, Warble, have a nice trip," Mary responds, turning to walk back into the house. She doesn't really expect to get away with it, but it's worth a try.

"Mary, didn't I say in our wedding vows, 'For better or forget it'? You're cruisin', girl!"

"On the other hand, you, Warble, can't be any better than you already are," Mary shoots back.

"Why, thank you, my dear!" Warble says, basking in the glow of what he imagines to have been high words of praise.

"That wasn't a compliment, Warble," Mary informs him. "I am simply resigned to that state of affairs. It would be easier to plan an obstruction to a sunrise or a hurricane than to change that situation."

Warble sighs, losing his patience. "Mary, quit kidding around. I want you to go with us," he says, changing to a cajoling tone. "C'mon, it'll be fun—plus, the photo opps will be much more effective if you're there by my side, gazing up at me in wonder and unmasked admiration as I perform my marvelous deeds to save humanity."

"Marvelous deeds?" Comfy and Albert say in unison. As Warble turns around

and gives them a dirty look, Mary, standing behind him, looks at the two workmates, shakes her head, and rolls her eyes. 'See the cross I have to bear?' is the message she's trying to convey to them. They get the picture.

"Yes, marvelous deeds!" Warble hotly contends. "I've got plans for the Arodnep that are orders of magnitude better than *your* lame ideas. Seeing Elvis in 1956 indeed!" Warble mocks. "That's the sort of thinking you plan to get when you leave the thinking and planning to a stuffed shirt pencil pusher and a grease monkey."

Mary tries to defuse the situation by changing the subject when she sees Comfy's body English (he's about to tell Warble a thing or two, sale or no sale), and notices Albert reaching for a fuse puller. "Why don't you just PhotoShop(™) me in to those photo opps, Warble?" she asks. "No one will know. You can tell me all about it when you get back, and it will be just like I was there."

"NO, Mary, and that's final!" Warble growls, unconsciously stomping his foot on the ground. "Go in the house, turn off the oven, and call Papa Murphys!"

"Can't I stay and finish my baking?" Mary wheedles.

"I wish I could write it in the sky in capital letters one hundred feet tall, followed by about a gazillion exclamation points: NO! NO! NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (etc.)" is Warble's response to that.

Mary expels an exasperated groan and turns on her heels, angrily pulling off her apron as she goes.

"'PhotoShop photo opps'--Who ever heard of such nonsense?!" Warble grumbles under his breath. "I can't imagine how Mary has sunk to such depths of depravity and crevices of corruption—trying to fool my constituents and the consumers thataway!"

Just then, the trio standing in the back yard hear a convoy of vehicles pull into the McGorkles' driveway.

CHAPTER 8

Tilting his head back at a 45° angle, Warble bellows out, loud enough for his employees out front to hear: "Gitcher donkeys back here!"

Warble phrased his demand that way because he always scrupulously avoids the use of coarse language.

Leading the way, Ward Robespierre soon turns the corner, followed by Jacques LaRue, a fifty-something health and fitness nut who is Warble's PFT (Personal Fitness Trainer); Marianne Trieste-Trench, a young, no-nonsense, take-no-prisoners type who is Warble's security expert; and Mullah Gitani, a laid back and somewhat roundish ("pleasantly plump") middle-aged gent who functions as Warble's resident token Indian Chief, Cook, and Bottle Washer.

Now that everyone is here, Warble yells out for Mary (in a manner exactly like before—you remember, the Brando/Flintstone routine).

Waving Comfy and Albert aside, Warble is about to explain the key features of the Arodnep to his employees but first says: "I hope you remembered to bring your toothbrushes and jammies, because we're going on a little trip."

Jacques and Marianne elbow Ward and sarcastically whisper, in unison, "Thanks for telling us, Ward."

"I didn't know myself, people," Ward pleads his innocence.

Mullah sits down on the lawn "Indian-style," crosses his arms and, with a look of deep contentment on his face, begins meditating and playing air sitar.

Soundtrack note: "Live for Today" by the Grass Roots and/or something by Ravi Shankar or his ravishing daughter, or "Philby" by Rory Gallagher

Warble explains to his employees about the GPS/CPS, but emphasizes that he alone, as the owner of the Arodnep (Comfy perks up at this remark,

seeing he apparently has the sale wrapped up) will operate the location and date selection device.

"After you get the finished version, you mean," Comfy reminds him.
"Remember, this prototype can only go to the Ed Sullivan Show, 1956."

"Of course," Warble says, while holding one arm behind his back, fingers crossed (a trick he also used at his Presidential inauguration, some of you may recall).

When Warble begins talking about the MC/D, Mary interrupts him with a question. "Why do you say it that way?" she asks.

"Say what what way?" Warble replies, really knowing what Mary is wondering about but wanting to appear as if his "distinguished" pronunciation is completely natural, and was done subconsciously, automatically.

"You say material 'Muh Teary ELL'," Mary explains, wrinkling her brows in consternation.

"Oh, that," Warble says, "It's the French. As my old friend Eau Zarque the fabled fur trapper always says, any time the French word for something sounds enough like the real word so that you think you know what it means, use it!"

"Why?" Mary asks, thinking that sounds like the most blatantly nonsensical advice she's ever heard in her life.

"'Why?' you so ignorantly ask?!?" Warble says, actually glad to have the opportunity to show off his knowledge of the romantic French lingo. "Sacre bleu, madame! It's sophisticated! Your apparent IQ will increase by 10 points for every French word you use. Why, if you were to allow four or five French words to drop casually into a conversation, you would be viewed as having an IQ double your certified! Besides, if people think you know French, they'll assume you understand Proust, Gaugin, and all the other mysteries of life—they might even conclude that you can communicate with dolphins—which, buy the whey, are WAY smarter than most humans (although none are more intelligent than I, of course).

"You would be viewed as being twice as smart as the average human, and four times as smart as your average Congressman."

"You may be onto something, there, Warble," Jacques muses aloud. "Or maybe you're just *on* something."

Mary pulls Warble aside for a private conversation. "Warble, tell me again why you hired that guy as your fitness trainer."

"Mr. LaRue is a huckleberry above a persimmon, Mary."

"Say again?" Mary requests, still in the dark.

Warble sighs. "Because he's such a great gymnast, that's why!"

"What's so special about his gymnastic abilities—he hasn't been in the Olympics or anything, has he?"

"No, but who gives a hoot? He ate cereal bars while working out on the parallel bars. He ate one right after another! I've never seen anything like it!"

"You mean he ate cereal bars serially while on the parallel bars--a deed that had no parallel?" Mary asks.

"Exact-act-actly!" Warble answers, beaming, thinking he got Jacques at quite the bargain salary (the equivalent of minimum wage, when you add all the compulsory overtime). "And, he once swam from Alcatraz to San Francisco, pulling a tugboat with a rope in his mouth—but that was nothing, really."

"Ok, let's try a dry run," Warble says, hoping to fool everybody. "Let's get our assignments worked out and see if the logistics are logical enough for now. I, of course, will sit in the pilot's seat; Mary, as my soul mate and co-owner of the Arodnep, will take 'shotgun' and sit next to me in front. In the middle seat, let's put, from left to right, LaRue, Trench, and Robespierre (since he's my right-hand man, he should be at my right, and, appropriately,

behind me). Last and least, taking the hindmost, we'll let Gitani sit in the middle of the back seat, with Comfy and Albert flanking and sandwiching him."

A little dubious, but wanting to humor the customer, Comfy climbs in, and gestures for Albert to take his spot, too. Once everybody is aboard, Warble turns around, and then two things happen in quick succession: First, Warble feigns amazement, points at the sky behind him and yells, "Jiminy Cricket! Is that who I think it is?!"

The ruse works pretty well—Comfy and Albert, who don't know Warble too well yet, look back. As soon as they do, Warble pulls up the GPS/CPS and enters the time and space coordinates.

Before anybody can do anything about it or even utter a word of discouragement, lodge a complaint, file a grievance, or raise an objection, the unlikely octet are flying high above Wisconsin, looking down on corn fields, soybean patches, and string cheese factories.

About that second thing that happened simultaneously with the first, though (Warble's dirty trick being the first thing, for those of you not concentrating all that intently): As Warble was busy entering the time and space coordinates, Albert's pet puppy Taterskin, who had been more or less waiting patiently up until then, had bounded into the back seat, and snuggled up to his master.

Comfy had tried to grab the pooch and throw him overboard, as the Arodrap was crowded enough already, and he didn't want the rambunctious puppy crawling all over his brand new silk suit, but also because the time travel feature had not yet been tested with animals—it is unknown as of yet just what it might do to them, and whether they would even survive it.

Where are they heading, you ask? Warble has entered the following time and space coordinates into the GPS/CPS:

Location: Cooperstown, New York

Date: April 1st, 1992

CHAPTER 9

Now you may wonder, 'Why?' Why Cooperstown, New York? And why 1992? Warble has chosen Cooperstown because that's where he thinks people had a barrel of fun inventing baseball. But why 1992, when the Cooperstownians had (again, as Warble thinks*) invented the sport away back in the 1800s? Warble saw no need to go back any further than necessary, at least for this first trip. He didn't know if it would cause him to get motion sickness, so he decided to play it safe at first and see how things would go just going back a few years in time.

* Baseball is in reality a derivation of the British game "Rounders," which is similar to the game of Cricket, rather than being something "new"

At any rate, Warble's convoluted reasoning can't really be logically explained, so let's just accept that he picked April 1st, 1992 as the most efficacious time of arrival at that destination. He didn't pick April 1st because of any affinity with fools or pranks, but because that is opening day of the new baseball season, and he wants to enact a new rule that will save not only baseball, but by extension the world (as Warble will explain).

On arriving in the town, Warble heads for a corn field and then presses the "Land" button. Directly after touchdown, he climbs out of the Arodnop, walks out onto its hood (or cowling), turns around, and addresses his fellow travelers:

"Ladies and Gentile men, we are about to save our great society by means of an end-around, a nipping in the butt, as it were. As everybody knows, baseball is a microcosm of life, especially American life. And as America is beloved by all peoples and nations, whatever is done in America will be obsequiously imitated by all everywhere. They will trip over themselves scrambling to follow our lead.

"So, our motto will be: today baseball, tomorrow America, and the rest of the world the day after tomorrow (it might take a little bit longer for backwards third-world countries who only get wind of our innovations when the llamas and water buffalo and what-not come straggling into their remote

villages bearing news of our latest innovations).

"The future of our culture and way of life..."

"Warble, I get all my culture from yogurt," Jacques objects. "Is that the kind of whey you're talking about?"

"No, LaRue, I'm talking about the American way of life. Our freedom, our lifestyle that everyone is jealous of, making them green with envy, and which we must maintain regardless of the cost or consequences. It is our patriotic duty to see to it that it is never altered, interrupted, or otherwise messed around with."

Marianne agrees that the American way is the best, and declares herself ready to fight all foes, foreign and domesticated foreigners, who try to stick a finger in her pie.

"Yes, American whey is the best," Warble concurs. "And so are American curds."

"American Kurds?" Marianne asks.

"Sure," Warble answers. "If Little Miss Muffett—a pretty good friend of Jimmy Buffett, buy the whey (that's a subliminal advertisement, in case you didn't notice)--had been eating *American* curds and whey (which give strength, promote courage, and taste really wonderful to boot), she wouldn't have been frightened away by a silly old spider. Even if it were a Tarantula straight from the Costa Rican rain forest, W. Somersault Milkshake's epic poem about her would've been altogether different: The diminutive maiden would've fought the scary arachnid tooth and nail to keep her curds and whey."

"You don't say!" Jacques replies.

"No more rhymes, and I mean it!" Warble says, reddening with anger.

"Anybody wanna...play a game of basketball?" Jacques asks, pretending to dribble an imaginary ball in the air.

"Getting back to the point," Ward says, "It may be that we need to do something about preserving our way of life, Warble, but how do you intend to do that, and from here in 1992 of all times?"

"This is the day the preemptive strike must be initiated," Warble answers.
"The timing is perfect for it."

CHAPTER 10

"Preemptive strike? What in the world do you mean?" Ward questions.

"That's not our way; it's unprecedented, at least at this early date in our history."

"Exactly! And that's why we have to precedent it right now, so that we don't end up in a world of hurt," Warble explains. "Here's my plan: as already established (because I said it), baseball is a microcosm of life in America. If we improve baseball, we necessarily and by definition improve America. Now I ask you: who is the most important person on the baseball diamond?"

"The umpire?" Ward guesses.

"The umpire?! That fat, dumb, wannabe turtle?! What have you been smokin', Robespierre?! The most important guy on the diamond is the *pitcher*. And do you know how many of these fine specimens we've lost over the years because they were forced to waste their time and wear out their arms throwing pitches that the batters didn't even swing at?"

"Can't say that I do," Ward freely admits.

"You should brush up on American history, then (also known as baseball history)," Warble scolds. "Briefcase Paige, the greatest of them all—cut down in the prime of his career because of having to throw too many swung-at-but-missed and unswung-at strikes. And then there's the inimitable James Hannah-Barbera "Dizzy" Dean, who threw out his arm pitching to a gaggle of minor leaguers or American Legion players or whoever they were, who wouldn't know what a double steal was if one came up and bit them on the patooty. A travesty!

"Last but not least, Ho Lee Krapp, the pride of Korea, blew out his arm pitching to Tony Gwynn, who fouled off 314 straight Krapp curve balls in one single, solitary at-bat—which, as you might guess, was the last batter Krapp ever faced—his arm was dead as a doornail from that point on. To add insult to injury, as Krapp was yanked by the manager after Gwynn homered off him, a spectator—as they are wont to do--jeered him with comments

decidedly unfavorable to his lineage. The hot-headed Korean pitcher lost his cool and went into the stands. When Krapp hit the fan, all Dallas broke loose. Krapp was banned from baseball for life. I think he's selling apples retail from a cart on the streets of Seoul, now. And he doesn't especially care for that line of work. It's a sad thing. Anyway, ..."

"Just what are you driving at, Warble, besides trying to drive me crazy?" Mary asks.

"That would be a mighty short ride for *you*, Mary," Warble retorts. "You may as well walk, if that's where you're going. Anyway, here's the deal: We have to change the rules of baseball so that umpires can call strikes on batters without the pitcher actually having to throw the ball."

"What? How could an umpire tell whether the pitcher is going to throw a strike, and whether the batter either wouldn't swing at it, or swing at it and miss?" Jacques asks.

"Well, he's the umpire, isn't he? What he says, goes. He's probably the most important guy on the diamond—except for the pitcher that is, as I proved to you ignoramuses earlier. You just have to trust him and take his word for it—or else. Besides, you just have to have faith—ya gotta believe!"

"Faith? You're espousing a faith-based initiative?" Marianne asks.

"Leave Mary out of this. She doesn't even understand baseball, the poor pitiable soul. What I mean is this: every true baseball fan (in other words, every dyed-in-the-wool, red- or blue-blooded American) knows that the umpire can tell in advance whether the pitch is going to be a ball or a strike. He can tell from the sign the catcher gives the pitcher, or the look on the pitcher's face, or how many times the pitcher scratches himself in the groin area, or in which direction he drools tobacco juice down his chin, whether the pitch will end up being a strike or not."

"He can?" Marianne asks, dubious of the veracity of Warble's statement.

"Sure," Warble asserts. "For example, if the batter can't hit low-and-inside curve balls, and the catcher calls for that sort of pitch, the umpire already

knows it's going to be a strike. Or if the pitcher gets a real determined look on his face--you know, like an 'I won't be denied,' 'Refuse to lose,' or 'Get 'er done' kind of glaring stare, he will definitely throw a strike. Also, if he drools tobacco juice down the left side of his chin, he's obviously in 'the zone' and has tapped into his inner derelict, unleashing his raw potential..."

"Warble, what in Kennesaw Mountain Landis are you talking about?" Jacques demands.

"Intuition, skill, and years of practice—that's what I'm talking about, LaRue," Warble says. "The umpires have it. Also, if they don't like the batter, and they either like or are indifferent towards the pitcher, they know they're going to call a strike. Or sometimes they just alternate between calling balls and strikes. Ball, strike, ball, strike, etc. Those embodiments of wisdom incarnate (the umps, that is) can even tell by the look on the batter's shoulders whether he's going to whiff or not."

"Whiff? What've you been sniffing, Warble?" Mary queries.

"Besides sniffing at your ignorance, you mean? Why, sometimes the umps will be able to call a batter out on three strikes before he even gets out of the on-deck circle. That will save even more time, and shoe leather to boot.

"Anyway, the point is this: The most important practitioners (pitchers) of the most important job in the country (baseball) must be protected. Their arms need to be spared all that extra stress and strain, the wasted motion of throwing balls that would be strikes anyway. Their careers will last longer, thus baseball will experience a boon, verily the country will be uplifted, and voila!--the world will be made safe for globalization, and the globe safe for commerce."

CHAPTER 11

"What?! Just what is it exactly that are you proposing, Warble?" Ward wants to know.

"We must facilitate and enable and enact a rules change, so that umpires can call strikes before they happen, and so that the pitchers don't even have to throw the ball in those instances," Warble answers. "Games will go faster, pitchers will last longer, and all will be peaches and cream, hunky dory, goodness and light.

"Yes, the future of civilization depends on us: Umpires, those selfless paragons of impartial justice, moral integrity, and social equality *must* be given the right to call preemptive strikes!"

"I must admit, Warble, I really don't see what good all this will do," Mary says.

"Mary, I'm shocked! You are so self-centered! You don't care three continental derns for those poor, put-upon pitchers, do you? As far as you're concerned, they can blow out their elbows and waste their time hurling all those unnecessary strikes. Okay, then, seeing that all you care about is yourself, here's how you--and the entire country!--will benefit: As the games will be much shorter, you can get home earlier, to tend your begonias and bake your pies. Like the national anthem says:

(Warble sings it)

Take me home from the ball game

Take me home from the crowd

Buy me some PopTarts(™) and fake fruit snacks

I don't care if I get really fat

So it's root root root for a short game

If they play long it's a shame

And it's 1,2,3 sore arms saved at the old ball game

"And by spending less time at the games you can thus accomplish more in the way of, say, watching reality TV shows, mowing your lawn, golfing, and other vital pursuits."

"But I don't golf," Jacques says, who engages in only what he considers to be *real* sports (ones in which the participants run, jump, sweat, and smash into things).

"I know you don't, LaRue, but you should," Warble advises. "That was a hint, a word to the wise, but perhaps it was lost on you. But just in case it's not and you will actually listen and learn: golf is very suave and debonair. It's the only sport where you don't have to run, jump, sweat, and smash into things. Because it's such a calm and laid-back activity, you don't even have to shower after golfing, so think of all the water you can save!"

"What about the water used to keep the greens green?" Jacques counters.

"I wouldn't worry about that, LaRue--it's probably recycled water anyway. Butt, buy the whey, what do tree huggers have to do with it?"

Jacques has no idea what Warble is talking about. He returns to his earlier concern. "Are you *sure* this unprecedented move—these preemptive strikes you're proposing--is a wise one, Warble?" Jacques persists.

"Of course, LaRue. There are many historical examples where preemptive strikes worked well in America."

"There are?"

"Sure! To cite just one example, Sherman left behind a slow-acting poison when he passed through Atlanta."

"Sherman who? Mike Sherman, the former coach of the Green Bay Packers?"

"No, you hare-brained nincompoop! Boy howdy, it must take a lot of practice to become as ignorant as you are--no offense, of course! Anyway, when Sherman marched through "Jaw-jaw," you see, he knew the Peachy Keeners would eventually steal Milwaukee's baseball team (an attempt to usurp their

culture, as baseball is a Yankee sport), and leaving behind the time-release poison was Sherman's way of getting revenge in advance--ya gotta be proactive, dont'cha know, not reactive, retroactive, or radioactive. Anyway, you can tell it worked out just swell if you watch a Braves game in Atlanta: Everybody in the stands moans and sways and flails their arms--sure signs of being slowly poisoned to death."

"Warble, I think you spent too much time playing football without a helmet when you were a kid," is Jacques' opinion on the matter.

"Hey, why aren't we getting anywhere?" Warble demands of everyone, but of Comfy and Albert in particular. "We're just flying in circles around the world, over and over."

CHAPTER 12

"Did you hit the after burner switch?" Comfy asks, knowing full well that Warble hadn't, but wanting to couch the matter in the form of a question.

"No, I didn't hit the after burner switch," Warble responds in a huff. "You didn't tell me I *needed* to hit the after burner switch, or that there even *was* such a beast."

"Well, there is, and you do," Comfy says. Albert nods in the affirmative, as he scratches Taterskin behind the ears.

Warble searches for the switch. He can't find it. "Where's the after burner switch, and what does it do?" he asks.

"It's on the tip of the lever," Albert tells him. "It turns on the after burners."

"I KNOW it turns on the dad-blamed after burners," Warble says, irritated. "I *MEAN*, what will that do *exactly*?"

"It causes us to fly at mach pi," Comfy answers. "We have to attain that speed to be able to slip the surly bonds of earth, slide into another time dimension, and go where we wanna go today."

"Oh," Warble says, scratching his head and trying to remember where he'd heard that 'slip the surly bonds of earth' line before.

"So what's mock pie, anyway?" Warble finally asks.

"3.14 times the speed of light divided by 3.14 times the speed of sound, less the induction drag ratio of a healthy snail on a cold morning, where "healthy" is defined as sodium-free and of average slimeness, and "cold" is defined as 31.4 degrees Fahrenheit (-0.333333333 degrees Celsius)," Albert immediately answers, anticipating the question. Having been asked the question hundreds of times by Arodnop stockholders, "vulture capitalists," as

well as all of his friends and acquaintances, Albert answers as fast as he can and in a monotone, sounding like a bored automaton--in other words, exactly like a Congressman.

Warble hits the after burner switch. In no time at all, so it seems, the octet (or nonet, if you count Taterskin) have arrived at 1992 Cooperstown.

As Warble lands the Arodnep in an empty lot behind a Wal*Mart superstore, everybody hears Albert groaning pitifully.

"What's wrong?" Mary says, turning around. "Oh, my word!" she then yells out, eyes bulging.

CHAPTER 13

"Holy Mexican sauce and Jumpin' Jehoshaphat!" Warble exclaims. "What's happened to Taterskin?!"

A general hubbub ensues.

"WHAT HAPPENED TO MY PUPPY?!" Albert adds to the din, after he's finally able to--with the aid of Mullah pulling while he pushes--get the huge dog off his lap.

Taterskin has changed from a puppy into a full-grown dog somewhere between Oconomowoc and Cooperstown, some time between 2009 and 1992.

"I told you this thing was just a prototype, Consumer Warble!" Comfy scolds. "We shouldn't have come here. We shouldn't have gone *anywhere* but to the Ed Sullivan show to see..."

"I know, I know," Warble finishes his sentence, "We should've gone to see Elvis Costello, or Elvin Bishop or whoever, on the Conan the Barbarian show.

Soundtrack note: Play "Fooled Around & Fell in Love" by Elvin Bishop

"Butt what the hey, so the puppy is now a dog—stuffing happens, as my old friend Hugh Geauxgurl always says. Besides, Albert is the mechanic—don't look at me," Warble says, shifting the blame. "He must have forgotten to tighten a bolt here or twist in a screw there or something."

Warble doesn't really care what size the canine is. But then again, he's not the one who has to squeeze into the back seat, which was designed to carry three adults, with that number of people plus an additional very large dog.

At least none of the *people* have been altered, or not in a way that is obvious at a cursory glance. Concluding that all is well, Warble feels justified in playing his trick and making his little detour. "So," he says, "This proves once again that the customer is always right. I will gladly pay you next Tuesday,

Comfy, for the use of the Arodnap today."

Comfy throws up his hands. "All right then, Consumer Warble. If you're definitely going to buy it, then I guess I can't interfere with your little joy ride."

"This is no joy ride, Comfy," Warble informs the salesman. "We are out to save the world, preserve the American whey, and make the globe safe for commerce, and the world safe for globalization."

CHAPTER 14

After successfully instituting the preemptive strike rule (money in the right hands, passed under the table, works wonders), Warble says, "Well, enough of the 1990s, people. Let's go back to a simpler and less hectic and cynical time—1960, in Silver Spring, Maryland."

"What freedom-fortifying feat (or "marvelous deed," as you like to put it) do you plan on performing in that year and place, Warble?" Mary asks.

"It's not what I have to *do* at that location in time and space, but what I need to *prevent*. An enemy of progress is on the verge of throwing a monkey wrench—nay, a veritable King Kong wrench!--into the works if we don't stop her. The fate of the earth hangs in the balance. If we don't prevent this Jezebel, this fruitcake beatnik tree-hugger, from propagating her pernicious prevarications, future generations will be—to put it mildly--perturbed with us."

"What dastardly deed must we derail, Warble?" Ward is curious.

"Johnny Carson's daughter Rachel (the spoiled brat) is about to write a book claiming that there aren't enough birds living in her neighborhood and the reason why is because of the miracles of science. Rachel, nattering nabob of negativity that she is, will assert that chemicals, produced with Yankee ingenuity to grow more food faster--thus ending malnutrition and starvation (in other words, it's a good thing)--are killing the apians."

"What are apians—apes? Bees?" Jacques asks.

"No, you birdbrain—apians are birds! We must stock Ms. Carson's back yard and local environs with a bevy of chirping, squawking, cawing, cooing, whistling, hooting, scat-singing, cacophonously cackling birds—enough dissonant and discordant din to drive her deliriously demented, or at least batty! We'll import so many birds--indigenous as well as exotic--that they're going to be louder than your run-of-the-mill high school dropout garage band playing 'Wild Thing.'

Soundtrack note: "Wild Thing" by The Troggs

"How can Ms. Carson write 'Silent Spring' when every limb of every tree on her street will be loaded down with boisterous birdies?" Warble gleefully and rhetorically asks, rubbing his hands together. "It will be the most discordant, inharmonious racket heard since Bob Dylan took up the harmonica. 'Noisy Nights' maybe, but 'Silent Spring' will be out of the question.

"Climb aboard, folks. It's time to introduce Maryland to Warble Poundcake McGorkle, hero of heroes and benefactor of all mankind!"

CHAPTER 15

Arriving in the Old Line State, Warble stashes his "pride and joy" (the Arodnap) behind a veritable hill of crab shells near a seafood restaurant. Espying a phone booth there, he takes a pad and pen and jots down the location of all seven pet stores in town.

Goose-stepping back to their hiding place (where the rest of the Oconomowoc 8 are waiting for Warble and holding their noses), Warble rips off one address and hands it to Ward, hands another to Jacques, and so on, until everybody but Mary has one pet store to visit.

"Buy all the birds they have," Warble addresses the assembled throng. "If anybody gets nosy and wants to know why you're cornering the market on flying beaked animals, turn up your nose, say, 'That's for me to know and you to find out,' and then, as a final gesture of fierce and stubborn independence, stick out your tongue at them. That should intimidate them and stop them from asking any more impertinent questions.

"We'll meet back here after everybody's made their purchases, pass the MC/D wand over the birds so we can put them all in the trunk (remembering to explicitly shrink them rather than use automatic mode, as most of the birds are smaller than breadbaskets and would otherwise grow to mammoth proportions), and then of course we'll revert them to their normal size before turning them loose in that commie wacko beatnik pinko ratfink's back yard.

"All right, synchronize your watches. It's 3:14 pm Eastern Standardized Time. Get back here as soon as you can. Oh, and make sure to keep your receipts if you expect to get reimbursed next quarter."

"Where am I going, Warble?" Mary asks, feeling left out, as no address had been doled out to her.

"Come with me, Mary, we're going to the *exotic* pet store down the road a piece."

Soundtrack note: What say ye to "Down the Road a Piece" by either Chuck Berry or Foghat?

The next couple of hours go by in rather pedestrian fashion (mainly because all of Warble's entourage are walking from their 'secret hideout' to the pet stores and back).

Each member of the unlikely group of travelers return to "Crabshell Hill" one by one, until Warble and Mary are the only ones missing.

"Well, you know what they say," crows Albert. "One boy will do the work of one boy; two boys will do the work of half a boy."

"That may be, Albert," Marianne says, "but Mary is not a boy, so that theory flies pretty much right out the window or falls flat on its face in this instance."

"Maybe Mary's not a boy, but the principle of the thing is still true, I think," Albert defends himself.

This starts a big argument, though, as Marianne vehemently contends that the "Boys Inverse Work Ratio Rule" only applies to males specifically, and that it doesn't hold water with females.

Comfy stays out of the argument at first, but finally notes: "If it only applies to boys, then why are Warble and *Mary*, who you admit is not a boy, taking so long? Where are they?"

Just then, the belated duo arrive. Mary is carrying several bird cages in each hand, and is even balancing one on her head. Each cage is packed wall to wall, and to the rafters, so to speak, with birds. The winged creatures look like teenagers crammed into phone booths or Volkswagen Beetles. Only not as happy.

Warble had heard Comfy asking about he and Mary's whereabouts. "We're right behind you, Comfy," Warble wheezes, puffing and straining, pulling a giant cage on wheels behind him.

"What *is* that thing?" Marianne asks, on getting her first glimpse of the creature in the cage.

CHAPTER 16

"Helephino," answers Warble, catching his breath after he reaches the Arodnep and stops to rest. "I know it's not a bird, but it was on special—31.4% off—so I couldn't resist the bargain. Think of all the money I saved!"

"Well, be that as it may, the species has got to have a name," Marianne says.

"Of course it does, and I just told you what it is," Warble answers.

Everybody replays the conversation in their mind, and do not remember Warble giving the name of the species of the odd creature at any time.

"I missed it--what is it again?" Ward volunteers to be the guinea pig.

"HELEPHINO!" Warble yells. He hates having to repeat himself.

"First you say you don't know the name, then you say..." Jacques adds his two cents.

"Pay attention, boy. I say, PAY ATTENTION!" Warble fumes. "It's a HELEPHINO, you dadburned varmint! It's part hyena, part elephant, and part hippo. The starting 'H' comes from Hyena, the sandwiched 'eleph' part from Elephant, and the trailing 'ino' from Rhino!"

"You're going to let this thing loose in Johnny Carson's daughter's tree?" Albert asks, doubtful any of the boughs will be able to stand the strain.

"No, you bonehead!" Warble says. "Of course not! This was an impulse purchase—nothing to do with the bird plan. Once I saw this cute critter, I knew I had to have it, come Dallas or high water."

"What do you plan to do with it, then?" Ward wonders.

"Good question," Warble says.

"Bad answer," Ward replies.

"You didn't let me finish, Robespierre!" Warble admonishes. "I'll use the MC/D on it, of course, and then I'll take it back to 2009 Oconomowoc and make a fortune out of it. I'll become the world's only and premiere Helephino breeder. *Everyone* will want one. They will be the hip, designer, fad pet—for decades, probably."

"Why would somebody want one of those monstrosities?" Marianne asks, looking at the creature in the cage with a disgusted look on her face.

"You see, Marianne," Warble points out, "That's why you're just a lowly security expert, while I'm the brains behind this outfit. It's obvious—if you have half a brain—that this is the best animal the wonder drug thalidomide and the miracle branch of science known as eugenics has ever produced. This critter is bound to be good-natured (because hyenas are always laughing); have a superb memory (since elephants never forget); and a good sense of balance, inherited from its rhino genes."

"Rhinos have a superior sense of balance?" Jacques asks, for whom this is a new thought.

"Natch!" Warble says, and reasons: "Have you ever seen a rhino tip over?"

The seven others (excluding Taterskin) in Warble's entourage have to admit that no, they've never seen a Rhino fall over.

"Well, then, it's as plain as the antennas on your head, isn't it?" Warble says. "And speaking of the plains, since you're all a bunch of no-account, ignorant fools, you've probably never heard of just how good elephants are at remembering things, have you?"

"Well, if I have, I've forgotten it," Jacques jokes.

"Then pay attention, boy, I say, pay attention this time, and maybe you'll learn something," Warble replies, seeing no humor in the situation.

"Elephants once roamed the American plains in herds millions strong; they helped the Indians remember things, so the dirty rotten redskins didn't

have to carry libraries around with them as they went on their extended camping trips. The elephants always toted the Campfire marshmallows, too, buy the whey.

"Animals know lots of things humans don't--about plants, food, the weather, etc. The other animals of the forest and plains and glens taught the elephants about herbs and all that stuff. The elephants, in turn, paid it forward and reminded the Indians about all the things that they needed to know at the proper time—when to come in out of the rain, when to raid a wagon train full of innocent civilians, and so forth."

"Really?" Marianne asks, understandably skeptical.

"That's the way I heard it," Warble says.

"When?" Albert questions, desiring some reference he can research to verify Warble's claims.

"Just now," Warble curtly responds, impatient to finish the story.

"*Just* now? But you were right here just now," Ward counters, confused.

"Yes, that's when I heard it. Didn't you hear it, too?" Warble asks, getting exasperated.

"What do you mean, Warble? Who said it?" Marianne would like to know.

"What do you mean 'who said it?'--I did," Warble huffily answers.

"But who did you hear it from?" Marianne persists.

"What are you blathering about? I heard it from myself. Didn't you?" Warble seethes.

"You assert that auto-attribution is appropriate in such a case?" Ward queries.

"I have no idea what you just said, but there's no source more trustworthy

than myself, so I tend to favor my own quotations. But you people are hopeless. I don't know why I bother," Warble says, turning away, and leaving the rest of the story untold.

His traveling companions are relieved, glad to be reprieved from listening to yet more of Warble's rants, raves, and aimlessly ambling ramblings.

After an embarrassingly pregnant pause consisting of a few molasses-slow seconds that seem like hours, Mary asks meekly, "What now, Warble?"

Warble whips around, thrusts his right forefinger into the air, and proclaims: "Off to Ms. Carson's, to infest her environ with more birds than she will be able to shake the proverbial stick--or stone--at!

"Butt first: Ward, take a picture of me here in front of the Arodnep, surrounded by all these critters and varmints—in other words, the birds and all of you. I want to have a photographic record of my heroic deeds—for posterity, you know. From now on, take a picture of me at each scene of historic import we visit."

CHAPTER 17

And so it goes. Warble and his cast of mercenaries and malcontents release their purchased menagerie (except for the Helephino, which Warble has passed through the MC/D and placed in the Arodnep's trunk) all around the Carson home and neighborhood. Having successfully completed his self-assigned task at this time (1960) and place (Silver Spring, Maryland), a feeling of warm satisfaction washes over Warble.

Or then again it could be the pigeon poop that has just landed on his head.

At any rate, Warble finally straightens up and commands his troops: "Now, people, we've got one of our most important assignments ahead of us. We need to go back in time to the illustrious year of our Lord seventeen and seventy-six and throw an ignominious traitor out of the country before he gets a chance to perpetrate his dastardly deeds."

"You mean Benedict Arnold?" Marianne guesses.

"Of course not! Why would I care about a philosophizing pig?" Warble snarls (deducing, erroneously, that Marianne is speaking of Spinoza and the pet porker on 'Green Acres'). "I'm talking about that would-be menace to society George W."

"But George W. Bush wasn't even alive in 1776!" Ward objects.

"Not *George W. Bush*, you no-account scalawag dipwod! I'm talking about *George Washington*!"

"George Washington was a traitor?" Ward asks, stunned.

"He most certainly was, Robespierre," Warble says. "Until we cut behind him in time and head him off at the pass, that is. Boyoboy, I'm surprised at your ignorance of Colonial and early-post-colonial history. Everybody knows about the terrible things George brought upon the country. What were you doing in U.S. History class, anyway—daydreaming, doodling, and throwing spitwads?"

"Never mind what I was or was not doing in school," Ward says, then inquires: "What did Washington do to get your dander up, anyway?"

Warble glances down at his shoulders and, although he doesn't really see anything, surreptitiously brushes them off with a few quick hand motions. "I knew I should've worn my white Elvis costume," he mutters to himself under his breath.

"What did you say, Warble?" Ward asks.

"I said, 'You must've been flying a kite, listening to tunes'."

"When?" Ward asks, thinking he has lost the thread.

"When you should've been in history class paying attention to the lessons, you unpatriotic bonehead!" Warble replies, practically frothing at the mouth. "You were probably out standing in someone else's field enjoying 'Up, Up, and Away' by the Fifth Dimension on your iPod."

Soundtrack note: Guess which song should go here? (sorry)

"iPod?! They didn't even have such a thing when I was in high school. Even now, the only eye pods I have are these right here beneath my peepers," Ward says, indicating with both fingers the bags under his eyes. "And I had none at all in those halcyon days of yore," he adds, pointedly. "I've only developed them since I went to work for you, along with my gray hair and nervous stomach."

The tables have been turned. Warble has no idea what Ward is ranting about. "Be that as it may, the fact remains that you are inexcusably ignorant of George Washington's grave crimes," Warble notes, fixing Ward with an accusing stare.

"Oh, you mean chopping down the cherry tree?" Jacques says. "Sheesh! Get over it."

"Cherry tree! What are you thinking?! Georgie Porgie (and his wife Bess, too,

who created the first American flag) grew up in Washington, *D.C.*, not Washington State! There are no fruit trees in D.C. In fact, there is nothing productive at all there. His Highness' heinous transgression was inventing the peanut."

CHAPTER 18

"George Washington invented the peanut?" Mullah asks incredulously.

Warble yanks the baseball cap off Albert's head, hurls it to the ground, and stomps on it several times, jumping up in the air to get more "oomph" into it, kicking violently downward as he reaches the apex of each leap. "Dad-blast it to smithereens! Think outside your buns for once, Gitani! Why must I, of all people, have to travel with such a group of blithering idiots?! Of *COURSE* George Washington invented the peanut! How did you even graduate from culinary academy without knowing that, you mush-for-brains?!"

"Beats me," Mullah sighs.

"I don't blame them," Warble fumes. "And I wish they would bring corporal punishment *back* to school! Dull and pestilential scholars like you must have deserved it—every last bit of it, in fact."

"All right, all right, Warble," Ward re-enters the fray. "Now George Washington, you say, invented the peanut. What's so bad about that, anyway?"

"What's so *bad* about that?! What's so bad about that, you say?" Warble mocks, the pitch of his voice rising higher and higher. "I'll tell you what was so bad about that: by inventing the peanut, George Washington became—by *design*, I'm high convinced—the progenitor of peanut envy."

"*Peanut* envy? I've never heard of it," Ward claims.

"So, you were also dozing through your Psychology, Health, and P.E. classes too, were you?" Warble accuses.

Warble groans, sighs, rolls his eyes, scratches his head, and taps his toes impatiently before continuing.

"OK, since I haven't got much choice, I'll serve as your remedial educator,

just this once: Peanut envy ensues when one person either has more, larger, or riper peanuts in their lunch box than their counterparts—whether this be at school, work, or any other public or private place. And this psychological malady has caused such a distraction to people down through the centuries that the nation's GDP has been adversely affected as a result."

"Really—it harms the GDP?" Ward says.

"Yes, the Grandly Designed Peanut, or GDP, the most magnificent example of wood sculpturing ever done—completed by Whistler's mother while her son was painting her--continues to be stolen from the White House lawn, where it is properly ensconced, and whittled away, piece by piece, before being surreptitiously restored to its proper resting place in the dead of night, until the once stately icon of national pride and potency has been reduced to a mere puny and flaccid caricature of its former illustrious self."

"Warble..." Ward begins to object.

"*Consumer* Warble to you, you pee-on, you member of the common rabble, you!" Warble scolds.

"All right, then: *Consumer* Warble, I think you've gone—if you'll excuse the expression—psycho!" Ward dares to say.

"Exactly, Ward!" Warble says, his anger melting away like a glacier in the Alps. "Finally, you're getting the point! I guess you did wake up from your naps once in awhile in psychology class. One must always use psychology to get ahead in this world. One has to think psychologically, which means thinking like a psycho—you see, if you use the logic of a psycho, you're thinking psycho-logically."

"That explains a lot," Mary says, under her breath.

"Thank you, Mary," Warble says, doffing an imaginary hat. "No need to thank *me*, though. On the other hand, even though turnabout is widely considered to be fair play, my dear one, I consider it my burden--I mean my *duty*--to explain these things to you. After all, you'd be pretty much lost without me."

"Explaining things to me is your *burden*, Warble?" Mary asks, raising an eyebrow menacingly.

"Sure, Mary. It's kind of like the big fat fellas in the NFL."

"How do you mean?" Mary wants to know.

"You know: surely you've heard of the 'wide man's burden.' That euphemism refers to the obligation fat guys have to play on the line on football teams, even if they'd rather be the quarterback, and get all the money and girls.

"Just as it's the wide man's burden to play on the line, and the thin man's burden to be a lowly punter or play some other such wimpy position, it's my burden to explain to you all those pearls of wisdom that I have so painstakingly gathered into my vast storehouse of knowledge over the years," Warble explains.

"How could I ever repay you, Warble?" Mary asks sarcastically, rolling her eyes.

"You couldn't in a million years, Mary," Warble sighs smugly. "But, I'm not complaining. To get back to the point, though: We need to banish Washington back to England where the old tea-drinking, toffee-eating, fox-hunting, frosted-wig-wearing, wooden-toothed old coot belongs."

CHAPTER 19

"Aren't you being a little hard on the fella, Warble?" Jacques asks. "After all, if George Washington hadn't invented the peanut, we wouldn't have peanut butter sandwiches, peanut clusters, Reeses Peanut Butter Cups™, peanut butter cookies, the classic songs 'Peanut Butter' and 'Eatin' Goober Peas,' the comic strip 'Peanuts'..."

Soundtrack note: If there isn't enough time in this scene for both songs mentioned above in their entirety, just play a verse or two from each one, a 'peanut medley' of sorts

"Get a grip on yourself, LaRue. You're starting to go...nuts, I'd just about say," Warble says. "What's so great about all of that stuff, anyway? Those negligible, superfluous products and highly debatable 'contributions' to our culture you so irrelevantly mentioned certainly don't make up for all the mayhem the old fossil caused by introducing peanuts to the scene.

"You know, LaRue," Warble continues, pointing at the fitness trainer and using his most serious tone, "a lot of people have been killed by peanuts down through the ages."

"You mean people who are allergic to them?" Mullah sagely guesses.

"Allergic to peanuts? Whoever heard of such a cockamamie hypothesis!" Warble scoffs. "No, I'm talking about the Great Peanut Wars that were fought in the middle ages. Those who preferred Spanish peanuts declared war on all the people who opted for Virginia peanuts. All of Europe became a bloody battlefield; even the children from Spain and Portugal got involved, driving all the Virginia peanut-fans clean out of Iberia and over into Turkey.

"But those were Europeans—we don't really care about them much. The key point is, Americans have been deleteriously affected by the aforementioned ill-advised invention, too. The peanut envy caused at circuses and baseball games when some people have salted-in-the-shell-peanuts and others don't have any at all has been far worse than those wars I touched on.

"But that's not all!" Warble continues, jutting a finger into the air, really warming to his task now. "Washington set back technological progress and innovation light years by bringing forth his diabolical new legume. Hah! Who ever heard of a nut that doesn't grow on trees, anyway?! It's a crime against nature! A nut growing out of the ground!" Warble jeers, laughing derisively. "What sort of perverted, deviant, wicked, twisted mind could come up with such a thing? If God had meant nuts to grow out of the ground, he would've invented the peanut himself!"

"All right, Warble," Marianne challenges, arms folded, "I'm waiting to hear how Washington set technology back by inventing, as you say, the *Arachis hypogaea*."

"Don't put words in my mouth, Ms. Trench! You should've been a shyster lawyer, or perhaps a Congressman. As I so plainly stated, it was the *peanut*--not the hydroponic arachnid--that Washington invented. And what was George's evil conspiracy?" Warble asks rhetorically.

"This evil animal-hater deliberately set in motion the events that would cause elephants to starve," Warble answers himself, to the edification of all present (that's his intent, anyway). Warble begins crying crocodile tears of feigned sorrow and indignation. "And since peanuts are elephants' main and in fact sole source of nutrition, when humans ate all the peanuts, these poor, pitiful, put-upon, poached pachyderms starved to death."

"But," Ward objects, ignoring or feeling no compassion for Warble's apparently overwrought state, "How is it that George invented peanuts, as you claim, when obviously Indian and African elephants—if peanuts are, as you claim, that species' sole source of food--had already been eating them since time immemorial?"

Warble sighs, exaggeratedly and exasperatedly, and wipes away a fake tear. "Robespierre," Warble explains condescendingly, "Only *humans* can invent things, *animals* can't. So how could these *Native American* elephants and elephants *of color* invent the peanut, huh? And the human inventor must, of course, be an American—only *Americans* can actually invent things--didn't you pay attention *at all* in U.S. History class?"

"So you're saying that Mexicans and Canadians can invent things," Ward reasons. "Also Brazilians, Colombians, Costa Ricans, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, Panamanians, Paraguayans,..."

"No, gosh darn you, Robespierre! I said AMERICANS, not Mexicans, Texicans, Canucks, or anybody else crowding in on us from the top or bottom of this hallowed land of purple mountain majesties and all that jazz!

"Face it, Ward," Warble says, fixing his image consultant with his most piercing gaze and menacing stare, "the lanky landowner was a despicable virtual poacher of pachyderms."

"A *what?*" Comfy exclaims, simultaneously confused, amused, amazed and bemused by Warble's accusations and 'logic.'

Warble, in recounting the harm done by Washington, loses all semblance of cool. His face reddens, his jaws tighten, and he practically screams:

"IF NOT FOR THE HEARTLESS EXTERMINATION OF MAN'S BEST BEAST FRIEND, THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH ELEPHANTS FOR EVERYONE TO HAVE A PPA!!!"

CHAPTER 20

After Warble's "jets" cool off a little, he continues, explaining: "That is to say, we would all have a PPA--Personal Pachyderm Assistant--to help us remember things (like appointments, etc.)"

"A PPA? Now that you mention it, I *did* hear something about the Harper Valley PPA once," Mary muses, rubbing her chin thoughtfully.

Soundtrack note: Play "Harper Valley PTA" by Jeannie C. Riley here, but perhaps in a subdued way, at an unobtrusive volume?

"Mary, snap out of it," Warble exhorts, snapping his fingers. "That's an equine of a decidedly different hue. The PPAs I'm talking about are pachyderms that communicate by 'writing' messages in the air with their trunks. You—if Washington hadn't been such a no-account jerk and prevented us all from having one, that is—would have your choice of four options to decode the early form of sky writing those gentle giants used:

- 1) Stand on your pet elephant's feet, leaning back against his kneecaps, to read the message.
- 2) Face your wrinkly friend, and learn to read backwards.
- 3) Face your club-footed servant and teach him (or her—some of the female elephants are almost as smart as the males and can also be taught to write) to write backwards.

--Or--

- 4) Stand on your Pinocchio-nosed slave's feet, and teach it to write backwards and learn to read backwards.

"You can also, of course," Warble adds, in a rather offhanded manner, "teach the fat slob's shorthand, you know--or short *trunk*, I should say."

Warble chuckles, pleased (as punch, as usual) with himself.

"Well, I must admit it would be fun to have a pet elephant," Mary says.

"Don't patronize them, Mary. These are working animals, not mere pets. Give

them some respect."

"It's hard *not* to respect an elephant, Warble," Ward says. "But, although I grant you it would be fun to have such a pet...I mean, working animal...why is it such a big deal? It seems like we've gotten along pretty well without PPAs all these centuries."

"We have, have we?" Warble challenges, hands on hips. "If we had had PPAs all along to help us remember all of our appointments and responsibilities, many calamities would have been averted and avoided. We wouldn't have to even be here now, saving the world. I could be home, laying in my hammock and eating bon bons."

"Calamities?" Marianne wonders. "Calamities could have been avoided?"

"Sure," Warble asserts. "You've heard of all those people being gassed and what-not in Nazi concentration camps? All because Hitler forgot he was part Jewish."

"He was?" Comfy asks, incredulous, then realizes the ridiculousness of that assertion and casts an aspersion on Warble's mental state: "You must be out yo' head, Consumer Warble!"

"Come on!" Warble chides. "You didn't know that, Comfy? And speaking of Jews, do you know why they are always so irritable (Hitler was obviously a tad irritable, himself, a sure sign of Jewish blood)."

"Tell us, honey," Mary says monotonically, not that she really wants to hear it, but she knows there is no way to get out of hearing "the rest of the story," and just wants to get it over with as quickly as possible.

"All right. Hold on to your hats, as I am about to unfold one of the great mysteries of history," Warble promises.

CHAPTER 21

Warble pauses, allowing the suspense and anticipation to build.

"One of the greatest causes of problems throughout history have been Jews with a bad PH-balance."

"Bad balance--you mean they fall off trampolines?" Albert inquires.

"No, silly, I'm talking about the acidic Jews."

"*Acidic Jews?*" Ward hears himself ask.

"Sure, I guess they're full of you-know-what and vinegar, making them acidic, and that's what makes them so surly."

"What do you propose to do about it, Warble?" Mary sarcastically asks.

"We'll slip some sand and salt into their matzoh balls; that'll straighten them up and balance them out. You've never heard of alkaline Jews or loamy Jews causing trouble, have you?"

"Well, no, but..." Albert reasons aloud.

"There's no butts about it, Joad," Warble rests his case. "I proved it to you plain and simple, and you've got nothing to retort in reply now, do you?"

"Well, *I* have a question," Ward says. "What made this particular brand of Jews so acidic in the first place?"

"A fine question, Robespierre. You have outdone yourself," Warble commends. "The source of the acidity can be laid at the feet of a chemical imbalance caused by extreme frustration over their inability to ever find a beanie that fits. That unhappy state of affairs was enough to drive them crazy, or at least to distraction, which altered their chemical makeup."

"This sort of posthumous off-the-rack psychoanalysis demeans and trivializes the absent analysands, reducing their wonderful idiosyncracies to a list of pat psychological disorders," Ward gives Warble to understand.

"I don't understand a word you just said," Warble says, staring at the image consultant. "You must somehow learn to keep quiet if you can't make any sense, Robespierre. Anyway," Warble continues with a wave of his hand, "to get back to all the calamities caused by forgetfulness and failing to concentrate—the reason why people were put in the camps in World War II in the first place, buy the whey, was to help them learn how to concentrate. If they had mastered the art beforehand—or had a PPA!" he exclaims, looking around at all to make sure they got the implication, "they wouldn't have ended up there, as there would have been no need for the remedial training they got in concentrating in those camps."

"I don't think that word means what you think it means, Warble," Ward interjects.

"What word, Robespierre?" Warble demands. "Are you—YOU of all people, with your hifalutin', gold plated, kid glove, diamond breastpin jargon--accusing me of malapropism?"

"Not a word of it, Warble, but *concentration*...those camps were called 'concentration camps' because..."

"Oh, dry up, Robespierre," Warble says, monopolizing the conversation again. "Now, as to other calamities caused by people having their rights taken away by that old nincompoop Washington and thus not having a PPA on hand 24/7:

"1) Jim Bowie forgot to take his vitamin C and echinacea before the Alamo. If he had been well, he would have knifed all of Santa Anna's men, it would've been the Mexicans who would've said "Remember the Alamo," and they would've regained Texas at San Jacinto (which would've been a good thing, in the long run, for the U.S.).

"2) The Captain of the Maine forgot to have the explosives removed before having the welding done.

"3) Gavrilo Princip forgot it was against the law to assassinate people, even if they are "furriners" with twirly mustaches and high-toned ways.

"4) Investors forgot to sell high in 1929.

"5) Men in the crows nests in Pearl Harbor in 1941 infamously forgot to always expect the unexpected.

"6) Muslim terrorists forgot that Islam is a peaceful religion."

"It is?" inquires Ward, eyebrow raised, consternation written on his brow-- after Warble quickly writes it there with a magic marker, that is—one he keeps on hand for just such occasions.

"Naturally, Robespierre. Take Muhammad Ali, for instance: When he was Cassius Clay (a Catholic, I think, and a grandson of Henry Clay, the old abolitionist), he was violent, beating people's brains in or out at the drop of a hat or the ringing of a bell; after converting to Islam, though, the former pugilist married Jane Fonda and refused to kill Vietnamese fishermen."

Ward slaps himself on the side of the head, as if he's climbing out of a public swimming pool with water-clogged ears, and then vigorously rubs his temples with his index and middle fingers while wearing the expression of a sufferer of migraines, inadvertently smearing the word 'consternation' all over his forehead until Warble's 'calligraphy' is not even legible to a journeyman pharmacist.

"Just because I mentioned the amazing factoid that Clay/Ali was a Catholic doesn't mean you have to give us a show-and-not-tell Ash Wednesday performance, Robespierre! Get serious and show some respect!" Warble yells.

Ward sinks to his knees, sobbing in what Warble calls consternation (a combination of confusion and frustration). Warble shoots him a disdainful look, and commands the others: "Don't mind him, he's got a weak mind. Anyway, in conclusion, I feel it necessary to mention two final occasions where the lack of PPAs caused untold misery and suffering to mankind:

"7) "Curious George" Donner forgot there was a mountain range in the way when he guided the emigrants from the flatlands of the Midwest to the Golden State (or tried to, at any rate) on short rations.

"8) Last but not least, old smarty-pants Washington even sabotaged *himself*."

"George Washington needed a PPA?" Mary queries.

"What else? The antiquated geezer was supposed to be meeting with Benedict Arnold to give him a raise and a promotion, but was fooling around in the Green House instead, inventing peanuts. This negligence to accord honor and prestige to Arnold caused him to—understandably, I'm sure you'll all admit—go on strike and nullify the final year of his contract. He became a free agent and signed on with his former team, who quite cleverly and somewhat cagily promised him accolades, shoulder decorations, a comfortable pension, and all the ale he could drink."

"And?" Comfy asks, shaking his head in bewilderment.

"And the old envy-inducing peanut inventor went to live in that miserable swamp known as Washington, D.C., in a whitewashed headquarters building. What's the name of it again--the Presidential mansion, I mean?"

"The White House, Warble," Mary answers, rolling her eyes and shaking her head. She turns to Marianne and mutters under her breath, "How can he be so full of...other information, and not know that?"

"Why Taos?" Warble says. "What kind of an answer is that? The presidential mansion isn't even *in* New Mexico, is it? Isn't it somewhere in Washington State?"

"I don't know about *that*, but I certainly think I know what state *you're* in, Warble," Mary complains under her breath.

But Warble doesn't hear his wife's uttered groanings. He's not paying attention, but rather cogitating on the precise location of Washington, D.C. "Yes, I was right, as always!" he finally ejaculates, his index finger pointing

skyward. "I'm sure the presidential pad *is* in Washington state—Redmond, I'm fairly certain. But that's beside the point. The point is that the name of the joint is the *white house* - el casa blanca, in other words."

"That seems a rather colorless name," Comfy contributes.

"Yes, Comfy," Warble admits, "but it fits the occupants to a 'tea,' and that's all that really matters."

CHAPTER 22

The details on just how Warble tracked, hounded, and trapped George Washington are left out, for your own welfare, gentle reader. Red-blooded, white, true-blue Americans would simply find the tale too difficult to read, for the following reasons: On finding America's first President, Warble tackles him, unceremoniously yanks his wig off his regal head, and chucks it into the bushes; Warble then saws off a piece of one of George's wooden teeth with the razor blade he always keeps in his back pocket, ties George's hands behind his back with a modified bungee cord, and then, while straddling him, stuffs the president's mouth full of grass (regular Kentucky Bluegrass, not Cheech & Chong's preferred variation). Not leaving well enough alone, Warble also breaks Washington's commemorative Franklin Mint sword in half.

As a final indignity, Warble transports Washington to Boston and puts him--in leg irons--on a pea-green boat loaded to the gunwales with whale oil bound for London (the ship is also carrying some coals from the Wyoming fields to Newcastle, but that is neither here nor there).

By not divulging the details of these events, the reader is saved an attack of high blood pressure, or perhaps even a full-blown conniption fit. But there's no need to profusely thank me, dear reader; just 'pay it forward.'

CHAPTER 23

Warble is as pleased as a dog with two tails and a silver collar with the way things have gone so far, and is champing at the bit to get on with his further plans.

"Now, gang, we're going to undo all those disasters that would've never had to happen had that old rascalion Washington not cheated us all out of our PPAs, an inalienable right guaranteed us in the Constitution.

"Remember how Mexico slyly worked it out that we got saddled with Texas? We're going to go back to the Alamo and make sure the Texans win."

"Finally, you're making sense, Warble! Now we can see old glory waving victoriously over the Alamo after all. We will wrangle victory from the jaws of defeat," Jacques enthuses.

Soundtrack note: What do you think of Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee" here?

"Now LaRue, don't get carried away. We only want to win the battle of the Alamo so that we can lose the subsequent battle at San Jacinto and trick the Mexicans into keeping that god-forsaken territory. The loss at the Alamo will be a Pyrrhic one for the bean-eaters. They will at first think their loss at the Alamo is a great victory, forcing us to keep Texas, but really, they will get so riled up over the ignominy of getting their fannys whipped that they will lose their heads and win at San Jacinto, even if it does mean they will have to take back the Lone Star Beer state, the bane of North America."

"What in the world are you talking about, Warble?" Mary asks, brow furrowed.

"I *to/d* you already, Mary—whoever wins the Alamo fight lights a fire under the losers, who then go out and win the next battle, the one at San Jacinto, for the gipper, and then they get saddled with having to keep Texas."

Warble's entourage look at one another and shrug. They don't follow his logic, but he *is* paying their salary (or, in the case of Comfy and Albert, buying their product), so they clamber back aboard the Arodnap.

"Alright, here we go," Warble says, as he deftly spins the globe until the Lone Star State is front and center. He presses the globe with his thumb, and a large hologram of Texas appears in front of his face. He locates San Antonio, and presses that. After typing in the date March 5th, 1836, he finally presses the Start button and away they fly, at mach pi.

In what seems like "no time flat" they are at the site of the Alamo. But they must also go back in time, and the prototype of the Arodnap does not allow traveling through space and time *simultaneously*—instead, it first takes you through space, after which you go back in time. Receding in time is not as fast as traveling through space.

After Comfy rather sheepishly explains this temporary drawback of the Arodnap, Warble expounds on the subject.

"You see, folks, instead of traveling at the speed of pie (which is the speed it takes an average sized family to eat a fruit pie), going back in time we will travel only at the speed of Methuselah. It's still pretty fast, but nothing like the speed of pie."

As it seemed that no time at all had elapsed from the time Warble pushed the Start button until they arrived in San Antonio, Ward doesn't understand how even the hungriest of pie lovers could have even gotten his fork into a piece in that time frame. But he lets that go. He has bigger fish to fry: "Warble, just what is the speed of Methuselah? I've never heard of such a thing."

"Elementary, my dear Robespierre. Methuselah was the oldest man who ever lived. He reached nigh a thousand years before he finally gave up the ghost and croaked. Now you know how the older you get, the faster time flies. When you're a kid, a year takes forever. When you're 50, it goes by pretty dad-blamed fast. Well, imagine what it's like when you're as old as Methuselah—time fairly zips by! In fact, as we've been discussing the

matter, we've been zipping back through time, and—voila! Here we are: in the year of our Lord eighteen and thirty-six."

And so it is. As the group of time and space travelers emerge from their experimental craft and approach the Alamo, they spot the team of stout defenders standing at the ramparts. Warble yells a "howdy-do" to them and says he has a message for them from Sam Houston.

"How do we know you're not a bunch of Mexicans?" somebody challenges, yelling out from the battlements. Warble can't tell if it's William Travis, Davy Crockett, or maybe even Jim Bowie—although he assumes Bowie is probably already on his sickbed.

"Do I talk like a Mexican? Do I look like a Mexican? Am I wearing a sombrero, a pancho, a bandoleer, or a Wal*Mart employee name tag? Of course I'm no Mexican, you sun-burned, coonskin-capped varmint! Let us in, I've got an idea that is guaranteed to save your bacon."

The assemblage of strangers doesn't look like likely saviors to the hard-bitten (they got that way from eating lots of hard tack) guardians of the Alamo. Travis and Crockett (it was Crockett who had yelled out to Warble) confer briefly.

"I never saw such a bunch of citified, flabby, parlor-bred would-be saviors in all my born days," Travis comments.

"I agree that they don't look like much in the way of reinforcements, but the other side of that coin is that if they *are* agents of Santa Anna, it won't take much to subdue them," Crockett replies. "I say let them in, and see what they've got to say. It should at least be a diversion for the men, and relieve some of the stress—in other words, a morale-booster."

Travis yells out to the group below to come on up. To Travis and Crockett's amazement, the group of strangers immediately disappear over a hill, then reappear above them a scant few seconds later, hovering over the Alamo in the Arodrap.

"What in blue blazes is that contraption?" Travis yells, looking up in

astonishment.

"Beats me, Will," replies Crockett, who is pulling on his beard and staring up at the Arodnep in wonder.

Warble presses the "Land" button, and the Arodnep gradually settles down on the middle of the Alamo's roof. Comfy, salesman that he is, tries to explain it all to the stalwarts, but Warble butts in, literally shoving him aside, and waxes practically poetic about his 'little beauty.'

To make a long story short, though (who wants to hear Warble brag about his possessions, and besides, we already know what the Arodnep is and what it can do), in short order the Arodnep is secreted away in an interior room for safe keeping, and Warble meets with the Texas "power trio" (Travis, Crockett, and Bowie) in a back room where Bowie is lying on a cot.

Soundtrack note: "Beer Drinkers and Dallas Raisers" by Z.Z. Top

Warble wants to explain to them his idea for defeating the marauding Mexicans, who are bound to go on an all-out offensive at any time.

"What's yer idea, McDorkle?" Bowie wheezes out, from his cot.

"*McGorkle*, boy, *McGorkle*," Warble corrects. "Now here's what's going to save all you Texicans from ignominious defeat:no, on second thought, I think I'll make it a surprise. It'll be easier to *show* you how to win the day than to explain it to you—since you're probably none too bright, anyway. After all, who would *want* to be a Texan."

With a parting glance of disdain cast at Bowie--who Warble considers to be too weak to follow him outside--Warble turns on his heels and returns to the Alamo's rooftop fortress.

CHAPTER 24

After making sure Ward is ready to take a picture of him "in action," Warble addresses the ragtag group of defenders: "Never fear, McGorkle is here!" he bellows out, spreading his arms wide at his side and turning himself slowly in a circle for the entire congregation of Texicans to admire (or so he thinks, anyway).

Warble spots an old timer in the assembled throng who bears an uncanny resemblance to "Uncle Joe" in Petticoat Junction. Warble assumes he must be the company cook, and addresses him specifically: "Set all your pots to boilin' and fire up all your fryin' pans, cooky, we're going to serve up a mighty nice culinary welcome to those invading hordes from across the border. After we're done with 'em, they'll never want to see the ol' red, white, and blue, not to mention the lone star or the about-to-be-stepped-on rattlesnake, ever again."

"Who you callin' cooky, stranger? I'm the sergeant of arms hyar, and don't you forget it!" the man says (whose name happens to be, not Joe or anything remotely similar to Joe, but rather Tanglefoot Popskull).

"Pardon me, but if you're a sergeant where are your stripes?" Warble inquires, dubious of the man's claim to officership.

"I'll give *you* some stripes if you don't mind your tongue, strange stranger!" Tanglefoot threatens.

Davy Crockett, who is grinning from ear to ear, pulls his sergeant of arms aside and whispers to him: "Play along with him, Tanglefoot. At the very least, these fella's 'r' gonna be good for a laugh, and if worse comes to worst, we can just bash 'em all on the noggin and chuck 'em over the side—except the womenfolks, of course--we'll keep them around to cook our vittles and boil our duds for us, and to advise us when we get dressed in the mornin's which gunbelt goes best with which buckskin vest—you gotta be stylish when it comes to this hyar history-makin', ya know. Anyway, just pretend you're the head cook, and get some of the boys to help ya."

Tanglefoot is on the verge of reluctantly acquiescing when Warble comes up and pokes him in the shoulder.

"Say, who's giving the orders around here?! I told you, you mangy old geezer, to get crackin'!"

Tanglefoot's quick temper gets the best of him, and he rears back and is about to send Warble reeling with a back-loaded roundhouse punch. But Crockett prevents this by grabbing Tanglefoot's arm, slowly shoving it back down to his side, and, putting his hands on his friend's shoulders, turning him around, whispering in his ear, and reminding him just to play along for now.

Tanglefoot harumphs, squares his shoulders, and marches three steps away, to the center of the Alamo's rooftop.

"Flapjack, Zanzibar, Willie! Huddle up; we've got a job to do."

Flapjack Wormcastle (the real cook), Zanzibar Ricochet, and Willie Nelson Miles Standish gather around, a combination of mischievous anticipation and dubious dread displayed by their countenances.

"You heard the man," Tanglefoot growls, simultaneously jerking his thumb over his shoulder, indicating Warble, and rolling his eyes. "Fire up the cauldrons and the frying pans."

The colorful trio look at one another, shrug their shoulders, and ask: "What for, Tanglefoot? We just *had* breakfast."

Before Tanglefoot can ask for a reason for the seemingly unnecessary order, Warble beats him to the punch and steps into the breach: "Cook up as much hot Texas chili as you can in the pots, and scads and scads of extra large donuts in the frying pans, boys! We're going to give those south-of-the-border desperadoes a welcome they'll never forget!"

CHAPTER 25

A few hours later, the Mexicans finally arrive. The Texicans are pretending they're all either napping or lounging in the interior rooms playing Texas Hold 'Em or engaging each other in friendly knife fights. The Mexicans, basing their assumption on prior experience, assume the Texicans are just stupid, though, and are not expecting their arrival.

But Warble has been peeping through a crack in the wall in the bell tower. Just as the Mexicans (the vanguard of whom are carrying extension ladders and grapnels) get between maximum firing range of the Alamo's cannons and the base of the wall, Warble vigorously rings the bell and shouts the command:

"LASH ME TO THE MAST, BOYS! STAKE ME TO THE POLE AND COMMENCE MY DEATH CHANT! HOKA HEY! IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME! IN OTHER WORDS AND TO PUT IT PLAINLY: FIRE! FIRE AWAY! FIRE AT WILL!"

Warble then looks down, his visage betraying deep concentration, scratches his head, and rubs his chin. "Come to think of it, there's probably not a Will in the bunch of 'em," he says to himself. He turns around, points at the sky with his right index finger (seeing this, Mary finally realizes what this characteristic idiosyncratic gesture of Warble's reminds her of: John Travolta in "Saturday Night Fever"), faces "his" men, and yells at the top of his lungs:

"FIRE AT PEDRO! FIRE AT JUAN! FIRE AT JOSE! FIRE AT JUAN AGAIN (there's a lot of Juans in that bunch, I reckon)! FIRE AT ALBERTO, GILBERTO, ROBERTO...and all those other various and sundry assorted Bertos!"

Well before Warble has completed his rather lengthy opening statement, the defenders of the Alamo commence with their opening salvo. Texas chili shoots out of the cannons, splattering the attacking army with the combined ingredients of beans, peppers, hamburger (as this was, to be precise, chili

con carne, not just plain old chili), onions, carrots, tofu, and peanut butter.

The Mexicans are repelled. That is to say, they momentarily pause in their advance, and then continue coming on apace, but they are repulsed, or revolted, by the odor and texture of the sticky goo (the chili had been cooling off for an hour or so, and had congealed quite a bit) dripping down their spiffy, newly-laundered white uniforms.

As is common with megalomaniacal, slap-happy gloryhogs, Warble considers himself invincible and loses his head. Not literally, that is, but in the heat of battle he climbs atop one of the chili-shooting cannons to get a better view of the proceedings. While gawking, laughing, pointing, provoking, trash-talking, commanding, and otherwise making a nuisance of himself, Warble becomes the target of many Mexican sharpshooters. A teeny-meeny ball (Mexico's lightweight and economically manufactured answer to the minie ball) strikes the heel of his left boot as he is airborne above the cannon barrel, dancing his idiosyncratic version of a Texas Reel.

The teeny-meeny ball strips the heel right off Warble's left boot, sending the boot appendage over the other side of the wall in a long and graceful arc, chaperoned the whole trip by the teeny-meeny ball, until both objects disappear together down a packrat's hole.

Warble, meanwhile, has landed in a heap alongside the cannon. The force of the wardrobe malfunction had spun him around in the air and dumped him unceremoniously onto the deck.

Truth be told, the teeny-meeny ball saved Warble from friendly fire, as Jim Bowie was just about to throw his 'Arkansas toothpick' (as some people call his signature weapon) between Warble's shoulder blades (from a prone position on his cot, from which vantage point Jim had a limited view of the action).

Dazed and confused, Warble lifts his head up and barks: "Robespierre, you scoundrel! You must've cut corners on those boots you made me! They fly apart like nobody's business."

Soundtrack Note: "Dazed and Confused" by Led Zeppelin

Before Ward, who is busy loading a cannon with chili, can respond, Warble calls over the medic on duty.

"Sawbones, I think my brain may be busted, and my body totaled."

"I don't doubt the former, but can you be more specific about the latter?" the doctor requests.

"Well, for starters, I've got a small stream in my neck."

"Um...yes, right, those would be blood vessels."

"That's not what I'm talkin' about, you stethoscope-around-the-neck-hangin', hypocritical-oath-takin', baby-blue-pajama-wearin', leather-bag-totin', take-one-of-these-and-call-me-in-the-mornin'-advisin', dad-blamed sawbones pseudo-healer! It's a crick! I've got a CRICK in my neck! Get out your porcupine needles and give me some accurate punctures, or I'll send you packin' on the next thing smokin'! You can be replaced you know--Krazy Kevorkian offered to come along on this pleasure cruise at half your fee!"

The doctor reddens in anger and turns away, but not before hotly replying (miffed as he is at Warble's less-than-complimentary phraseology): "Maybe you should've called that other feller, then."

Note from the legal department: Of course, Warble made that bit up about Dr. Kevorkian's kind offer--no such negotiations ever occurred

Mary comes up and feels of Warble, to see if anything is broken. Enjoying the treatment, Warble rolls over for more of the same, panting, wagging his tail, and shaking his extremities like a spastic high school cheerleader.

"Oh, get up, you old faker, you're fine," Mary chides, pulling Warble up by one of his arms. Warble sighs, shrugs, and then crouches on his haunches. Surreptitiously, this time, he surveys the scene unfolding on the field of battle.

Seeing the chili has not been enough of a deterrent to turn back the tortilla-fed hordes, Warble orders the second phase of his master plan, the donut onslaught, to begin.

CHAPTER 26

Like the chili, the donuts had also been cooling for some time, and had hardened somewhat—not day-old hard yet, but harder than fresh. Coupled with the fact that they had been prepared by unpracticed hands, and the donuts were not exactly of tender texture to begin with, the fried projectiles achieve their desired effect: the Mexicans are knocked off their feet when struck by them. And there is no escaping the holey disks of dough—it is as if donuts are veritably raining from the sky (these extra-large specimens are, by the way, the original Texas-sized donuts of culinary lore).

And to top it all off (although the donuts had no frosting *per sé*), the “rain” was coming at the enemy sideways, or leastways at a slightly downward but mostly horizontal angle. The Mexicans are spun around, bowled over, knocked down, clotheslined, and have their feet taken out from under them by Warble's second wave of ammo.

The shock and awe caused by the nonstop onslaught of donuts gradually wears down the tenacious-but-not-foolishly-so enemy combatants. It is the coup de grâce. Even Santa Anna, who was personally untouched by the barrage of chili and donuts—as he was directing (watching) the battle from a safe distance--could see that all was lost, at least on this day and at this site.

So the Mexican general calls for his orchestra, the Tijuana Brass, to play “Spanish Flea,” their official/unofficial retreat song (they had never retreated before, so it wasn't their official retreat song *yet*—yet they liked it so much, they sometimes looked for opportunities to retreat in subsequent martial engagements).

Soundtrack Note: Isn't it obvious?

CHAPTER 27

Like a small dog who starts chasing a car—once it's heading away from him—Warble sees that Santa Anna's men are disappearing over the horizon.

"They're fleeing to 'Flea'" he yells out exuberantly. "Probably to the shining sea, if I'm not utterly mistaken."

Tanglefoot tells Warble the ammo has given out—there are no chili or donuts at all left.

"Dang it!" is Warble's response to that intelligence. "I wanted to have a bowl of that larrupin' good chili in a victory celebration, as a symbolic in-your-face, or actually in-*my*-face, gesture. Oh, well. When you're out of ammo, boys, you have two options: charge or retreat. If the latter is 'not an option,' then it's time to 'fix bayonets!'--remember the 20th Alabama at Little Square Top."

"But Warble, that hasn't happened yet," Marianne tells him. "And it wasn't--"

"No matter," Warble tells his security expert under his breath, waving his hand to silence her. " *They* don't know that," he gestures with his head back towards the Texans. "For all they know, the present is the future. So this is like comparing peas and peaches, or perch and perchérons, anyway."

It's all too much for Ward, who has overheard Warble's aside to Marianne. WarbleLogic(™) has addled his previously moderately sound brain. Ward begins babbling and mumbling, and wanders off, away from the group that is mingling, commiserating, and socializing in the warm afterglow of all-out, unmitigated victory. Nobody notices Ward climb onto the parapet until it's too late. With a whimper followed by an anguished shriek, he leaps out into space, and falls, head over heels and ankles over elbows, to the ground below.

Nobody takes time to check on Ward at the moment, though. The victory celebration is on—they drink Texas Tea and dance the Texas Two Step.

Soundtrack Note: "T for Texas" by either Jimmy Rodgers or Lynyrd Skynyrd

Once the tea cups have been drained and the Two Step stepped, the Texicans and most of Warble's entourage chase the Mexicans due south. As they catch up to them at the border (just past the Taco Bell there), the Mexicans are settling in for lunch, to be followed by a siesta. Embarrassed over the indignity of the battle's outcome, and livid over the poor usage of their stylish uniforms, Santa Anna's men pointedly deign to acknowledge the proximity of their foes, seemingly completely ignoring even the very existence of the Texicans and their funny friends.

Warble wants to get as much mileage out of his victory as possible, though. On an adrenaline high, his trash-talking reaches new heights of hubris, pinnacles of impudence, and depths of inimitable inanity. But there is a method to Warble's madness: He doesn't want this defeat to decline in significance in the eyes of the Mexicans as time passes, like a spring-training baseball game does at the onset of fall. He wants the Mexicans to be so angry that they will fight like madmen the next time, at San Jacinto, and win by any means (or nices) necessary.

Warble accomplishes his goal. Each soldier in Santa Anna's army, even normally easygoing ones with peaceful tendencies and pleasant dispositions who just came along with the army for a lark, as well as those who were pressured into serving against their will, vow in their hearts to not just *beat* the Texicans next time, but trounce them beyond any doubt—unconditional surrender of Texas or bust! Not that they want the 'prize' --they just want sweet revenge.

After the Mexicans finish their meal (which sticks in their craws) and their siesta (which is spent tossing and turning and gritting their teeth), they silently pack up and move on, south for the season, somewhat reminiscent of a team of Arctic Terns, a gaggle of Canada Geese, or a bunch of lightly clad bums.

Warble returns to the Alamo to survey what he considers to be his parade grounds. Walking around the perimeter of his "castle," as he now views it, all of a sudden he comes upon Ward, unconscious, lying on his back at the base of the Alamo's south wall. Warble hopes Ward is not dead, because then he

might have to help dig his grave and/or be expected to tip the minister after the burial rites. And where would he find a replacement image consultant among these uncouth and barely civilized Texicans? Scarcely a one of them would know a cufflink from a handcuff or a manicure from a manatee.

Warble finds, though--much to his relief--that Ward is OK after all. A giant glob of congealed chili had broken his fall, and his head is resting on a day-old Texas-sized donut. As Ward sleeps soundly, Warble gazes wistfully upon the macabre scene. "Typical image consultant," Warble says to no one in particular. "Stages his own dramatic and glorious demise, but then doesn't follow through with it. Chicken, probably." Comatose as he is, Ward is not in the least bothered by Warble's ramblings. His face is at turns angelic in peaceful repose, then scrunched up as if concerned with a matter.

Suddenly, Ward wakes up with a start. "Chicken? Did I hear somebody say 'chicken'? I'm famished! I could eat a horse. Well, I could eat just about anything right now—anything but Texas Chili and donuts, that is."

"There's a Taco Bell down at the border, Robespierre," Warble says. "We need to go back there, anyway, just to make sure Santa Anna isn't trying to sneak back over the imaginary line and get revenge before his time."

CHAPTER 28

Once Warble is convinced that the Mexicans are really gone, and not planning some sort of trick for immediate revenge, he sets the men to work on their final details: First, they build a bridge for the Mexicans across the border, along with a box full of validated "carte blanche" green cards (with everything but the names filled out). The purpose of the bridge is so that Santa Anna's army can bypass the INS booth. The pre-validated green cards are for the unlikely event that the Mexican army is stopped by a self-appointed militiaman or a National Guardsman out on patrol in the desert.

After this "red carpet treatment," the Texicans think they've done more than enough for the Mexicans, but Warble isn't satisfied yet. He has them blaze a trail through the mesquite, tumbleweeds and bushes, so it will be "like a walk in the park" for the Mexicans as they carry their campaign of revenge to San Jacinto (Warble also leaves maps, and places sign posts along the way, showing which direction and how many miles it is to San Jacinto and which say 'Welcome Back, Amigos' and other cheery, chamber-of-commerce type stuff like that). As a final touch, Warble has some animal pens and La Quinta Inns built at strategic points along the way, and has the pens stocked with armadillos, chickens, and corn (the critters will live on the corn until the Mexicans arrive), so that Santa Anna's avengers will be able to keep up their strength and good humor while on their march.

At long last, Warble is content with the arrangements made and the provisions provided.

"It's all set for you now, boys," Warble addresses the Texicans, in a stentorian 'stage' voice. "I've handed you the longed-for and much-desired defeat on a silver platter. My work here is done, so we will bid you adieu and be on our way. We have other fish to fry, people to save, heroic deeds to perform, etc. etc. ad infinitum. Going to Dallas in a handbasket will now be a trip for the Mexicans to take, not for the chosen people of all time and space, us/we Americans. So long! Good-bye! Farewell! Adieu! And above all, give my regards to Broadway."

The team of disparate but conjoined time and space travelers again clamber aboard the Arodnap. Before one can spit and holler howdy, they are over the horizon, angling skyward into the wild blue yonder.

The Texicans watch the strange bunch leave, scratch their heads, look at each other quizzically and bemusedly, shrug, chuckle, and finally tromp off stalwartly on their trek to San Jacinto and sure ignominious defeat (which is, in this case—to Warble's way of thinking, anyway--actually a victory in disguise).

CHAPTER 29

"We've been to 1776, to save America from the devious designs of George Washington, and we will later travel to 1876 to alter the results at Custer's Last Stand, but next on the agenda is a trip to two and one centuries, respectively, after those years--to the Bison Tenny-all year of 1976."

"Why did you say it like that?" Mary asks Warble.

"Sakes alive, wench—what do you mean? What? Say what like what?" Warble splutters, angered about being interrupted with a nonsensical query.

"You said 'bicentennial' like 'bison tenny-all.' It sounds lame," Mary explains.

"LAME? *You're* the lamebrain, Mary. It *is* bison tenny-all, because it's the year that all bisons (otherwise known as buffaloes) had to wear tennies (otherwise known as tennis shoes). The reason for that, of course, was because these idiotic beasts needed to show proper deference for the ascendancy of the race of Manifest Destiny and their introduction of a much better culture to all America, including sensible shoes—like tennis shoes."

Warble looks pensive for a moment, and then goes on, seemingly rolling a conundrum over in his mind. "Even though tennis shoes aren't just for tennis players anymore..."

"Warble," Ward interrupts, feeling a headache coming on. "Can you possibly save the footwear history for some other time?"

"Oh, you people are impossible!" Warble barks back. "Ignorant as rocks, and you don't even *want* to be edified by your superiors. Alright, then, I won't throw my diamonds before boars—let's just forget about it, and go."

"Amen, brother," Comfy says. "You said 1976, Consumer Warble. Where are we headed, and why 1976?"

"Why 1976, you ask? Because that was the year an extremely iniquitous plot was devised to negatively impact American culture."

"That was the year disco came onto the scene?" Jacques ventures a guess.

"Disco? No, nobody ever paid any attention to disco, so we don't have to worry one whit about that. The problem was: yellow ribbons."

Editor's note: Although it was really 1973 when TO&D had the hit song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon," it's not at all out of character for Warble to be wrong, and it doesn't affect what ultimately happens whether he arrives at the "right" time or not...

"Yellow ribbons? What harm could *they* possibly cause?" Ward wonders.

"Well, Robespierre, what would we as a nation wind up like if the country became inundated with the things?" Warble probes.

Ward has no idea. He just shrugs.

"I'll tell you what, Robespierre, and this is why you need me as your leader—you obviously can't think for yourself very well—but don't pine away or even weep or moan about that. It's probably genetic, and you can't help being such a numskull... Buy the whey, what do you have against disco?"

Ward just rolls his eyes and shrugs again. Warble sighs and then continues. "Let's use logic, shall we?" he condescendingly begins. "You are what you eat, now *that's* a proven fact. Tell me, what is your most important sense—of your five senses I mean: hearing, taste, touch, nickels, or sight?"

"Sight?" Ward ventures.

"Sight, right," Warble agrees, nodding. "Now, if you are what you eat, and taste is less vital than sight, then obviously you are what you see, too. So, when people see yellow ribbons, it engenders fear in their bosom (if they are male) or in their breasts (if they are female)."

"Looking at yellow ribbons scares people?" Jacques questions. "I've never noticed that."

"Then you're not very perceptive, are you, LaRue?" is Warble's rejoinder. "It's a good thing you're not a detective, or a member of some other profession which calls for good observation skills--like a mattress tester, for instance. You don't have to be a rocket scientist--that is to say an out-and-out genius like me, for those of you who don't understand the analogy--to perceive that people who are cowards have yellow stripes down their back."

"Literally?" Albert questions.

"Yes, literally, how else would it mean anything or make any sense?" Warble replies. "This diabolical plot to first plant yellow ribbons on every tree in sight, and then to infest all the cars and buildings and t-shirts after that with the nefarious things, is nothing more or less than a bold attempt to turn Americans into a race of rank cowards, besieged as our eyes would become with the debilitating and enervating color yellow everywhere we looked."

"So you say this is a plot, Warble. Just *who*, according to your way of thinking, is behind it?" Mary skeptically challenges her husband.

"I don't just *think* I know who's behind it, Mary, I *know* I know who was responsible for popularizing this whole mess: It was three baseball players (who would ever expect baseball players, of all people, to ever do anything wrong?) who formed a singing group in the off-season and thus verily set the whole rotten conspiracy in motion: Tony (Conigliaro), Orlando (Cepeda), and Don (Mattingly).

"What'd you say? A soprano, a centipede, and a wrestling mat?" Ward asks for clarification, totally confused.

Warble has no idea what Ward is referring to. So he ignores the question and goes on with his explanation. "This evil triumvirate somewhat cleverly and cutely called themselves Tony, Orlando, and Don...I'm probably the only person who remembers their last names, buy the whey," Warble boasts, pushing himself up on the balls of his feet and puffing out his chest. "They had a mega-hit single called 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'round the Old Fig-Mulberry Tree' that hypnotized people into doing just that, drastically

reducing the courage level of their fellow consumers in the process."

Soundtrack note: Must I even mention it?

"So how do you intend to prevent these three jocks from starting this rather silly fad, Warble?" Mary wonders.

"We've got to kidnap those guys, and give them an attitude adjustment, Mary." Warble rubs his hands together and, gazing dreamily into the distance, gloats: "Once we're through with them, they'll never in a million years even *consider* recording such an unpatriotic and seditious tune."

Soundtrack note: We would call for "Attitude Adjustment" by Hank Williams, Jr. here, but it's going to be used later, so never mind

CHAPTER 30

You know the routine: Warble picks the spot (Philadelphia), then the date (July 4th, 1976), and off goes the wayward group of adventurers in the Arodnep.

Hovering over the historic city, Warble spots a bell tower and "knows" it is either the spot where Quasimodo went on a rampage or it's Big Ben. Sure that none of those traveling with him will know any better, he asserts: "That tall building down there is Big Ben. It was named for Benjamin Franklin, who used to live in these parts before he moved to Florida and was reincarnated as a bear."

"You mean *the* Ben Franklin? The one who started the chain of stores?" Mary jokes.

"The very same gent, Mary—that's how he made enough money to repair to Florida and undergo a mammalian change operation. The surgery required to change a person from a human to a bear isn't really all that radical or invasive, but back in those days--when people were even stupider than they are now, and placebos hadn't even been invented yet--it was quite a feat."

While yammering away, Warble has spotted his prey. He touches down in a dale or vale a smidgen beyond the pale of the golf course.

"Where are we?" the group inquires, in unison.

Warble winces, but controls his temper. "We're at the 'City of Brotherly Birdies Golf Emporium'," Warble replies. "The evil plotters are just over this dale, or vale, or whatever it's called in this part of the country. We'll fan out, pretend we're fans, and surround them."

"And then what?" they all ask, again in unison.

"If y'all are practicing to be a barbershop septet, you've got to tighten up your harmonies *just a tad*," Warble seethes, frowning. "Anyway, here's what we're gonna do: Albert, bring the jumper cables. We'll hide behind that

group of trees betwixt and between us and them. Marianne, you walk toward them with your secretarial pad in your hand, pretending you want to interview them. As soon as they notice you, act like you tripped, and fall sprawling to the ground. Pretend you sprained your ankle and start whimpering pitifully. When they come over to see if they can help you, we'll emerge from our hiding place, surround them, and tie all of them up with Albert's jumper cables."

"Jumper cables? Are they long enough?" Ward inquires.

"You betcha, Robespierre—they're extra-long in case you need a jump from a fellow Arodnop pilot while flying through the air—in the event your motor cuts out—it *is* an experimental aircraft, after all. You never heard of Bert Rutan being caught dead without extra-long jumper cables, have you?"

"Can't say that I have," Ward replies, not knowing who Bert Rutan is and, as usual, having no idea what Warble is driving at.

"But these guys are pretty buffed and ripped—they could probably undo any knot *you* could tie," Jacques teases Warble.

"Don't worry, LaRue, I've got it all figured out," Warble says. "Those guys may be fine physical specimens with buns of steel, but that also means they're none too bright."

"Now wait a minute, Warble. Just what do you mean by that?" Jacques asks testily.

"No need to get testy, Jacques. But face it: the more a person improves his physique, the more his mental acumen is adversely affected, in inverse proportion. Take Steve "Popeye" Garvey, for instance—big and dumb, right? Before he became a regular fixture in the weight room, he was a pretty bright guy, but his brains drained right into his muscles, leaving just the fatty deposits behind in his cranium. It's one of those either/or things: when you gain muscle, you lose brainpower; conversely and correspondingly, when you gain knowledge, you lose muscle mass.

"Yesirree Bob, the more a person learns, the weaker his body becomes.

Another case in point: Bill Gates. It's a tradeoff. Unless, of course, you are born both physically and mentally gifted, like a certain person among us is," Warble explains, referring, of course, to himself. "If you're born with dual citizenship, being both a person of supreme intellect *and* endowed with a superior physique, you're a born leader, and pretty lucky, to boot—as is everyone who comes into contact with you."

Warble sincerely hopes they all appreciate the privilege of spending time with him.

Jacques is fuming, but realizes resistance is futile. "Assuming that's so," he puts the argument aside for the moment, "how do you plan to hold that trio hostage with just a pair of jumper cables?"

"We'll tell them it's a bomb, and that the cables are filled with nitro. If they move the cables too violently, they will all explode, and then they will never get a chance to finish their round of golf."

CHAPTER 31

There's no need to recount the nitty gritty details of the capture of Tony, Orlando, and Don, as it went off pretty much as Warble had planned it.

Telling the three golfing buddies the only way to remove the 'bomb' is to take them along to their captors' secret hideout and remove it there with a specially-designed tool, Warble and our gang march them through the green (or fairway) and into the dale (or vale).

Arriving at their craft, Mary realizes they have a problem. There's not enough room in the time and space vehicle to accommodate everyone.

"Warble, how are we going to get them into the Arodnap?"

Warble misunderstands, thinking the problem is that the captives are more or less immobilized by the jumper cables and won't have the freedom of movement necessary in order to be able to climb aboard the airship of their own accord. "Jacques and Albert can pick them up and deposit them in the back seat, where they can keep an eye, or preferably several eyes—but no more than four, unless they've got some potatoes in their pockets--on them."

"We have no *room*, Warble," Mary plainly explains.

"How can you think about romance at a time like this, Mary? We have work to do," Warble responds.

"I'm *not* thinking about romance, Warble, believe me," Mary retorts, embarrassed and thinking she will probably *never* be in the mood for romance ever again.

"Oh, I get it," Warble replies. "You mean there's not enough *space* in our space and time travel vehicle to squeeze in these big lugs. But you forgot about the built-in, standard feature MC/D."

"MC/D? Isn't that a phone company?" Mary quips.

"No, I think it was a rock 'n' roll band from Detroit," Albert muses, playing along.

Soundtrack note: Rev up "Kick Out the Jams" by MC5 here, brothers and sisters

"Not MCI, Mary. And not MC5, Albert. MC/D!" Warble reiterates. "MC/D: the Materie/Compressor/Decompressor. We'll shrink these fellas down to size and keep them in a little medicine jar until we get there."

"Wait, Consumer Warble!" Comfy interjects. "The MC/D has not been tested on people! We don't know if it will work--and it could even be dangerous!"

"Well so what, what can it hurt?" Warble shrugs. "Even if they *do* get a little damaged, mangled, spun, folded, or mutilated in the process—hey! They're just baseball players. They're a dime a dozen. Take any derelict off the street, pump him full of steroids, and you've got your next home run king."

"You do have a point there, Warble," Ward says, not a big sports fan himself.

Before any more objections can be made, Warble grabs the MC/D wand and passes it over the trio of captives, who are staring wide-eyed at the device as if it were a blockbuster, multi-year, guaranteed contract--only without the enthusiasm such a document would elicit.

"Grab them!" Warble yells, as the now mouse-sized trio try to make a run for it. Jacques almost steps on Tony Conigliaro before he's able to scoop him up. Mary catches Orlando Cepeda in one hand, and Don Mattingly in the other.

"They're so *cute*!" Mary exclaims in a high-pitched voice, admiring her two new-found pets. "They're *so* cute," she repeats, almost mesmerized.

"Give me those guys, Mary," Warble grouches, snatching the diminutive pair out of her hands. "Put them in that Coricidrin bottle, along with Tony C.," he instructs Jacques, handing over the two shrunken athletes as if they were a mere pocketful of change, lint, or cats-eye marbles.

"HEY! Pour out the Coricidrin first, you doofus!" Warble yells at Jacques.

"You don't want those guys to flunk their drug test once we set them free again, do you? You all never consider other people's situations—no concern for anyone but yourself!"

Warble wrenches the bottle out of Jacques' hands and pours the Coricidrin capsules down the nearest groundhog hole. He thrusts the empty bottle back into LaRue's hand and climbs into the pilot's seat.

Soundtrack note: Play "Statesboro Blues" by the Allman Brothers. If you don't understand why, don't fret it

CHAPTER 32

At their supposed 'secret hideout' (actually a mini-storage unit they just rented on the outskirts of Philadelphia), Warble unscrews the lid of the Coricidrin bottle. Understandably, the captured trio had panicked, hyperventilated, and used up practically all the oxygen in their plastic prison. The baseball players/golfing buddies (but not singing trio) had just passed out (the traces of Coricidrin left in the bottle had not helped much) when Warble unscrews the lid.

Air flows into the see-through plastic chamber, and the trapped athletes come to, one right after another.

"What are we doing here?" Tony Conigliaro wants to know.

"I thought all that was a nightmare," Orlando Cepeda comments, looking around in wonder, first through the bottle at the 'giants' surrounding him, then at his fellow inmates, and finally back at his captors.

"Where are we?" Don Mattingly asks, rubbing his eyes.

"You are right here," Warble answers cryptically. "You are here to get an attitude adjustment," he goes on. "And although this may seem nightmarish to you, it is a dream come true for us," as he indicates his accomplices arrayed around the imprisoned and dumbfounded trio.

Soundtrack note: "Attitude Adjustment" by Hank Williams, Jr.

"What are you going to do to us?" they ask in unison.

Warble cringes and covers his ears. The harmonics produced by the echo in the plastic bottle as the sound waves pass over the bottle's rim have irritated his overly sensitive ears immensely. "Dump them out in my hands," he orders Jacques, stretching out his upper extremities and bringing them together. "I can't stand that infernal three-part inharmonious echolocation racket."

Jacques obediently and unceremoniously dumps them into Warble's cupped hands. Tony, Orlando, and Don tumble over each other, half acrobatically, half clumsily.

"I figured out your plan, youse guys," Warble tells them, using his best Brooklyn or Bronx accent (Warble doesn't really know the difference between the two and, in fact, thinks 'Brooklyn' and 'Bronx' are synonyms for the same lower Manhattan neighborhood). "You intend to break the backbone of this country by popularizing the color yellow. That's mean!"

Quick study that he is, Don Mattingly has already realized it would be "vanity and a striving after the wind" to attempt to understand WarbleLogic™ or to argue with the man. He just wants to know Warble's intentions so he can figure out a defense, plan a diversion, or locate an escape route. "So what are you going to do to us?" Don asks again.

"Like I already said, we're going to give you an attitude adjustment, so that you're no longer mean and nasty, but sugar and spice and everything nice."

"How do you intend to do that?" Mattingly snarls.

"Marianne, bring up *The Documents*," Warble commands.

"Which documents, Warble?" Marianne inquires.

"*The Documents*," Warble snaps. "You know, the documents to prick a person's conscience, awaken in them zeal for righteousness, and stir them on to positive and constructive activity: the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address, and the Enron Corporation bylaws."

"The *entire* Constitution?" Marianne asks. "Including the preamble?"

"Including the preamble," Warble affirms, nodding. "And," he pauses for anticipatory emphasis, "all the amendments...and the postamble, too."

CHAPTER 33

At the end of Ms. Trieste-Trench's monotonic reading of 'The Documents,' her three victims are ready to surrender: Tony Conigliaro is laying on his back with his hands covering his face, moaning; Orlando Cepeda is sitting down, bent forward at the waist, looking at his shoes and weeping inconsolably; radiating away from Don Mattingly (who is curled up in the fetal position) in a random haphazard pattern are tufts of hair—his own, which he has yanked out as a result of the extreme frustration he felt while enduring the seemingly never-ending diatribe. His left arm begins to involuntarily jerk spasmodically upward and then back down against his side, in a manner eerily reminiscent of Joe Morgan waiting for a pitch (before the days of preemptive strikes, that is). Up, down. Up, down etc. etc. ad nauseum ad infinitum.

"What next, boss?" Marianne asks Warble, exhausted after her three hour stint of reading 'The Documents' to her captive audience (Warble also added the three-page, small print legal disclaimer he had had to sign when renting the storage unit, getting Marianne to read it between the Constitution and the Gettysburg Address).

"Bean ice," Warble icily and resolutely responds.

"What do you mean? I *have* been nice. I *am* being nice," Marianne insists.

"No--bean ice—give them some bean ice. That'll fix 'em," Warble explains.

"Oh! Bean Ice--What flavor?" Ms. Trieste-Trench asks.

"I don't know--which do you think they would prefer: coffee, cocoa, or vanilla?"

"Beats the living daylights out of me—I'll ask 'em," Marianne offers. "Say, fellas," she says, bending down to get a good look at the three baseball players. "It's feeding time. Which flavor will you have today: Coffee, Cocoa, or Vanilla?"

"Coffee, Cocoa, or Vanilla what?" the three ask in unison.

Warble claps his hands over his ears. "Those infernal midgets are going to drive me to distraction with that diabolical din. They sound like Alvin and the Chipmunks when they do that," he complains, walking to the far end of the storage unit. "Their malevolent and Machiavellian leader Alvin alone is bad enough, but the whole pathetic passle of 'em, I just can't bear it."

Marianne ignores Warble (she's catching on). She answers the captives' joint question. "Ice--*ice*, whaddayathink?"

"Ice?" the three ask--again, uncannily, in unison.

Warble can't take it anymore. He rushes up to them to explain. "YES, ICE!! You know the old Rodgers and Hammerstein show tune: 'You scream, I scream, we all scream for ICE!'"

"Oh, you mean ice *cream*," Orlando says, realizing as he says it that he *could* stand a little something to eat.

Warble sighs contentedly, grateful the trio didn't answer in unison. "Of course. But as Tina Turner said, 'What's cream got to do with it?' If it was cream, it would be viscous and you would either drink it or feed it to your cat. Like the Eye-talians, who are too busy smoking cigarettes and making whoopie to mince words, we just call it "Ice" around here."

"What? None of us smoke, Warble," Jacques objects (remember, he's the fitness trainer and wouldn't stand for such nonsense).

"I guess you're right, Jacques," Warble agrees, grabbing his chin between thumb and forefinger. "But haven't you ever heard of poetic license?"

"Poetry and kidnapping don't mix, Warble," Jacques counters, logically.

"Says who, LaRue? What you so crudely refer to as "kidnapping" is all for a good cause—to save humanity from the dark clutches of these slack-jawed miscreants who would sap the very strength from their fellow consumers and Americans if left to their own dark and dirty devices.

"And besides, I *did* bring along some whoopie cushions, just in case things get dull and we need something to do--so don't try to tell me we don't imitate the Eye-talians at least in that respect."

"Don't you dare sabotage *my* seat with one of those, Warble," Mary warns, "or I'll whup *your* cushion good!"

Chastened, and for once speechless—and, to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, more than just a little bit intimidated--Warble retreats again into the corner of the aluminum shed.

A short time later Warble tries to save face by bringing up an "interesting" anecdote from history that he thinks will impress everybody, and sort of goes along with the previous conversation, too:

"One of the great eras, or epochs, of mankind was the Eye-talian Sauce Age, which was preceded by Adolescence and followed by the Ice Age. The Eye-talians were so irate that the Ice Age was not named the "Eye-talian Ice Age" that they blew up Mt. Vesuvius in an insane and suicidal act of unparalleled depravity, desperation, and downright terrorism du jour."

Everybody (captives, accomplices, even the canine) looks at Warble, just to let him know they heard what he said, but don't care beans about it, with faces as straight and deadpan as is humanly (and doggedly) possible. Warble feels as if he's been slapped, and retreats again to the far corner of the storage unit, where he sits on his haunches a spell, sulking.

Warble is not one to be kept down for long, though. An idea soon comes to him, and he leaps up, just barely missing hitting his head on the (admittedly low) roof.

"Today is a good day to dye!" Warble proclaims.

"What? Why?" Ward wonders, thinking Warble has lost what's left of his marbles.

"Because our helpless captives will be humiliated by it, of course,

Robespierre. One should always humiliate one's captives—otherwise they might think you're soft and lose respect for you. We have to make an example of them, make it so nobody else wants to fall into our clutches."

"Clutches?" Albert perks up. "If we have clutches*, that means we have eggs. We can turn that Ice Cream into Frozen Custard, and even make up some Orange Julius, provided we can scrounge up some orange juice somewhere." He starts looking around the storage unit, although there's nothing in it besides what his fellow travelers and he have brought in.

* Albert does not think of the mechanical type of clutch, because the Arodnop has an automatic transmission.

"Orange Jews? You mean Protestant Jews?" Warble asks. "I've never heard of such a thing. Go take a nap, Albert, you're obviously overwrought and distraught. Now, back to the business at hand: We will now commence to torturing our captives."

"Torture, Warble?" Mary asks, alarmed. "Isn't that against the Geneva Convention?"

"Maybe so, Mary, but we're not in Geneva anymore. We're in—where are we? Oh, yeah, Philly. When in Philly, do as the fillies do, I always say. So don't worry your pretty little head about a little teeny weeny bit of torture here or there, Mary. It's really for their own good, in the long run, you know."

Soundtrack note: If I didn't hate the song with a purple passion, I'd call for "Philadelphia Freedom" by Elton John here

"Just what type of torture do you have in mind, Warble?" Jacques asks.

A diabolical grin spreads across Warble's face. "We will dye their hair in shades and patterns not even Dennis Rodman would concoct in his wildest dreams," Warble answers, cackling maniacally. "Yes, today IS a good day to DYE!!!" he exults.

CHAPTER 34

This chapter barely even belongs here, because it's so short and boring, but then again the Tony, Orlando, and Don/Yellow Ribbon episode has to be tied up so we can experience the ever-yearned-for 'closure' and move on to the next exciting adventure of our non-feathered friends (or perhaps you just view them as acquaintances—either way, the price of admission remains the same).

The miniaturized trio make their selections (Vanilla Ice* for Tony‡, Coffee Ice for Orlando, and Cocoa Ice for Don) and then, having sated themselves on the cool and refreshing desserts, pretend the ingestion of said substance (coupled with meditating on the documents read to them) has altered their plans and personalities for the better.

* Editors Note: Not the crooner, the snack food

‡ Editors Note Revisited: Who really wanted Boston crème Pie, but was afraid to complain, suspicioning that Warble would be unpredictable in matters of culinary hospitality

Warble, prescient judge of character that he is, doubts their sincerity, though. Besides, he wants to go through with his dye jobs come what may. No amount of pleading, cajoling, or promising to be good on the part of the trio softens Warble's heart or can get him to change his mind.

Once Warble is through with them, Tony sports a pink pompadour, Orlando has had his hair dyed invisible, so it looks as if he is bald, and Don's "do" is in the shape of a map of the Cayman Islands, in "a tasteful turquoise and an iridescent violet," as Warble describes it.

This is more than the fashion-conscious multi-millionaires can take. They pleadingly promise to be nice, repent of their wicked ways and intentions, and forego any yellowing of America. Warble finally graciously accepts their pledges, and lets them out of the bottle.

Following handshakes, hugs, and promises to keep in touch all around, the

relieved trio are released back into the 'wild' by our cast of characters.

Oh, one final thing: First, of course (prior to their release) the trio go through the MC/D treatment again, which serves to decompress them, returning them to their normal size. As has been noted, though, using the MC/D on humans was an untested feature, and a few minor glitches do result.

Although not obvious at first, it later becomes apparent that each of the three 'guinea pigs' has lost something 'in the translation' from normal size to puny and then back again, namely:

Tony has lost his sense of balance.

Orlando has lost his sense of decorum.

Don has lost his sense of humor.

As an indirect result of that triple tragedy, they never play golf together again.

CHAPTER 35

"There's nothing like the feeling of satisfaction one gets after he has saved the world from yellow ribbons, yellow jaundice (AKA 'the yaller janders'), yellow journalism, the Yellow Kid, yellow bananas, Ol' Yeller reruns, sunrises, and all the other insidious things sneakily packaged in that insipid hue," Warble beams, while looking around at his comrades, expecting to bathe in their accolades like a tuckered-out housewife in a tub of hot water that has had Calgon Bath Oil beads(™) copiously added to it.

"You might think such hard work would make me tired, but actually I feel quite invigorated! Are y'all ready for another foray into fame, fun, and a feeling of intense contentment and sublime insouciance?"

Although their responses are varied and at any rate are less enthusiastic than their boss had hoped, Warble's entourage nevertheless drag themselves away from what they had been doing (resting, and trying to justify their inexcusable conduct in being Warble's accomplices) and seat themselves wearily and warily in the Arodnep.

Location: Gilbert Islands, Kiribati

Date: June 21st, 1492

CHAPTER 36

Touching down on a lonely atoll, the amalgamation of unlikely co-conspirators alight blithely and lithely onto the white sands and go gently into the good and lightly blowing coconut-scented breeze.

"Warble, you picked a fine spot this time," Mary concedes, "but what are we going to do here? What kind of misch...I mean, what sort of heroic deeds are you going to perform here?"

"This is where the International Date Line begins," Warble answers, getting right to the point. "It emanates both northward and southward from this juncture, that is, from this point of origin and departure. Financed by evil entrepreneurs and inspired by demon rum, it must be nipped in the butt, and pronto!"

Understandably, nobody in Warble's entourage is any the wiser, in spite of Warble's supposed explanation of his intentions.

Finally, Mullah bites the bullet and ventures a question: "Warble, what in pan-fried seasnakes are you talking about? Who are you saying paid for the IDL, and why must it be stopped?"

"If I were half as ignorant as you, Gitani, I would just sit quiet, plan our next meal, and keep my mouth shut," Warble scolds. "Everybody knows that the International Date Line, or IDL, as you succinctly call it (you're probably just lazy or can't pronounce the shibboleth-like word 'International') was paid for by the illustrious forebears of—no, not the bears—but the human inhabitants of this island, the denizens of this veritable paradise.

"Gilbert & Sullivan, Gilbert O'Sullivan, and Melissa Gilbert all descend from the royal dynasty that has controlled this chain of islands for decades, maybe even centuries. They have made their oodles of boodle off an unsuspecting public by selling their Gilbert grapes to the non-grape-growing world, most notably France and their most-favored trading partner, Australia. Or, as those wastrel loonies down under would put it, 'most-

favoured'."

Soundtrack note: "The Land Down Under" by Men At Work would be really cool kicking in right here

"Even so, what's the harm in it?" Ward boldly probes (I say 'boldly' because he is starting to feel his sanity slipping away again).

"The harm?! I'll tell you the harm!" Warble seethes. "These malevolent dictators misused their hoarded riches to construct the IDL..."

"And?" Mary interjects.

"And nothing!" Warble shouts. "Who did they hire to do the building? A bunch of wily, dusky, beard-wearing, long curly dagger-wielding A-rabs, that's who!"

"So what?" Comfy challenges. "What have you got against the sons of Ham, Consumer Warble?"

"I like bacon and ham as much as any man, Comfy," Warble replies, misunderstanding Comfy's drift. "Butt that's neither here nor there, unless Gitani is cooking up some there," he points at Mullah, who has set up his portable cooking stall, having first, of course, used the MC/D to restore it to its normal size. "Butt anyway, the problem is this: the A-rabs copied the heathen Chinees and their dad-blamed Great Wall and built the IDL long and tall, extending across the entire globe.

"There are only three things on earth visible from outer space, you know: The Great Wall of China, The International Date Line, and the Maul of America."

"I thought the third thing was the California Aqueduct," Ward questions.

"The California Awkward Duck?" Warble wonders aloud. "You mean the mega-sculpture that was formerly proudly and prominently displayed outside that fast-food joint on the brink of Bakersfield? Nah, that fine work of art was *at one time* visible from outer space, but you may recall that Hayduke blew it

sky-high in 1984, the lousy no-account desert rat scoundrel. I'll get that mangy, manic, malodorous, mean-spirited miscreant maniac for that some day, believe you me! It was my favorite sculpture—much more stylish and evocative than 'The Thinker' or 'Venus de Milo' *any* time at *any* rate for *my* money."

"Anyway, Warble," Jacques asks (while keeping himself limber with some deep knee bends), trying to get his boss back on track, "What is your problem with the International Date Line?"

"Oh, no *problem*," Warble sarcastically answers. "That is, no problem if you think an A-rab takeover of the world is just what the doctor ordered."

CHAPTER 37

"And how would such a thing come about?" Marianne asks, not seeing the connection between the IDL and a hostile takeover of the world by Arabs or anybody else.

"It's elementary, my dear idiotess. As everybody knows, you are what you eat. So, when the A-rabs complete this vertical swath of date palms circumnavigating the globe, all in the vicinity will begin eating dates. This we must circumvent, for when they ingest these dates, they will take on the customs, culture, perspective, groupthink, and worldview of the A-rabs."

"You don't say," Ward says, his tone veritably dripping with sarcasm.

"Wake up, Robespierre, and pay attention!" Warble urgently urges. "Yes, I did say so, and you might be worth more than a dead rabbit if you'd get with the program, listen up, pay attention, and snap to it!" he snaps, snapping his fingers.

Ward considers giving up his post, but doesn't know how to get home from here—and besides, even if he did, it would still be 1492, and he doesn't want to sail the ocean blue just to finally arrive home exhausted and find redskins poking around his domicile.

"So we have to nip their plans of inundating the world with dates in the butt," Warble explains. "We will fool those fools by replacing their date palms with fig-mulberry trees, the most benevolent and beloved tree of arborists everywhere."

"And why figs for dates, Warble? What is their specific advantage, I mean?" ventures Marianne.

"That's for me to know and you all to find out—right now: by replacing the IDL with the IFL (International Fig Line) we'll secure freedom for the people," Warble answers.

"Figs for Freedom?" Jacques inquires.

"You've got it, LaRue," Warble nods. "With the International Fig Line in place, people can walk around the world naked as a jay bird—or really any species of bird, as none of them are inclined to don clothing, except of course for their plumage--feeling free and easy, light and airy, comfortable and carefree."

"Walking around naked? In public?!" Mary asks, eyes wide and involuntarily covering herself with her hands (although she is, of course, fully clothed).

"Sure, why not?" Warble replies nonchalantly. "If you happen to meet someone on the road, you simply reach over, snap off a fig leaf (or two or three, depending on your size and gender), and thus provide yourself with a modicum of modesty (all that custom really calls for, at that point)."

"And think of the health benefits!" Jacques interjects, getting into the spirit of the idea.

"That's right, LaRue," Warble agrees. "Many people will walk all the way around the world, stirring their stumps like nobody's business...which, of course, is beneficial to one's circulation, skin tone, regularity, and general state of mind."

"Exactly," concurs Jacques, surprised that Warble actually got something right for once.

"And that's not all, my slow-witted-but-finally-getting-the-point fellow travelers," Warble goes on. "By walking over and under the horizon (depending on their direction of travel, and doing both if they make a round trip of it), they will expand their *figurative* (no pun intended) horizons by coming into contact with people from all different countries and cultures. Thus, one person at a time, the IFL will bring about world peace—for who wants to drop a bomb, or napalm for that matter, on a friend of mine?"

"Hey, Warble, you sort of rhymed!" Mary notes.

"Mary," Warble answers, "haven't you noticed by now that I always speak in

the purest strains of majestic, divine, sublime poetry? Why, if you could *see* my words floating about in the air, like so many dancing lepidoptera, they would bear an uncanny resemblance to that incomparable dancing duo Cassius Clay and Muhammad Ali."

"Well..." Mary begins to hesitantly respond.

"That's a deep subject for such a shallow mind," Warble cuts her off. "And something else y'all didn't think of: What to do with the dead date trees after we chop them all down?"

"Well, it's Consumer Warble to the rescue again," Warble answers his own question. "I've got it all *figured* out (no pun intended) perfectly and precisely: We'll load them onto slow barges (the shipping costs less that way), and send them to the Saar Chasm."

"The sarcasm?" Ward wonders.

"Don't you know anything, Robespierre?" Warble answers, sighing. "The Saar Chasm is a giant crevasse in Germany. It makes our Grand Canyon look like a gopher hole buy whey of comparison. We can throw all those date trees and their foliage and brush into the Saar Chasm without even making a dent in it, so to speak. It's the biggest land fill on earth.

"And to top it all off," Warble adds, "the figs that will replace the dates here on the IFL can be used for medicinal purposes, too. They make an excellent poultice. You just squish a fig open and smear its innards all over the affected area. Here, I'll show you," Warble says, grabbing a fig from an inner pocket of his vest.

"Let's say you get stung in the face by a tse-tse fly and you are afraid of infection. You would grab a fig, squish it, and spread the fig filling (pretty much the same stuff they inject into Fig Newtons, buy the whey) all over your mug.

"Like this:" Warble says, squishing the fig in his hand and smearing the gooey paste all over Ward's face.

Ward doesn't especially appreciate being the recipient of 'Dr. Warble's Miracle Fig Paste' and flails his arms about for a bit, spluttering and stuttering. Ward finally finds his tongue (while wiping off his mouth): "You can also use the hanging harvest as 'ammo' when you want to bean (or 'fruit') your fellow travelers," Ward says, running to the nearest date palm, quickly harvesting a handful of its overripe cargo, and chucking them at Warble, who deftly ducks out of the way of the barrage.

Mary, who is standing behind Warble (Mary is a big fan of Tammy Wynette and takes literally her musical exhortation to 'Stand By Your Man'), bears the brunt of the date onslaught.

Soundtrack note: An apology to those who don't appreciate traditional country music, but what else could we do but play "Stand By Your Man" by either Tammy Wynette or Me First and the Gimme Gimmes at this juncture?

Warble sees the look on Mary's face and determines it would be a good time for a little 'team-building' exercise.

"Date fight! Date fight!" Warble yells playfully, prancing over to one of the trees. The rest of the gang join in the merriment, and a free-for-all date-chucking mêlée ensues.

Before one can spit and holler howdy, the whole area looks like an earthquake had struck or that a child's party had taken place there.

CHAPTER 38

Trained as he is in the manly art of throwing things at things (being an accomplished athlete), Jacques LaRue ends up the undisputed winner of the general mêlée (the free-for-all date-chucking mêlée, that is) that Warble had instigated, practically slaughtering his boss and co-sufferers.

Jacques is the undisputed winner, that is, by everyone except Warble, who is embarrassed at being bested by his hired hand and charges: "You cheated!"

"Did not!" Jacques insists.

"Did, too!" Warble persists.

"How did I cheat, then?" Jacques challenges.

"See! You're even boasting about it! And how!" Warble counters.

And so it goes.

Finally, Warble plays his trump card: He forces Jacques to either publicly proclaim Warble the bona fide winner, or take a cut in pay. True sportsman that he is, Jacques opts for the pay cut.

CHAPTER 39

Note: The actual replacing of the date palms with the fig trees takes seven months, but the work is pretty routine (read: boring), and so we will now 'fast-forward' to when the long and tedious job has been completed:

"Well, that was not necessarily my idea of out-and-out fun," Warble says, looking warningly at his personal fitness trainer, "but at least we interspersed the monotony with an occasional date or fig fight—which, naturally, I always won."

Jacques is standing disconsolately to the side, eyes cast down and shaking his head from side to side, his pants pockets turned inside-out.

"These trees will not always bear fruit," Warble addresses the gathered throng (he told them to huddle up or search for employment elsewhere and be stranded in time and space), "But we have other things to do. We can't keep coming back here, replacing trees. We'll outsource the maintenance work to some down-in-the-mouth and desperate immigrants. We'll have the trees periodically replaced, with the no-longer-fresh figs from the old and worn-out trees made into Fig Newtons (named after their inventor, Isaac, who was quite handy in the kitchen, being, as he was, on close terms with egg beaters and measuring cups, and also being no stranger to the mixing bowl)."

"*Sir*," Ward says, meaning that Warble should preface his invocation of Isaac Newton's name with the great scientist's title.

"Yes?" Warble responds, thinking Ward is finally learning to show him proper deference.

Ward quickly restrains an almost uncontrollable urge to kick Warble in the kneecap. Instead, he changes the subject: "So, where to now, Warble?"

"Onward! Forward! March! To the Arodnap!" Warble orders. "Fall in, men...and you, too, Mary and Marianne—we don't discriminate based on gender here, you know!"

"Sound off!" Warble bellows.

"MAR-y," Mary responds, in a distinct two syllables with a decided emphasis on the first, setting the pattern for the rest, as taught and demanded by Warble.

"Sound off!" Warble bleats again.

"MARI-anne."

"Sound off!"

"COM-fy."

"Sound off!"

"JACQUES-L," the fitness instructor responds, coming out of the doldrums.

"Sound off!"

"WARD-Robe."

"Sound off!"

"AL-bert."

"Sound off!"

"MUL-lah."

"Sound off!"

"BARK! Bark!" (that was Taterskin, by the way).

In step now, the eight two-leggers and the lone four-legger march in time to the Arodnap, and then march in place while awaiting Warble to take his seat first.

Taking his time as he is enjoying the moment so much, Warble begins to wax poetic, having gotten carried away in the martial verve of the moment, and, full of vim and vigor, indirectly informs his passengers as to what they can expect next:

"Fiddle sticks
Pick up sticks
Where will we
end up next?
Eighteen and seventy-six"

Swaying side to side in time with the catchy rhythm of his tone-poem, Warble cavalierly steps into the pilot's seat and pulls up the globe on the GPS/CPS, rapidly rubbing his middle finger and thumb together in a move calculated to capture everyone's attention and provoke eager anticipation.

Warble continues his improvised sing-song poem, knowing that he does have his captive audience's undivided, if not entirely voluntary, attention:

"Horse, Horse
Crazy Horse
Bull, Bull
Sitting Bull
Grass, Grass
Greasy Grass
Big, Horn
Little Bighorn
Stand, Stand
Custer's Last Stand
Will now end up quite different-LEE!
If you don't believe me, just wait and SEE!"

"And I thought John Cage's 'Watergate' composition was dreadful," Ward grumbles. "I'll gladly listen to that eighteen minutes of silence *any* day over Warble's pitiful caterwauling."

Warble completely ignores the discouraging words, spins the globe to

America, brings up Montana, and then Bighorn County, and locks the location with a press of a button. Following that, he enters the date June 25th, 1876, locks that, and away they fly.

CHAPTER 40

In practically no time, our favorite conglomeration of loonies have arrived at the specified place and time. Warble peeps over the side of the Arodnap, points down at the gently rolling plateau below, and yells out: "De plains! De plains! Buckle your seat belts, turn off all electronic devices and all that jazz (I heard you listening to *George Benson* back there, Comfy), sit down and shutcher pie-hole! We're going in for a landing. Keep your extremities and appendages--which, believe it or not, includes noses and ears for some of you--inside the vehicle at all times. Here we go!"

Soundtrack note: *George Benson's "Breezin'"* should have begun playing in the background at the start of this scene/chapter

Warble has decided to land the craft "airplane style" this time, rather than hovering in the air and gradually lowering to the ground in the vertical landing or "elevator" (V.T.O.L.) style.

After at first gracefully gliding onto the meadow paralleling the Bighorn River, the Arodnap suddenly lurches and whooshes forward like greased lightning, as if it had stepped on a giant banana peel. Picking up speed, the time and space vehicle careens from side to side as Warble frantically tries to regain control of the runaway craft. Just as Warble is about to take it back up for another go-around, the Arodnap upends against an oak tree, spilling out its occupants, one after the other.

Plop, thud, thunk, and 'oof' are about all that's heard for the next several seconds.

"Nice driving there, Warble," Mary says sarcastically, standing up and brushing herself off, glaring ruefully at her husband.

"It wasn't my fault, of course, Mary," Warble whines. "That grass there is *really* greasy. The whole Sioux nation must have had a picnic there and wiped off their hands on the blades of grass (or leaves of grass, as Whitman, the inventor of boxes of chocolates, would say), after gorging themselves on

Colonel Sanders Montana Fried Chicken."

"Bosh and balderdash," Ward says, turning his back on and waving his hand dismissively at Warble. "Excuses, excuses. You're just a rotten pilot, admit it," he mumbles.

"What did you say, Robespierre?" Warble demands, pursuing his image consultant and pointing his finger at him. "I'd like to see *you* try to land an experimental craft full of dead weight in the high plains some time!" he challenges defiantly.

"So would I! Let me fly the darned thing!" Ward blurts out. "Maybe we could at least stay in one piece and not muss up our hair that way, damaging our dignity into the bargain!"

"Step back, little fella," Warble goads. "*You* couldn't *handle* a machine like this. Besides, it's *mine* and I won't let you," he finishes, arms crossed, pouting.

"For cryin' out loud, Warble," Jacques says, "fly the dang contraption if you want to, but tell us: Why are we here and what are we gonna do?"

"Now you're talking sense, LaRue. At least *somebody* here (besides me) is thinking straight and wants to actually accomplish something. What a bunch of losers and cry-babies I've saddled myself with. Sheesh!

"Anyway, since you're all so *stupid*, I guess I'll—again (spoken like Tom Hanks as Forrest Gump in the film of the same name, to be specific, like this: 'UH-gin')—have to give you some remedial education on what y'all should have learned at your mama's breast, or in Kindergarten at the very latest:

"Back in YoOL eighteen and seventy-six (that is to say, the year of our Lord 1876), the Planes Indians took advantage of George Strongarm Custer--who believed in fair play and thought the Indians would abide by the rules of warfare, too—by means of a sneak aerial attack as the personable general was unselfishly laying out a la crosse field for the Indians' amusement, right around here--on this very spot, more or less.

"Instead of simply suing Custer in the circuit court (they prefer basketball to la crosse and had specifically requisitioned a basketball court from the "Great Father"), the Planes Indians mercilessly bombed Custer and his men with tons of Cayenne pepper wrapped around garden hoes. What looked like tasty treats descending from the sky were, in actuality and in effect, sodbuster guillotines. Custer and all his men were decapitated by the uncannily accurate bombing carried out by the Planes Indians.

"For those of you who are wondering, the Injuns ordered the garden hoes from J.C. Penney; they were sent in on the Wells Fargo Stage direct from Reno.

"Anyway, the Indians were so cold-hearted and cavalier that they were all casually chewing Dentyne gum as they flew the mission, and listening to 'GarryOwen' on their radios--being played on the kazoo by some yokel on 'Prairie Home Companion' if I recall correctly.

Soundtrack note: If The Chieftains haven't done a recording of "Garryowen" yet, maybe we could talk them into it? Or Van Morrison?

"Wild Bill Hickok is partly to blame for the whole shebang," Warble continues, "For he was the one who taught the Indians how to fly in the first place, when he personally took them under his wing and trained them for his show, *Wild Bill Hickok's Western Extravaganza and Aerial Stunt Show*. The Indian squad leader Mad Cow (who today, like Lou Gehrig, has a disease named after him) opened the ceremonies by yelling out, 'Hey, dudes! It's a good day to kill! Bloodthirsty savages, to the battle stations! Mama's boys, whiners, wimps, milquetoasts, and pantywaists hide behind a tree and just watch a while!'

"The worst thing of all was the music the Indians were listening to. They were flying *so low* (and solo, too, buy the whey, as they had as many airplanes at their disposal as they had warriors) and had their radios blasting *so loud* that Custer could hear 'Garryowen' as clear as a bell. Distracted by the melodious tones and catchy rhythm, Custer was too busy break-dancing and "movin' to the groovin'" to heed the warnings some of his officers were alertly supplying him with. Shrewd, battle-hardened veterans that they

were, some of Custer's junior officers had by this time perceived the possibly unneighborly intent of the Planes Indians."

Warble sighs. "If not for the distracting music, Custer would have won the battle, and then been elected President of these hyar Ewe-knighted States. And the upshot of that would've been, that instead of Rutherford Bee Haze being elected President in YoOI 1876," (who institutionalized 'hazing,' from which Warble is still traumatized, by the way) "Custer would've filled that lofty office and sat on that throne.

"Poor old Custer," Warble sighs, after a moment of silence, a tear running down his cheek, "a kinder, gentler, more humble soul never existed (except for me, of course, but I wasn't born yet, then, so he took the cake at that point in time). All Custer wanted was peace, and to see good come to the Indians—and to become President, of course, but who can blame him for that?"

CHAPTER 41

We don't want to give anybody any crazy ideas that they might use at home to wake snakes (raise a ruckus) or frame trouble by decree (use legal trickeration), so we won't divulge just what Warble did to turn the tide at the Battle of Greasy Grass/Custer's Last Stand.

Suffice it to say, future generations now refer to the engagement as Little Bighorn/Custer's Second-Finest Hour (his finest being his inauguration day, when he became President and wowed the crowd with his flowing locks and dashing debonair demeanor and derring do, not to mention his flashy duds and flamboyant horsemanship).

The following incident in the battle may be worth mentioning, though, after all: the Indian leader Mad Cow casually remarked during the thick of the fight, "Et tu, Dustin?" after being—literally--stabbed in the back. Going by the nom de guerre 'Little Big Man,' and pretending to be for the Indians but really being on the cowboys' side--I mean the soldiers' side (once the tide turned, anyway), Dustin Hoffman proved to be a star of the Little Bighorn/Custer's Second-Finest Hour.

Standing like a stone wall on the ridge, egging his partners on, then dashing around shooting apples off Garry Owens' head (no relation to the Garryowen of the aforementioned song), Hoffman cut quite the figure that day.

Despite serving as target practice, though, Owens didn't die—in fact, he went on to become the first guinea pig to benefit from cryonics, and when he was brought back to life a century later (without his brain, which he didn't really need) he became a television talk show host, changing his name to Regis Philbin.

CHAPTER 42

"Now to destroy the black-hearted villain, the agent of evil, the supporter of iniquity!" Warble yells. "I've really been looking forward to this one," Warble enthuses, rubbing his hands together gleefully. "Saving the world can be tedious work at times, but this is one project I've been champing at the bit to tackle."

"After I eliminate this threat to our way of life, this seditious son of perdition, they will erect a statue of me, Consumer Warble, on Wall Street, bigger than all the statues of Lenin, Lennon, and Hussein ever made combined. My fame and honor will be limitless and last to time immemorial."

"*You* will do this, Warble?" Mary asks, hands on hips. "You mean you're going to tackle this project all by yourself, are you?"

"Oh, I get your drift," Warble replies. "Don't you worry, little lady, I will generously allow you all to come along and help me—and serve as eye-witnesses of my glorious exploits (lucky you). And, if you really give it a good effort and concentrate, you might even outdo yourself and actually accomplish something this time. In that rare event," Warble goes on, "future generations may make small—maybe even 7/8th life size—statues of you all, too, that would be arrayed around and beneath the gigantic statue of me, like so many moons orbiting me in that rarified air that surrounds my presence."

"Oh, brother," is all Mary says to that.

"I am *not* your brother, you know that, Mary, and I wish you would stop implying that I was anything like that doofus," Warble hotly remarks.

"Doofus?! He's the Editor-in-Chief of Audubon magazine!" Mary shoots back, proud as she is of her little brother.

"I rest my case," Warble says smugly. "He's obviously a birdbrain."

Jacques has grown bored with the family tiff. "Who is this terrible person you can't wait to nullify, Warble—Genghis Khan? Nathan Bedford Forrest? King Leopold of Belgium? Hitler? Stalin? Mussolini? Osama Bin Laden?"

"What, those guys?! Heck no! So Hitler gave the Jews gas by making them engage in Jimmy Dean Sausage eating contests—no big deal! So Stalin formed a band with John Lennon and Richard Marx and named it the Grouchos—so what? So Leopold taught Ricky Ricardo to play the congo drums—who cares? And Moose-alini? So he threw a fireworks party for the Abyssinnians—big whoop! They don't even exist any more! And N.B. Forrest—a rank amateur—instigating pillow fights in the army barracks is all he could think of to do. And of course nobody gives a continental dern about bin Laden getting rich after cornering the market on Afghan sweaters and becoming a hermit! I, for one, surely couldn't care less!!

"No, those fellas were just petty criminals compared to the incorrigible psychopath I've got my sights set on. Besides, what did those fellas ever do that was a threat to our economy? I'm talking here about a *genuine* threat to our commercial future, a man so black of heart that he would throw a monkey wrench—nay, a King Kong wrench, I daresay!--into the intricate workings of our great capitalistic machine, the driving force that makes us who we are as Americans and without which America would not be the greatest country on earth!"

"Holy cow! This guy really sounds dangerous," Albert admits. "Is it Malcolm X? Cesar Chavez? You said he was a man, so it couldn't be Mother Jones. How about Ralph Nader? Noam Chomsky? Or perhaps Al Gore?"

"Amateurs, would-be revolutionaries, and wannabe activists!" Warble says, dismissively waving his hand. "None of them worth our time and attention. The man we've got to stop, come what may, whatever it takes, take no prisoners, no holds barred, get 'er done, come Dallas or high water, and by any means necessary, is Keith McHenry."

CHAPTER 43

"Keith McHenry!?" Ward says, "who in Sam Hill is Keith McHenry!?"

Warble crumples to the ground in a heap. For a second, he pretends to have passed out. But he quickly tires of that game, and jumps back to his feet. "You've never heard of Keith McHenry?! The biggest threat to our national security and way of life, and you've never heard of him?! What kind of imbeciles am I forced to associate with?!"

Warble buries his head in his hands and moans: "Oh, it's lonely at the top of the food chain and at the pinnacle of the evolutionary scale of progression! If only there were someone in my tax bracket and IQ range whom I could talk to, to relieve the relentless burden of having only nitwits to commune with! I feel like a mother of septuplets, stuck home alone in a shotgun shack or an efficiency apartment with nobody but her babes to talk to, with no intelligent conversation to maintain her sanity.

"A CEO! A CEO! My kingdom for a CEO!" Warble plaintively pleads, howling at the all-but invisible moon.

"What the deuce are you babbling about, Warble?" Jacques grouches. "What do you want with a CEO out here in the middle of nowhere, anyhow?"

"Any CEO worth his salt and pepper goatee would know who I'm talking about," Warble replies, "especially if he was in the vittles business. Keith McHenry is anathema to my brethren, the CEOs of this illustrious land. They would find common cause with me and support me in every way, spurring me on to victory with a hale and hearty slap on the back--and cut me a healthy contribution check, to boot, I bet. *They* know what an insidious threat Mr. McHenry is to our way of life, and what a hero I would become once I vanquished him."

A pleasant thought comes to Warble's mind, as he envisions future accolades that will accrue to him: "And *what* a hero I *will* be to them! They will either have to bust up one of those old geezers on Mt. Rushmore to replace his

plug-ugly mug with my dignified visage, or make room for me there some other way—maybe add on to the mountain a little."

Without having to even consult one another about it, "Warble's septuplets" spontaneously and unanimously decide to refrain from questioning their boss further on the identity of this mystery victim, this Keith McHenry person.

A couple of minutes go by, while Warble stands impatiently before them, arms crossed, toes tapping, looking from face to face to see who is going to have the intelligence and gumption to beg him to explain to them just who this menace to society might, in actuality, be. That is, what does McHenry do or what has he done that is so dangerous.

"All right, then!" Warble finally blurts out. "If you're all too dull to even formulate the question, or embarrassed to put your ignorance on display in front of your comrades-in-arms, I'll indulge your immature and silly peccadilloes: Keith McHenry is the diabolical and anarchic terrorist whose design it is to utterly decimate commerce as we know it."

"How so?" Ward yawns, dubious at best of the truthfulness of Warble's assertion.

"Cloaking himself in a mantle of innocence, McHank (I'll call him McHank from now on, to save a syllable each time I mention his name (and simultaneously slyly indicate my disdain--or at least lack of respect--for him), which will eventually really add up and save a lot of precious time) claims to help the poor, but in reality he is waging war against all the hard-working, selfless, red-blooded grocery store CEOs of this great nation," Warble begins. "McHank heads up a secret terrorist organization, S.T.O. ..."

"What does it stand for?" Mary wonders, a little curious in spite of herself.

"*Secret Terrorist Organization*, what do you *think*?" Warble replies, frowning, angry at being interrupted (and sounding, truth be told, uncannily similar to Napoleon Dynamite in the eponymously titled documentary).

"Anyway, McHank uses S.T.O. as a front, as a cover-up. By day (when he, like a vampire bat, mostly sleeps, having been busy wreaking havoc and causing mayhem at night) he pretends to be the mild-mannered leader of the group

"Food Not Bombs," which carries out the real work of S.T.O."

"Which is?" Ward asks.

"Ruining our economy by giving away free food!" Warble quickly and breathlessly answers. "It is an attack on commerce! And an attack on commerce is an attack on the corporations of this hallowed land! And as the corporations go, so the country goes," Warble asserts.

"How so?" Jacques questions, inadvertently sort-of rhyming with Warble.

"When corporations are hurt, the military suffers, as they are—rightfully so--like two peas in a pod," Warble explains. "The military protects the corporations, the corporations support the military. And so, if the corporations suffer, so does the military, and so does the government. Because without the military, how would the government be able to enforce its will?"

Warble only sees blank faces staring back at him, so he continues. "It couldn't, of course. And so, you see, we must nip this cancerous tendency in the butt, before our country is ruined and all is lost."

"Warble, is it really as bad as you make it out to be?" Mullah ventures. "I mean, 'Food Not Bombs,' that actually sounds pretty good when you think about it."

"Then don't think about it, Gitani! I pay you to cook, not to think! 'Sounds good,' you say?!" Warble chides. "That shows how simplistic your thinking is, you clueless hasher! Without bombs, how would we bomb anybody? Ever think about *that*—HUH? And *giving away food*—besides the fact that it is downright un-American on its face—is a transparent blow against domestic colonialism (AKA capitalism), a shot across the bow of our very way of life."

"Just who does McHenry give this food to?" Mary wonders.

"People who are too stupid and/or lazy to work for a living, Mary! You know—poor people," Warble answers.

"In other words," Ward puts in, "people who couldn't afford to buy the food in the first place."

"Exactly!" Warble beams. "People who are non-entities, really. They have no place in our society, nor do they even have any business living at all."

Ward ignores that particular bit of WarbleLogic(™) for the moment. "So these people would not pay for the food they're receiving because they *cannot*—they don't have the money. So how is capitalism threatened by their receiving these allocations of foodstuffs?" Ward pursues, starting to feel like the attorney he had at one time thought he was destined to become.

"Ward, I'm beginning to question your sanity and patriotism! Did you cheat on the loyalty test I gave you? Did you sign that sheet with one hand tied behind your back?" Warble inquires, squinty-eyed.

"No, Warble, I did not cheat," Ward answers. Refusing to be sidetracked, he goes on: "I just want to get this straight: The people who get the food are not altering the economy because they are unable to pay for the food anyway. Now: do you not agree that there is surplus food produced in this country—that if it is not distributed and allocated to the needy, it will simply go to waste? In other words," Ward concludes, failing to wait for what he considers to be the obvious answer to his question, and poking his bony right index finger in Warble's chest, "'Food Not Bombs' is not doing any harm whatsoever to anybody. On the contrary, ..."

Warble interrupts, shoving Ward's finger away with his hand. "Now looky here, Robespierre! I'll thank you to leave the thinking to me, and keep your mind on your own business—which is to make *me* look fine, dapper, suave, debonair, spiffy, splendiferous, and downright stylish. You might hurt yourself...or *get hurt*..." Warble warns, not too subtly, "if you stick your nose--or your bony right index finger, for that matter--where it doesn't belong!"

Jaw set resolutely and eyes flashing ominously, Warble jerks his thumb at his seven companions and then towards the Arodnap. Briskly goose-stepping to the craft, Warble climbs in, and brings up the GPS/CPS.

Place: Boston, Massachusetts

Date: May 23rd, 1980

CHAPTER 44

His reluctant crew has piled in beside and behind Warble—they are his hostages, so to speak, as they would be forever stuck in an unfamiliar place and time if they were to abandon him.

"We've got to nip this thing in the butt," Warble instructs the occupants of the Arodnep, after they've touched down on the field at Fenway Park (although it *is* baseball season, the Red Sox are not in Boston today—they are in Baltimore, playing the Orioles). "McHank and his rabble are about to form a violent sect, whose aim is to undermine everything worth mining and overthrow everything worthy of being thrown—including but not limited to bachelorette parties."

"I thought they just wanted to give food away," Mary posits, ignoring, for the moment, the lion's share of Warble's accusations.

"That's just one part of their intricate plot to violently overthrow the world," Warble explains. "First, they want to take over the nuclear plant here, and hoard the yellowcake for their own devious uses. McHank is obviously a Nazi, and we've got to stop him."

"A Nazi? Named McHenry?" Jacques questions.

"Sure, McHank was born in Germany, so he obviously *has* to be a Nazi. I'm convinced (and so you should be, too, then) that his birth name was Klaus Mannheim or something like that. 'Keith McHenry' is simply a nebulous nom de guerre. And you can tell how violent he is by his beard."

"His beard talks to you?" Mary asks, wondering if Warble has finally gone all the way around the bend and over the deep end.

"No bout a doubt it," Warble replies. "Each whisker represents one person killed--or at least horribly maimed, with the intent to kill...or horribly maim. The beard and its lushness is a super-secret sign used by S.T.O."

Soundtrack note: Play "The Jam" from "Ain't No 'Bout-A-Doubt It" by Graham Central Station, although only one in a million people will "get it"

"Then how do *you* know about it, Warble?" asks Ward, suddenly suspicious.

"Because I'm the biggest toad in the puddle, Robespierre. And I'm that big croakin' toad because I'm so *smart*," Warble witheringly replies. "Unlike *some people* I know," he adds, staring first at Ward, and then looking around at all the rest of his traveling companions one by one, not even leaving out Taterskin.

Soundtrack note: "I've Got a Name" by Jim Croce

Ward caves. He knows Warble is wrong, but he just can't bear arguing with him any longer. He'll go insane (again) if he does. So, he gives in, and decides to go along with Warble, regardless of how wrong and wrong-headed his boss and his plans are. "All right, then, Warble, you win: What do we have to do to neutralize this fella?" he asks.

"Now you're talking, Robespierre," Warble smiles. "Maybe you're not *quite* as dumb as you look. We introduce a law to the Massachusetts Legislature that, in order to give away free food, you must first purchase a license to do so-- for the tidy sum of...oh, say 3.14 billion dollars. This will discourage those guys, because even *they* don't have that kind of dough, to throw around like confetti at a New York Yankees Times Square World Series celebration parade.

"Our nemesis and his crowd of ne'er-do-wells will retire from the field, eyes downcast, hearts bedarkened, and tails between their legs.

"Once Congress sees how well our stratagem worked in the Bay State, they will make such company policy...I mean federal law...and such random acts of anti-commercialism will be punishable by death and even worse things."

"Worse things than death?" Mary asks.

"Yes, like having their eyes propped open with toothpicks and being forced to watch reruns of 'The Partridge Family' until they are reduced to babbling

imbeciles, no longer suitable for any practical purpose or worthwhile endeavor—that'll teach 'em!" Warble viciously vents.

CHAPTER 45

Again, Warble's plan is carried out pretty much to the letter, so there's no sense in going through the whole play-by-play of what exactly happened, when, and how, yodda yodda yodda. As always, Warble is quite pleased with himself once he's accomplished his stated intentions:

"Well, I really shined that time, didn't I?" Warble rhetorically crows, strutting like a rooster, beating his breast like a baboon, and virtually spreading his tail-feathers (had he any literal tail feathers to spread).

"Now, though, that's not all: We've been proactive in preventing mayhem. Let's take it one step further and be proactive in introducing the blessed condition of consumerism. If we are lax in our duties, and give in to a lapse in our proactive activities, we could suffer a prolapse, and that would not be a pretty sight."

Mary rolls her eyes. "What have you got in mind now, Warble?" she wonders.

"With my wonderful imagination and profound visionary skills, Mary," Warble replies, expelling a sound like a previously parched person who has just taken a big swig of water, "I see the magnificent future that awaits us, now that I've made the globe safe for commerce and consumerism and the world safe for globalization. Not just every man, but every *thing*: Every living, breathing, animate, inanimate thing—and so forth, you get the picture—will have its price. Stamped right on it, in fact. In other words: Bagged, tagged, and bar-coded to boot."

"What in tarnation are you getting us into this time, Consumer Warble?" Comfy (and other similarly inquiring minds) wants to know.

"First, we need to have one world currency. The dollar, of course. That eliminates a lot of jobs (money changers, printer's devils, etc.) and makes purchasing goods (man's highest and loftiest endeavor) so easy even most Congressmen will be able to do it—with a little help from their favorite lobbyist or page, at any rate.

"We will hypnotize the world with this hip-hop chant I've written on the spur of the moment, so that they switch over to the dollar without our even having to spend the time and money that would otherwise be necessary to bomb them into submission:

"Ruble, Mark, Frank
Throw them in the TANK!
Rupee, Lira, Peso
In the trash they MUST go!
DOLLARS! DOLLARS! DOLLARS!
Makes you jump and HOLLER!
OUT with the old! IN with the new!
Make your neighbor BE like you!"

In spite of himself, Comfy "gets the spirit" and begins movin' to the groovin', shakin' to the bakin', and jivin' to the connivin'. Soon the entire troupe is dancing in spite of themselves*, and Warble knows he has won them over once again.

* Taterskin is not strictly *dancing*, but he is cavorting around the undulating mob: running around, barking, and jumping in the air. Warble thinks Taterskin is just mindlessly mirroring the goings-on. Albert thinks Taterskin is trying to warn him about something. What Taterskin is *really* up to, though, is celebrating the fact that he's not a dopey, dorky human.

CHAPTER 46

Fast forward a few hours. How Warble accomplished his first goal is really rather a dull tale, and not worthy of your time in the retelling of it. It's enough to know that it has been "seen to."

"Now that I've set up the Dollar as the sole legal tender for all debts public and private, for all eternity," Warble congratulates himself, "I can add a few finishing touches--some masterful flourishes and elegant grace notes, if you will--here and there."

"I can't wait," Mary says, sarcastically.

"That's the spirit, Mary!" Warble beams, disregarding Mary's tone of voice. "I *knew* you had it in you."

"And I knew you had it in *you*, Warble," Mary replies. "In fact, you're *full* of it."

"Be that as it may, Mary," Warble continues, unwilling to wander down that path, "we can now jumpstart consumerism, and fittingly earn ourselves a pocketful of boodle in the process."

"Don't tell me you're going to send everyone in America a tax rebate, and ask them to invest it in government bonds," Marianne says.

"Not a bit of it!" Warble answers. "In fact, we're going to a time before there was an America, and to the land of precision and industriousness."

"Japan?" Comfy guesses.

"No, you ignoramus!" Warble corrects. "Germany, of course! In Japan," he adds, "all they do is play around with flowers, write terrible poetry, and eat raw fish—they're too indolent to even *cook* their seafood. No, those people are a hopeless case when it comes to being productive and making high-quality consumer goods."

To make a short story perhaps a smidgen longer than it has any justifiable right to be, Warble and company traveled to Germany in the year 1717 (Warble just picked a neat sounding year at random) and handed over (at a bargain price) copies of the blueprints for Fulton's Steamboat, Whitney's Cotton Gin, and Ford's Assembly Line. In two shakes of a lamb's tail (roughly equivalent to three pendulum-like swishes of a horse's tail, or four elliptical swings of a fly-harassed cow's head), the Germanic tribes reinvented themselves as an economic miracle, a manufacturing mega-monolith, and Europe's economy was soon a raging inferno, burning white hot.

Warble has one more idea to implement before he "rests" from his works for this episode of history re-engineering: He wants to institute a standard price for everything in the known universe, and make it mandatory (punishable by many gruesome fates far worse than death) to comply. His plan?

"Minnie Pearl was a visionary, revolutionary genius!" he informs his fellow travelers. "She really knew how things should be, and set the example herself, even when she was fighting an uphill battle, swimming upstream, bucking the trend, and being laughed at for her troubles and self-sacrificing spirit."

Soundtrack note: Some banjo instrumental, maybe by Roy Clark's cousin who used to appear with him on "Hee-Haw" sometimes. Who else plays the banjo? Well, there *is* that kid from "Harold & Maude," but he might not be a kid anymore...he might not even play the banjo anymore, who knows? Bela Fleck, maybe?

"You mean everyone should greet everyone else with a boisterous and high-pitched 'How-dee,' Warble?" Albert asks.

"Boy howdy are you *dumb*, boy," Warble complains, screwing up his face as if pure lemon extract had been squirted into one or both of his eyes. "I was referring to the price tag on her stylish hat.

"You should never consider anything you own as a permanent possession," Warble continues. "Everything is for sale at the right price, and to save

precious time and the heartbreak of pointless haggling, everything should be marked with a price tag. This will grease the wheels of commerce, and inter-consumer transactions will proceed at a breakneck pace. I buy her hat, she buys your lawnmower, you buy my worn-out socks, and everybody makes money."

"Sounds a little gaudy, gauche, cheap, and cheesy to me, Warble," Ward opines.

"Keep your opinion to yourself, you brainless Neanderthal!" Warble hotly remarks. "If we listened to you, progress would be impeded to the point that people would be satisfied to just look out their back door and listen to Buck Owens."

Soundtrack Note: "Lookin' Out My Back Door" by Creedence Clearwater Revival should be playing at this point

"What?!" Ward responds, who had never said—or thought—anything of the sort.

"You can all see as plain as day, I take it," Warble continues, "that it is imperative that we place a price tag on everything. All traditional 'consumer goods' as well as heretofore *untraditional* consumer goods, including but not limited to: Trees, mountains, waterfalls, sunsets, sunrises, rivers, lakes, cloud formations, animals, people, haiku poetry—absolutely everything—needs to be price-tagged."

"Everything?" Mary asks, skeptically.

"Everything," Warble answers, resolutely, crossing his arms and shaking his head in the affirmative exactly one time.

And so it goes. Warble, equipped with a portable price tag printer (which he refers to as his "price tag bazooka") strapped across his back, pioneers the way, using the leadership style termed "Management by Example" and the punishment style known as "abuse, denigrate, embarrass, intimidate, and threaten."

Nothing escapes Warble's scrutiny. He tags houses, cars, domestic animals such as dogs, cats, canaries, and mud turtles; wild animals such as meadow voles, moles, mice, chipmunks, polecats, and duck-billed platypi (the plural of platypus); fig-mulberry trees, low-bush cranberry bushes (including individual cranberries, assigning each one a different price based on size, color, and overall appearance), hills, dales, vales, valleys, alleys, ...well, you get the picture.

"My inventory is growing at a breakneck pace!" Warble excitedly reports, to every one in general but no one in particular. "I've already earned a cool billion or so."

"Earned? How so, Warble? Those things you've tagged don't belong to you," Jacques reasons.

"Don't they?" Warble counters. "'Finders keepers, losers weepers.' Oh, that reminds me, I'll tag that weeping willow over there, and that fish-finder in that boot there yonder—separate from the boat, because it's an add-on, and was indubitably sold separately."

"Some people aren't going to like this, Warble," Marianne warns.

"Yeah, and some people are sore losers," Warble responds. "If they kick up a fuss, it'll be into the calaboose with them. Anyone interfering in the sacred art of consumer commerce will be subject to—as is logical and only right—capital punishment."

"You would have them killed for trying to retain their own private property?" Marianne questions.

"No, you knucklehead," Warble scolds. "That's not what capital punishment is. Capital punishment is worse than that: It's when a person is locked into a room with an old maid teacher and forced to recite the capitals of all 49 states, over and over again, until they lose their minds and turn into Congressmen."

"*That's* where congressmen come from?" Albert asks incredulously.

"Stick with me, kid," Warble says, putting his arm around Albert's shoulders, "and you'll eventually pick up all the intricacies of the inner workings of the government."

Warble warms to his task, thinking there is finally someone in the group with potential, who truly appreciates the pearls of wisdom he has at his disposal, crammed like sardines into his storehouse of knowledge.

"Here's an interesting one for you, Albert:" Warble says. "Politicians must take the hypocritic oath, whose preamble is: 'First do no harm to the olive oil'—or the Popeye, for that matter. Bluto and Brutus are up for grabs, of course. As for Wimpy, you're on your own. Now the postamble of the hypocritic oath is: 'Kick 'em when they're down and pulverize 'em when they're unconscious.'"

"So how long have *you* been in politics, Mr. McGorkle?" Albert meekly asks, fearful of antagonizing our protagonist.

"Me? I'm *not* in politics. What makes you think *I*, of all people, would be in politics, Albert? I wouldn't qualify for the post--I'm not a greedy, stupid, blow-hard glory-hog."

"You're *not*?" Albert innocently replies, confused and a little discombobulated—he can't imagine anyone *more* qualified for political life than Warble.

Without giving the question the dignity of a reply, Warble, with a look of uncaged rage in his eyes, whips out his price tag bazooka. Albert, deducing Warble's intentions, turns tail and runs, but Warble chases down his prey in short order. Warble leaps on Albert's back, pummels him about the head and shoulders a good while, and then marks him down 31.4%.

A yellow streak flashes through the air, knocking Warble off Albert. Rolling around in the mud and the blood and the beer (Warble had just been enjoying a cold one), Warble and Taterskin engage in a wrestling match of epic proportions. Each time Taterskin lunges at his throat, Warble fends him off with one arm while marking his price down with the other.

Soundtrack Note: "A Boy Named Sue" by Johnny Cash

As Taterskin's price drops from a high of \$100 down to an unheard-of and unprecedented -\$3.14, he is about to pounce on Warble, fangs bared, a growl of warning rumbling in his throat.

Albert picks himself up, dusts himself off, looks down at Warble, and then at his dog.

CHAPTER 47

"Leave him be, Taterskin," Albert gently but firmly commands his dog. "He's not worth the risk of infection. He's not worth shucks, in fact."

Taterskin reluctantly stops his growling and snarling, resumes his normal relaxed demeanor, and trots after his master, who has abandoned the field.

"Don't look at me in that tone of voice!" Warble yells after Albert, who is walking away from the scene with his canine friend and bosom companion. "After we get back to our customary time and place, you'll be fired, young man! And," he adds, as a parting shot, "I'm going to deduct the cost of that extra price tag—time and materials, shipping and handling, to be specific—that I was forced to place on you due to the uncompromising nature of market forces related to supply and demand."

"But I don't work for you!" Albert objects, turning around.

"Never mind, I have connections," Warble says, realizing that what the mechanic is saying is, indeed, true. "I can *have* you fired. And your dangerous dog declawed, debarked, decommissioned, and neutered to boot!"

A feeling of calm comes over Warble. Almost euphoric, indeed, is the wave of emotion that washes over him, as the harsh treatment he had dealt out to Albert reminds him of the halcyon days of yore when he fired people by the score (he hired them just so he'd experience the thrill and have the enjoyment of firing them) while working for Morley Moore in Brooklyn, New York (as those of you who read the first volume in this series no doubt recall with warm and fuzzy reminiscings).

Warble lays down in the grass and, just after tagging a dandelion, gently glides into that altered state and alternate world known as sleep.

CHAPTER 48

Warble is soon dreaming. The visions that come to him during his mid-day siesta are not pleasant ones, though. He dreams about returning home, to the year 2009, in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. He expects life, after the reengineering he has done and will yet do, to be a paradise for enterprising entrepreneurs and other greedy-guts capitalists (as people who 'just don't get it' refer to Warble and his ilk).

For some reason, though, in Warble's dream, it is not that way. Transported in his mind forward (or back, depending on how you look at it) to the time and place from whence they started out, something has gone seriously awry: The McGorkles are poor. Truth be told unvarnishedly, they are downright destitute. Warble and Mary are living in a hovel not much more elaborate or fancy than a ramshackle shack comprised of corrugated iron and cardboard stapled together, with wallpaper consisting of pictures torn out of second-hand magazines.

As members of the lowest economic and social class—the poorest of the poor—Warble and Mary are owned by 'poor farmers' who rent, lease, and sell poor folks to the highest bidder.

Mary is taken away from her home by her owner and sold to the government, to take part in an experiment in human ethics being carried out in Getoutamyway Bay. There, she is placed in a giant (3.14 miles square) terrarium, and subjected to a battery of tests.

With the subjects first deprived of food, then not allowed to have any water, then exposed to extreme heat, then to bitter cold, etc., the scientists overseeing the experiment take meticulous notes to see what these unfortunates will do. After starving them, or subjecting them to these other extreme hardships, they make available to them food, water, blankets to bundle up against the cold, or whatever it is the person desires--but the subject is not really supposed to have them. The only way they can get these things is to steal them. How long will they hold out? When will they 'break'? At what point do they go against their conscience and do something

they consider to be wrong, or immoral? For example, how long will Mary, who is being tested with a combination of extreme heat and fluid deprivation, last until she, in her parched condition, attempts to steal a bottle of water?

Warble is safe from such experiments, because for some reason (in his dream only, of course) he has been deemed null and void in the ethics and morals department. He actually scored zero on his MQ (morality quotient) test, and somehow inexplicably received a negative reading on the EQ (ethics quotient) test. Thus, he is not 'experiment fodder' and has never been used for such.

Mary, though, is a different matter altogether.

In a move of opportunistic efficiency and marketing brilliance, the government has directly taken over control of the experiments. The experiments actually pay for themselves (the government taxes the people, particularly the poor, since they are the ones who take part in the experiments and thus are the ones who "benefit" by them). Actually, the experiments not only pay for themselves, but the powers that be have made them into a blockbuster moneymaking venture.

The government is able to turn a profit on these experiments in three ways: First, they turn these into "reality" shows, and broadcast them to the entire world on a pay-per-view basis. Second, the government sponsors gambling operations where people bet on who will give in to which temptation, and when. Finally, sportsmen who have grown bored with hunting down mere beasts (most of which have gone extinct anyway) pay 'big bucks' (to use the cute colloquial expression) to 'euthanize' (to use the convenient euphemism) the subjects once they are about to give in to their temptation and attempt to steal something.

For any of these sportsmen still saddled with the vestigial appendage of a conscience, they can salve or assuage their feelings of guilt by paying a 'sin tax,' which goes to beautify the state-sponsored religious temples and produce yet more of the ubiquitous "educational and uplifting" government propaganda.

Yes, unbeknownst to the participants (only those too poor to pay for the

pay-per-view shows are selected as subjects, and so they don't know what fate awaits them), they are executed once they give in to temptation. In fact, just *before* they do so (in the spirit of preemptive strikes pioneered by Warble's ingenious idea) they are killed, to save the cost of the bread they would otherwise eat, water they would otherwise drink, blankets they would sully or soil, etc.

In Warble's dream, he is watching the drama unfold on the TV screen at the local government satellite office (spouses who are exempt from participation in the test as subjects are allowed to watch the experiments free, as a "kindness" to them).

It's hot enough to peel the hide off a gila monster, and Mary is just about as dehydrated as a dried apricot. As she staggers up to the vending machine in the center of the giant terrarium, Warble is watching her on the TV screen with bated breath. The vending machine, gleaming in the sun and beckoning Mary closer with its inviting metallic blue hue, bears a sign reading:

NOTICE: These bottles of cool, clear, refreshing water, which you can have by simply opening the door and grabbing one, are property of the government of these hyar Untied St8s of Pleonexia. You are on the honor system (nobody is here to monitor your actions), but you are not allowed, under any circumstances, to buy, borrow, steal, or purchase on credit any of this nice, cool, clear, refreshing, revivifying, rejuvenating, wonderfully tasty and thirst-quenching water. If you do so, you will be branded a thief for all eternity (not by us, because nobody's watching you, but by your own conscience, which will never give you a moment's rest).

Have a nice day—if you survive it without water, that is, which is extremely unlikely!

Signed, Your benefactors, the government of these hyar Untied St8s of Pleonexia.

Soundtrack note: "Cool Water" by The Sons of the Pioneers

The scientists conducting the experiments assert that the claims that the subjects aren't being watched is a necessary fabrication to preserve the integrity and accuracy of the tests.

Warble's eyes are glued to the screen. He sees Mary hesitate. He also sees

four snipers—Euthanizing Sportsmen, to use the preferred terminology—raise their rifles and center her in their sights (Warble sees each sniper in a separate “window” in each corner of his television screen).

Warble is frantic. He doesn't know what he can do to save Mary. He can't bear to watch the scene, but he is mesmerized by it all the same. He begins to sweat and hyperventilate. Back in the real world (outside of Warble's dream, that is), his wife and employees notice that Warble's formerly peaceful slumber has apparently morphed into a nightmare: Warble is whining pitifully, sounding something like a police siren stuck on its high note (in other words, it's a monotonic, rather than an undulating, sort of whine), and flailing his arms and legs in every direction. Nobody dares get near him, lest they be kicked black and blue and clawed to ribbons (it's been awhile since their sandal-bedecked boss clipped his finger- and toenails).

Meanwhile, Jacques and Marianne go up the hill to fetch a pail of water.

CHAPTER 49

As often happens in dreams, when disparate places, times, or circumstances sometimes merge into one and the same tableau and milieu, such is the case in Warble's nightmare. He dreams of himself "back" in 2009, in dire straits, but with the Arodnep a scarce few meters away from him, as is the case in reality (outside of his dream).

In his nightmare, Warble suddenly remembers something: the Arodnep has a "Back" button! He races to the craft (which, in his dream, is parked just inside the doorway of the government satellite television station), and flips open the emergency panel. The holographic keypad appears in the air before him. Warble presses the 'Back' button. He sees himself back in time price tagging everything in creation. Pressing the Back button again, he watches himself fixing the world's currency. Another press, and he views himself taking care of Keith McHenry and his 'Food Not Bombs' plot. Warble glances up at the television screen and sees the snipers begin to squeeze their triggers. He clicks the "Back" button over and over as fast as he can. Warble finally gets to the point where Comfy and Albert have just driven up to his mansion. Warble then holds the button in for the requisite .314 seconds, so that the scene will "stick" or "come back."

Hoping against hope, afraid of what scene of grisly and grotesque mayhem may confront his beady little peepers, Warble forces himself to look up at the television screen, wishing with all his might and main that his wife is out of danger.

Just then, Warble is drenched with what seems to him to be an ocean of cold water. And it had come just in time, too: Warble's agitated and frenetic energy had become so manic that he was kicking his pants off and sending dogs and other innocent beasts scurrying out of the neighborhood, persecuted as their hypersensitive ears were by his loud and high-pitched wailing.

Side note: Jacques and Marianne had returned down the hill, having fetched the water from a well, but in their haste to deliver the cool, refreshing

liquid to their suffering boss, Jacques had tripped and chipped his tooth. This happened because Marianne had been following behind Jacques too closely and she had inadvertently given him a "flat tire" and then went sailing herself, cartwheeling down the hill with surprising alacrity. Fortunately, though, owing to Jacques' athletic prowess and skills of coordination, he had spilled nary a drop of the precious fluid, even while going head over heels and breaking a crown in the process. But that's neither here nor there; it's just a rather interesting, if not especially noteworthy, side note.

Warble sits up, coughing, sputtering, blinking his eyes, and smoothing his hair down with his fingers. "What happened?! Is Mary OK?!" he yells. Then he realizes that he addressed that question to Mary herself—she's standing right in front of him, gazing down at him with a look of sincere concern. "Mary! You're alright! Thanks to me and my ingenious powers of deduction and dead-right insight, as well as my exemplary keyboard skills."

"You were *dreaming*, Warble," is all Mary says in response. "You seem a little distraught—maybe you should have a nice cup of tea, followed by a hot bath and then a little nappy-noo," she adds, patting him on the head solicitously.

"Tea?! Bath?! Nap?!" Warble yells, incredulous. "You know I drink coffee, take showers, and never nap, Mary! What a preposterous suggestion. 'Maybe you should have a nice cup of tea, a hot bath, and then take a little nappy-noo'," Warble mimics sarcastically. "Bah! Humbug!" he yells up at her, still dripping.

So angered and put out is he by Mary's silly suggestion, that steam is rising from Warble's body.

CHAPTER 50

Warble doesn't dwell on his dream. In fact, he forgets all about it after being violently awakened with that bucketload of H^2O as he was about to...do what?...he can't remember now, but he thinks it was something that was important to him at the time—in the dream, anyway...oh, well...he dismisses it completely from his mind.

Note: By the way, this affinity of Warble's to forget things that you might think would be just about impossible to disremember is why some people (behind his back) refer to him as "the brainy zany with the drainy crany"

"Jacques, you're a genius!" Warble remarks, seeming quite surprised. "At least," he continues, in a lower register, "you're a junior genius, an adjunct genius, or a genius-in-training. You've given me another one of my great ideas! Of course, my agile mind would have alighted upon it eventually anyway, but you sped things up a little, so I gladly throw you a little crust of recognition, a bone of commendation."

"What have I done?" is all Jacques has to say to that.

"Water! You've brought to my mind thoughts of water. Wait! We must have the right mood music for this—Mary, see if you can download Mozart's "Eine Kleine Wassermusik" on the Arodnap's iPod."

"Warble," Ward says, grinning, putting his hand on his employer's shoulder, "I think you mean Handel,..."

"Don't tell me what I mean, Robespierre! And get your grubby mitts off of me, you buffoon! Go fondle your own Hondle!" Warble growls.

Ward's body English, when translated into written English, goes something like this: "OK, whatever, I was just trying to help," and he backs off, both literally and figuratively.

Mary, of course, can't find any such song in the iTunes database, so she calls

WGRP in Cincinnati and requests "Smoke on the Water." When she returns to the huddle (Warble's employees are gathered around him, awaiting word on their next misadventure), the song has begun. Warble either doesn't even *notice* the music, or doesn't realize it is not the song he had in mind.

Soundtrack note: The following medley: Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" morphing into Handel's "Water Music" segueing into Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water" (the album cut, *with* the guitar solo, not the single version with Ritchie Blackmore's most excellent solo stripped out)

"Water! Water! Water! Water is the elixir of life!" Warble begins. "Water is the wave of the future! We've got to secure our nation's rights to all the water that ever graces it by falling from the sky, or passing over it in the form of water vapor—clouds, to you dunderheads. We must arrest the water, so that it can never leave us! You know the beautiful and classic poem by Emerson:

"If you love something, set it free
If it comes back to you, well and good
If it leaves, hunt it down and kill it"

"But Warble, that doesn't rhyme," Mary complains, wrinkling up her face.

"Do not wrinkle your visage so, sweetums," Warble strongly suggests. "Who says it has to rhyme? Are you questioning the artistic sensibilities of Emerson Lake N. Palmer, the great poet lariat?"

"Anyway," Warble goes on, waving his hand dismissively, "the real point, the crux of the matter, is this: If we don't even give water the *opportunity* to leave us, we won't have to kill it. We arrest the water, and it is ours forever."

"Arrest the water, Warble?" Albert asks. "What on God's green earth do you mean by that?"

"We will impound it, Albert," Warble replies. "We can't let it run free, like an escaped convict or a latchkey teenager! We've got to impound all the water, so that we always know where it is, and we can use it *where* we want,

when we want. Water should not have a mind of its own. We are its masters! We are its Lords!"

"So you want to go into the reservoir business, I take it," Mullah deduces.

"As you wish, Mr. Gitani," Warble says politely, feeling generous and expansive. "Get in the car, kids, we're going for a little ride. A Sunday drive, if you will."

"But it's not Sunday, Warble honey," Mary protests.

"Who cares, wifey-poo," Warble smiles at her. "Sunday is more a state of mind than an actual day of the week, anyhow."

"Hey, you rhymed!" Albert notes.

"Yes, so I did," Warble agrees, not realizing it until then but acting as if it were intentional. "Maybe I could've given my old rapper friend from Indiana a run for his money, if I had time for such tomfoolery as scribbling poems."

"You have a rapper friend from Indiana?" Comfy asks incredulously, imagining Warble probably thinks Michael Jackson is a rapper, rather than Warble's alleged friend being a genuine hip-hop stylist like Quadrevion Quartertone (who, as everyone knows, uses the stage name '1 sIk pUpPy') or Garry N. D'Anna.

Soundtrack note: DO NOT, under any circumstances, play "Goin' Back to Indiana" by the Jackson 5 here. Instead, play "Gary, Indiana" from the musical "The Music Man"

"Hoosier Daddy," Warble informs Comfy, happy to trot out his famous friends, name-dropper that he is.

"Ask yo' mama!" Comfy replies hotly.

"Why? What would my mother know about Hoosier Daddy?" Warble asks, confused.

"What business is it of yours who my daddy is?" Comfy says, ears flared, trunk raised, and trumpet blaring (using poetic license to translate Comfy's body English). "I asked you, Consumer Warble, and I want an answer: Who is this rapper from Indiana you claim to number among your friends?"

"I told you, Comfy: *Hoosier Daddy!* Hoosier and I go way back--he used to be a copywriter for my string of used car lots before he had a mid-twenties identity crisis and became a famous hip-hop *artiste*, well respected among music critics for his insightful and incisive lyrics."

"Oh, you *mean!* *Get back, Warble! Get down!* Hoosier Daddy!" Comfy reconciles, impressed that Warble, square peg that he seems to be, knows a rapper from a flapper, and hip-hop from flip-flops.

"Anyway, here we go!" Warble says, as he enters the location and date of their next rendezvous with fate.

Place: St. Louis, Missouri

Date: May 29th, 1913

CHAPTER 51

"Dam Nation!" Warble cries out like an alarm clock that had gone off without being set as he and his entourage arrive at their destination near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. He is standing on the hood, or cowl, of the Arodnep again, arms spread heaven-ward.

"Warble! This is a family book! The author promised there would be no profanity contained within its pages!" Mary gasps.

"Profanity?! We're not in Babylon, Mary, so there's no need for you to babble on like that. I was merely exulting in the prospect—nay, *certainly*—that we are about to 'cut the ribbon' or 'christen the ship,' so to speak, on our great engineering project: the damming of America! We will be so far ahead of the curve in the community of nations when it comes to the impounding of waters that our national nickname will become "the Dam Nation"! What glory! Oh, for joy! What cause for rejoicing! This calls for a benediction!"

Warble leaps off the Arodnep and hurls himself on the ground with an overly and overtly flamboyant display of euphoria, kissing "terra firma" (with eyes closed) first here, then there. Without being aware of just where and what he is smooching, Warble accidentally kisses a piece of pre-masticated and subsequently discarded chewing gum (discarded presumably after it had lost at least most, if not all, of its flavor), and comes up with it stuck to and hanging from his lower lip.

Mary has not been paying any attention to Warble, and so did not see his mishap. Warble is also, as yet, unaware of it. Mary is looking out at the Mighty Mississippi, as it rolls its mile-wide tide along. Warble approaches her stealthily from behind, grabs her gently by the waist, spins her around, and declares:

"Mary! Give me a kiss, as a token of your love and devotion, as a symbolic gesture depicting pictorially your common cause with me in helping this nation along to its manifest destiny of ultimate water control!"

Mary sees the previously-owned and chewed gum hanging from Warble's lower lip, and backs away in disgust. "Warble, I'm not going to do anything of the kind. I don't know where your lip has been!" Mary refuses, revolted.

Warble is dumbfounded, consternation written (figuratively, not literally) all over his face. He reaches up, examining his lip with his fingers. "Oh, gross!" he yells out, peeling off the pre-chewed gum glob. "Juicyfruit! I hate Juicyfruit!"

Ward tiptoes up to the Arodnop and downloads Jimmy Buffett's Greatest Hits. For one thing, the sight of the Mississippi River puts him in the mood for sailing and drinking. The other reason Buffett had entered Robespierre's consciousness is left as an exercise for the reader.

Soundtrack note: If you're just a reader, don't cheat and read this—this is meant solely for the soundtrack engineer: Spin a little "Grapefruit-Juicy Fruit" by Jimmy Buffett at this point in the proceedings

Soundtrack note addendum: If you are not the soundtrack engineer, and you were honest enough not to read the private note to him or her above, I'll reward you by giving you a hint--I'll give you the name of the song in Piglatin: "Rapefruit-Gay Uicyfruit-Jay" by Immy-Jay Uffett-Bay. If you still can't figure it out, I'll print the answer/translation here in a really small font:

"Grapefruit-Juicy Fruit" by Jimmy Buffett

Warble climbs a knoll overlooking the River, strikes a dramatic pose—head tilted skyward, left elbow akimbo—and proclaims: "Oyez! Oyez! Hear ye! Hear ye! Huddle up, maties!"

Warble's wife and employees saunter up to him, and wait, in an attitude of resigned anticipation.

"Again, you all are fortunate to be here at the time and at the site of the beginning of an engineering and economic marvel. All credit and thanks to me, of course," Warble intones, smiling to beat the band.

"Enough of that, you old contortionist, get to the point!" Jacques demands.

"Did you call me an extortionist, LaRue?" Warble asks, rage rising in his voice.

"No—*contortionist*, you old coot. You keep patting yourself on the back. Just tell us what you intend to do," Jacques demands.

"Hmpphh!" Warble grunts disapprovingly. "Some people have no respect. Or, more likely, extreme jealousy is behind your *feigned* lack of respect and profound appreciation. Well, I can at least understand why you would be jealous of me, LaRue, but try to be satisfied with being allowed to bask in the radiant glow of my presence and of being privileged to have *some* part--however minuscule and unimportant it may be!--in the outworking of my purpose."

Jacques rolls his eyes. Warble goes on. "We are going to dam every river with enough flow to be called a river. Starting here, where the Mississippi and the Missouri meet and meld and morph into one, we will impound these waters for the use of all America. Up till now, these waters have gone to waste, dumping out into the Gulf of Mexico. Why, after all, should we allow the Mexicans to have our rightful water supply?" Warble demands, shaking his right fist in the air. "This is OUR water. No Mexicans need apply for it! I am tired of us Americans making those Mexicans rich by wasting our water on them. We will dam it right here, and keep all the water for ourselves."

"What do you mean 'making those Mexicans rich,' Warble?" Mullah asks. "I thought they were rather a poor nation, actually."

"Well, you've obviously never seen Mexico City, Gitani, you old flibbertigibbet, you. If you had, you would know how polluted it is. And how does a city *get* polluted? By people manufacturing a lot of goods, and making a lot of money thereby.

"Oh, yes, they're rich all right! And they've been running their industries—their textile mills and Corona breweries and taco factories and so on—with OUR water. We've been subsidizing them, so to speak. They've been taking the bread right out of our mouths! But no more! This has got to stop, and it WILL stop, once we dam up our waters, starting right here, where the 'Mighty Mississipp' and the 'Big Muddy' meet, the Father of Waters and the Mother of All Waters. Oh yes, that mother is *really* going to get pregnant

now, and send her children all across the land—New Mexico will look like New Hampshire! Arizona like Oregon! Utah like Florida! Texas like--well, forget Texas, as Mexico owns it now."

"You think this dam will supply water for all those places?" Mary asks.

"Remember, Mary, this is just the first of many. We're going to build dams everywhere. In every place where water currently (no pun intended) flows out of our hallowed land and into some also-ran country (like Mexico or Canada) we will arrest, impound, and dam it. In fact, that will be our motto: 'Dam it!' We'll make t-shirts emblazoned with that slogan, print it on bumper stickers, paint it on the side of barns, plaster it on billboards, etc. What a genius I am! And getting back to the Mexicans: Let them make their own water! It's not our lookout how—or even *if*!—they succeed in polluting their cities."

"That sounds like quite an ambitious project," Albert notes dryly.

"You're not just whistling Dixie cups, Albert," Warble says. "We'll have dams up the wazoo."

Soundtrack note: "Mississippi Sheiks" by Rory Gallagher

"What's a wazoo?" Albert inquires, sorry he asked practically before he gets the words out of his mouth.

"The Wazoo is a river in Michigan," Warble replies, thoughtfully. "Haven't you ever heard that song: 'Way down upon the Wazoo River, down Saginaw way'? And two famous expressions come from it. 'Up the Wazoo' means to travel *up* the Wazoo River, to the pristine Northland—stopping at the Canadian border, of course, where the landscape changes to a frozen wasteland.

"And to be 'sold down the river' means to go *down* the Wazoo, ultimately to be dumped into the Gulf of Mexico, from whence the tradewinds drift one relentlessly to the Sargasso Sea, where one is inescapably and unmercifully bitten by electric eels and their close cousins, electronic eels."

"I thought you said the Mexicans got that water," Mary asks for clarification, ignoring the eel part of the story completely.

"They *do* get most of it, Mary," Warble says, "but they're not as efficient as us ingenious Yankees—some of it gets away from them and drifts off of its own volition on over to the Sargasso Sea.

"But not for long! Going down the Wazoo will soon lead people right to wonderful recreational opportunities right here on Lake Warble at the Consumer Warble Memorial Dam, at this historic spot on which we now stand."

"'Lake Warble'? 'The Consumer Warble Memorial Dam'?" Mary asks.

"Sure," Warble replies. "That *is* what you all are going to insist I name this initial project, isn't it? After all, Lake Warble will be a man-made lake, and what man will have made it?

"But getting back to the entomological lesson regarding the Wazoo River in the Wolverine state: Going up the Wazoo is a good thing, whereas going down that river was up until now to be avoided at all costs, and by any means necessary."

"Close, but no cigar, Warble—a Wazoo is actually a musical instrument," Jacques jokes. "It's used mostly in classical music, like the solo in Del Shannon's hit song from the Renaissance period, "Runaway"."

"If that were true I would agree with you, LaRue—that instrument *should* be dammed. But it's *not* true. Where do you get such hare-brained ideas, anyway?"

Soundtrack note: Start playing "Runaway" by Del Shannon (real name Charles Westover) earlier, so that the kazoo solo kicks in just as Jacques mentions it. Or just confuse everyone by playing the version by Me First and the Gimme Gimmes (which has a guitar solo). Do you think we could get someone like Andy Williams (or Andy Rooney) to record a version of "Swanee River" as "Wazoo River"?

CHAPTER 52

It takes lots of time, money, and manpower (Warble saves on all three by hiring Mexicans, who work fast and cheap) to build the ponds, canals, and reservoirs, but the "Dam Nation" project is finally complete, in a mere eight years. Warble and company do not stick around to see it all through, though. Warble leaves the oversight to others, delegating the details to a team of managers comprised of Roger Wilco, Jimmy Crack Corn, Everdood Watt, and Crystal Sporidian, as well as a group of civil engineers which include Monty Pharaoh, Eddy Boyle, Tonya Tunnabrix, and Nate R. Haight (a former vacuum salesman who left his previous stock in trade because he was slowly but surely beginning to bear a striking resemblance to the household appliances he sold, leading to the well-known metaphorical phrase--which he came to despise--that "Nate R. Haight's a vacuum").

"Get ready for buckled black boots, buckled hats, muskets with flared barrels, and enough turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie to choke a horse!" Warble beams, thinking he will simultaneously pleasantly surprise and enlighten his crew as to their next assignment, which they had better opt to accept if they know what's good for them, employment-wise.

"Why?" Albert wonders.

"'Why?' Isn't it obvious, Albert?" Warble replies, disappointed. "We are going to Plymouth, Massachusetts, circa 1620: We're going to see the Pilgrims walk off the gangplank onto Plymouth Rock and set to work on their Thanksgiving preparations."

And so it goes. Sort of, anyway. They do go to Plymouth, and it is 1620.

Warble cuts quite a figure in his "drugstore pilgrim" duds. As he mounts the pulpit at the colonist's meeting, held in the visitors' "honor" as a sort of inquest, Warble waves for silence. Out of curiosity, mainly, a hush does fall over the assembled colonists.

"Friends, Pilgrims, Founding Fathers, lend me your ears," Warble begins. "I have been sent from on high, and from a time postdating this one, to help

you institute a foundation for the future that will be even better than the one you would have laid without my able and priceless assistance."

Miles Standish grabs his blunderbuss, and is about to raise it to his chin, when John Carver waves him off. "Let's just let him talk," Carver whispers to the soldier. "Methinks he is just a bit addled in the head; perhaps I can foist off my governorship of the plantation on him—sanity has never been a requirement for public office, after all."

Warble continues. "This is what must be, m'lords: There will be only one religion allowed in this land."

"Hear, hear!" many from the crowd concur; others look around nervously, frowning.

"This religion consists of the following dogma, rules to be followed by all, and whose transgressors will be punished by fates worse than death:

- 1) No fun, no pleasure of any kind, is allowed. In other words, to put it pithily: 'If it feels good, don't do it'
- 2) For those who break that first law (and everyone will, for it'd be more likely to catch a weasel asleep than not to, and those of us in on the ground floor can freely flaunt it, as it won't apply to us—just so long as we give the *appearance* of following it), they can buy their way out of the terrible punishments they deserve by paying us a dispensation fee. Really, of course, we don't want their money, but this is a *service* to them because they get twice the pleasure out of their iniquities this way: first, the pleasure of the sin itself; second, the feeling of euphoria and indescribable relief once they buy their way out of the punishment. We are their benefactors!

"But that's a rotten and hypocritical scam!" John Howland (one of the pilgrims) accuses Warble. "It's a pyramid scheme!"

"No backtalk from the peanut gallery!" Warble roars. "And so what if it is, anyway: the wise and mighty Egyptians of old used them, and so will the Masons, so why not us? In fact, if you'll just take a close look at some legal tender, you'll see those pyramids proudly displayed thereupon. So, obviously, pyramids and their schemes have been sanctioned by the government and

are, by extrapolatory deduction and curved space reasoning, a downright good idea.

"And I'm sure you will all agree with me that we will be better off in the long run if we suppress—nip in the butt, to put it plainly—all other religions." He turns to his traveling companions/employees, and addresses them, in particular, on the subject: "You know what it would be like if it was 'every man for himself' and they could all choose their own way of worshiping. Take Ty Conestoga, for instance, who coaches Little League over in Ixonia in our time period. He belongs to a religion called "The Church of Later Days, Dudes." They believe their holiest writings were given them by Frank Sinatra. Then two angelic twins, named Macaroni and Moron, interpreted that lounge lizard's prose.

"And we can't have that; it's just too weird.

"And then there's that religion Martin Luther started by opening a can of worms at a Revival Meeting (he was on a diet, and worms were the only things he was allowed to eat). Although not intending to wake snakes [editors note: 'wake snakes' means 'cause a ruckus'], and enjoying the meeting immensely (he wanted to be a preacher himself), Luther was ordered to leave, as some of the ladies there were squeamish, and didn't want to share their pews with the creepy crawly critters. Luther staunchly refused to vacate the premises, though, and ended up boxing the circuit rider's ears—as I'm sure you all remember.

"Well, that poor ol' itinerant revivalist was catawampiously chawed up by the time ol' Marty got through with him. He was cut in about 95 places or so, and he was kicked in a couple more. And you'd better believe, they sung a different kind of revival song when the preacher hit the floor--because they weren't especially fond of the gospel tune he always had them sing, anyway, and Luther taught them one more to their liking. If memory serves, it was *Battle Hymn of the Republic*."

Soundtrack Note: "You Don't Mess Around with Jim" by Jim Croce plays at this point, followed, of course, by Johnny Horton's version of "Battle Hymn of the Republic"

Warble's employees look at one another, confused, and shrug their shoulders. They have no idea where Warble intends to end up with this seemingly nonsequitorial tangent he has flown off on. Warble is not to be stopped just yet, though. Turning his attention back to the crowd as a whole, and now addressing specifically the Pilgrims, he goes on:

"And I'm sure you realize just how busy I am, since I am omniscient and have the answer to all of mankind's problems. So, I trust you can carry out this assignment yourself—instituting one religion, legislating full compliance from all on pain of punishments worse than death, and guaranteeing freedom of worship in this one religion."

Not too surprisingly, the Pilgrims (and the Strangers, who would later form the nucleus of Merle Haggard's band) think Warble is mad. Superstitious and backward as they are, they are afraid to come near him, as they fear that whatever malady he is suffering from might be "catching." Warble interprets the looks on their faces as deep respect and profound devotion to his stated cause, and concludes that his plan is safe in their hands.

Soundtrack Note: "Rainbow Stew" by Merle Haggard and the Strangers should be playing around in here somewhere. Let it play until the final note

"On that note, we will take our leave, and leave you to this important work," Warble says, bowing to the pilgrims. "We will now go on another journey to a land far away and to a time even further in the past, to prepare things for this sole allowable framework of worship."

This is the first Warble's crew has heard of their next assignment, and they wonder what he's got up his sleeve this time, where Warble's whim will drag them in his wake. Warble jolts them out of their reverie before they have much time to dwell on it: "Let's go, gang! Off to our next adventure!"

Warble dashes through the crowd. Miles Standish had planned on arresting Warble and throwing him in the stockade on short rations, but Warble slips through the assembled throng before Standish even realizes he has vacated the pulpit.

"Hurry, people! We've got to get away before Our Founding Fathers and

Mothers try to detain us! They'll probably want me to teach them how to rob graves, steal corn, make treaties they don't intend to keep, poison the Indians, and all kinds of other useful and practical skills.

"History tells us, though, that they will soon figure these things out for themselves, so I don't want to waste my time on that."

Warble leads the way out of the plantation to the forest beyond, where the Arodnep lays hidden. As the crazy eight (nine, if you count Taterskin in that 'august' group) clamber aboard once more, Warble brings up the *GPS/CPS*.

Location: Jerusalem

Date: March 4th, 29 C.E.

CHAPTER 53

Warble pilots the Arodnop to a secluded spot on the dark side of Mars Hill. Warble and his crew camouflage its location by covering it with the branches from a withered fig-mulberry tree and multitudes of mustard plants.

Clapping the plant residue off his hands with a feeling of satisfaction (a mixture of satisfaction and anticipation), Warble informs his crew of his plans as they saunter down the hill (at this moment Warble looks quite similar to Pete Townshend on the cover of "Who's Next," walking down the incline with his head inclined in a downward arc, looking pensive and thoughtful and almost, if one didn't know better, a little contrite):

Soundtrack Note: Either "Baba O'Reilly" or "Won't Get Fooled Again" by The Who would be good choices at this stage of the game

"In order for the Founding Fathers to institute a solitary religion that will stay strong and resist all future attempts to circumvent or replace it," Warble begins, "it will need government backing. And so, what better way than to find Jesus, convince him to come forward in time with us, and run for President. That way, as Supreme Head of all branches of the government--the legislative, the judicial, the executive, as well as Commander in Chief of the combined branches of the military--he can introduce, uphold, and enforce the law to maintain one and only one religion. That will bring us lots of boodle—for the good of the embuddled, of course—and keep everyone united, to boot."

"Do you think Jesus would really want to do that—get involved in politics?" Mary questions Warble. "After all, he refused to become king of the Jews when some of them tried to draft him for that very purpose in his day."

"If we can't convince him to come with us to become President, we'll make something else up," Warble replies nonchalantly.

"You mean you'd try to pull a fast one on Jesus?!" Mary gasps.

"Well, why not, if it's for a good cause?" Warble replies, a little miffed that

Mary doesn't give him the benefit of the doubt that his motives are pure and his plan fool-proof. "The end justifies the meanness. Besides, Jesus will thank us, later, once he becomes President and realizes it's a better job than walking around dusty old Israel preaching—and for what: only to get killed in the end! Nature abhors a martyr! As President, he can retire unscathed and live in the lap of luxury in Las Vegas, Nevada; Ocracoke, Maine; Truth or Consequences, New Mexico; Lost Nation, Iowa, or wherever else he wants to spend his golden years."

"I think you've got Jesus all wrong," Mullah pipes up. "He doesn't care so much about comfort, retiring to a life of ease, and all that sort of stuff."

Warble has endured just about as much resistance from his subordinates as he can take. "All right, then!" he fumes.

His seven companions all sigh in relief. They think Warble has abandoned his plans, and so they turn on their heels and head back to the Arodnop.

"Hey! Where are you all going?" Warble yells. "I didn't say to go back."

"I thought you had given up on your idea about transporting Jesus to the future," Mary says.

"Who said so!" Warble barks. "I told you what we had to do, and why. What has changed it? Just because you idiots and flibbertigibbets can't see sense or think straight?!"

"But I thought we convinced you that Jesus wouldn't want to come with us," Mullah says.

"Maybe so," Warble concedes. "Butt in that case, we'll just have to kidnap him."

CHAPTER 54

"Kidnap Jesus!?" the seven cry out in unison. This is one thing Warble's entourage will have no part in or of, even if it does mean being stuck in 1st Century Jerusalem for the rest of their lives.

Seeing he would face stiff opposition and a *really* ticked off wife if he were to follow through with his plan, Warble stomps off to the nearest fig-mulberry tree, sits down in its shade, and begins actively moping (moaning, putting his head in his hands, telling people to shut their pie-hole when they try to talk to him, and violently pushing their hand away if they try to console him).

Note: For those who have read volume I of the Warble trilogy, the scene where Warble is looking for an 'Oompa Loompa' just before he meets Plumpo Tiddlywink may come to mind here

In a few minutes (during which time the rest of the travelers from the 21st Century are standing around talking about the upcoming NBA draft—that is, upcoming back in their native time and place), Warble's whimpering begins to lessen in intensity, his sobs coming further and further apart. A new idea is slowly taking root, like a viral fungus, in his mind. In a scant few seconds, the "brainstorm" has reached full bloom, and the multi-trillionaire "philanthropist" leaps up in the air.

"I've got it!" he beams, and then his expression changes. He scowls at the seven and adds, "No thanks to you traitors! I may not even *mention* you in my memoirs for this; and that even goes for *you, Mary!*"

Mary shrugs. Warble's expression changes back to one of satisfaction.

"Instead of kidnapping *Jesus*," he explains, "we'll just follow tradition, and settle for an imposter."

"An imposter!?" Jacques says, "that's preposterous!"

"Yes, LaRue," Warble agrees. "And that's exactly why it will work—nobody

will expect it. They will all think he really *is* Jesus. And who will know the difference?—you could train a monkey to be President. It's been proven many times, in fact.

"Any dummy can move his lips. The trick is figuring out who the ventriloquist is," Warble adds.

Well, it is a compromise, of sorts, is the group's joint thinking on the matter. At least we were able to prevent Warble from kidnapping the real Jesus, they reason.

"Do you have anyone particular in mind, Warble?" Mary wants to know.

"Yes, of course," Warble says, convinced he's already targeted the perfect candidate for the job. "There's a certain gent who hangs around with Jesus and has an appreciation for money—a born capitalist, I'd say."

"Who is this guy?" Ward asks, hoping his guess as to this person's identity is wrong. "What's his name?"

"I'll give you a hint, Robespierre," Warble says, intuiting that the personage he has in mind may not be the most popular choice with his traveling companions, and for that reason wanting to break the news to them gradually, gently. "Like Jesus, his name starts with a 'J'. And, like Jesus, his name ends with an 'S'. Also, both of them have five letters in their names, two of which are vowels, one of which is 'U'."

"Oh, brother, you can't mean..." Mary gasps, clapping her hand over her mouth.

"Cut that out, Mary!" Warble protests. "Just because we're in the land of Abraham and Sarah, or Abram and Sarai, doesn't mean you should pretend that you and I are siblings to one another. I don't see any Kings around here vying for your hand in holy matrimony, so just knock it off!"

"Warble, don't change the subject! Tell me you're not going to recruit Judas Iscariot as President," Mary wails.

"I can't tell you that I'm not going to do that, Mary, because that's *exactly* what I *am* going to do. After all, he is a reasonable facsimile of the person I *wanted* to bring, but YOU wouldn't let me," he scolds, getting angry again at the thought of the 'mutiny,' as he considers it to have been. "They are both Jews, and all Jews look the same; Their names are similar, as I just explained to you in such painstaking detail; and we can easily train him to do whatever we want, and to say whatever we want him to say.

"Actually, come to think of it," Warble goes on, "I think Judas is the perfect choice after all, and I'm glad I decided against kidnapping Jesus, even though you all tried to talk me into going through with it. Jesus would've been difficult to manage, I think—too much of an independent thinker and quibbler over minor details like right and wrong, truth, fairness, and justice.

"Now, Judas—*there's* presidential material for you! Since he would sell his soul and betray his friends for a mere 30 pieces of silver, just think what he won't do for us when we pay him the approximate equivalent of 30 pieces of silver *every month*, not to mention the sweet stock options he will have at his disposal."

"Oh, Warble," Mary says, throwing up her hands in a display of extreme exasperation.

"Finish your ode in honor to me some other time, Mary," Warble says. "We've got even more important things to do at the moment."

CHAPTER 55

Judas ends up being a pretty easy sell for smooth-talking Warble. The sound of swimming pools, movie starlets vying for his attention, and a mansion in Beverly Hills piqued Iscariot's interest (although Warble first had to explain to him what swimming pools, movie starlets and mansions were).

Soundtrack Note: The theme song to "Beverly Hillbillies" should play here

What really sealed the deal, though, was the promise that he (Judas), as President, could make as many shady back-room deals as he wanted, and the assurance that the more cunning and heartless he was, the richer he would become. It didn't hurt, either, that he would have ultimate power over the most important country on earth and would be exempt from any punishment, be it local, regional, national, or international. In explaining this perk, Warble intentionally left out galactic, or universal, because he had an inkling that a higher power might one day squash Judas flatter than a pancake, and he didn't want to mention that little detail to his partner in politics (AKA crime).

Instead, Warble focuses on the positive, and assures Judas the political game is an easy one to master. Warble instructs Judas on what it takes to succeed in politics: "Judas my boy, I know more about politics than anybody outside of prison. What you need is thick skin, a thick skull, wafer-thin arguments, and thinly veiled threats. Also, it doesn't hurt to have a college education—a B.S. in b.s., preferably. Just for practice, though, make sure to cheat in all your other classes."

Against their better judgment, Warble's crew acquiesces and go along with the smuggling of Judas into the 21st Century. Predictably, matters turn out as Warble intended: Judas is sent to the School of the Americas to learn how to lie convincingly, promise everything while delivering nothing, as well as all the other presidential skills. But even though Judas graduates at the top of his class, Warble and his paid goons have to finagle and fake, intimidate and bribe to secure Judas his proper position as President. Or, as Warble puts it, the citizens were too stupid to realize on their own that Judas was the right man for the job, so Warble and his cronies had to 'grease the

wheels' a little.

Judas, of course—on Warble's recommendation—had anglicized his name so that nobody would connect him with the Messiah's treasurer, who had disappeared under mysterious circumstances in the first Century C.E. What he changed it *to* doesn't really matter, though.

With that little matter all sewed up, as it were, Warble turns his attention to one last errand in time and space. But wouldn't you know it, the natives are getting restless. Mary is travel-weary and wants to remain in the 21st Century. Ward wants his vacation-- and *now*, of all times. Jacques also is grumbling about missing the WBA playoffs. Other crew members pipe up with their complaints and excuses about why they also need to go home (things Warble considers inconsequential, such as their kids' graduations, weddings, babies being born, surgeries, etc.).

"All right, all right, we'll be done soon," Warble promises. "But first, *one* more assignment, *one* final rendezvous with pivotal historical events, *one* last date with destiny."

"I'd rather have a date with Destiny's Child," Albert lets on.

"I think you *are* Density's Child, Albert," Warble snaps, having slightly misheard the master mechanic. "And I recommend you don't date yourself-- because then you would have to pay for everything. And, when you *do* date someone other than yourself, if you can't get the girl to pay, at least go Dutch—that's my way, anyway. Anyway, just one more job, and then you all can have a couple of days off—without pay, of course!" Warble reminds them, wagging his finger.

Soundtrack Note: "Say My Name" by Destiny's Child is a pretty (no pun intended, although those girls *are* mighty pretty) good bet here

Without saying another word in response (knowing it would be futile), the crew march dutifully back to the Arodnep, and silently climb aboard, still somewhat glum about being shlepped along on yet another wild goose chase, but at least relieved that they will soon be reprieved.

With a flourish and certain cachet borne of an acquired familiarity with the device, Warble activates the *GPS/CPS*.

Location: Yasger's Farm, Woodstock, New York

Date: August 15th, 1969

Soundtrack Note: Fade out here with "Woodstock" by CSN&Y

CHAPTER 56

Entering New York airspace at Methuselah speed, Warble slows the craft down as they pass Schuylerville and Watkins Glen. Following an imaginary glide slope* down to the tiny hamlet of Woodstock, he barely misses bowling over a grazing cow as he secrets the Arodnep behind a dairy barn on Max Yasger's farm.

* Warble has acquired a decided preference for airplane mode as opposed to V.T.O.L., or vertical landing mode, despite the mishap at the Greasy Grass

The cow moos in alarm, and races away from the Arodnep and its cast of characters, looking back at them wide-eyed, tail sticking straight out. Her next batch of milk will be ruined by the traumatic encounter with the time and space travelers, but Warble doesn't know that. And if he did know it, he wouldn't care, because he doesn't drink milk—like most megalomaniacs, he's lactose intolerant.

Warble and the crew bury the Arodnep under a pile of alfalfa. Warble doesn't want some nosy farmer discovering his little beauty and taking it for a joy ride.

On inspecting their handiwork and judging the Arodnep to be completely invisible beneath the pile of legumes, Warble raises his arm and points to the northeast. "Follow me, boys!" He commands, and begins trotting in the opposite direction that he pointed.

After covering a few yards, Warble glances back and sees that Mary and Marianne are still standing by the pile of livestock fodder. 'Probably talking about me,' Warble thinks.

"AND GIRLS!" Warble bellows out, furrowing his brow, and gesticulating wildly. "Do I have to spell out everything? What does gender matter at a time like this?" Warble mutters, exasperated. Mary and Marianne look over at Warble and give no response, but then suddenly begin running full speed toward their wayward comrades.

"So it's a race you want, huh, girls?" Warble says. "Well, you can't beat us—we're *men*--and besides, we've got a hard start, which is only fitting, lords of creation that we are."

Somehow Mary and Marianne not only catch up to, but overtake Warble and the other menfolk. When Warble sees they are being outpaced, he pulls up, climbs a small knoll, and begins his address to his troops (he imagines himself as General George Patton, standing atop a jeep).

"Violence is Golden!" Warble proclaims, at the top of his voice.

"Warble, how can you hold such a reprehensible viewpoint?" Mary queries, walking up to the group with Marianne. "Especially in such a peaceful and bucolic place?"

"Whether the botulism rate is any higher here than anywhere else, or higher than in the average burg, I really don't know or care, Mary," Warble replies coolly. "But I'm here to tell you that our way of life cannot be maintained without violence. And I mean to put an end to all this talk of peace and such nonsense. We are here at Woodstock to nip these freaky, psychedelic peaceniks in the butt."

"Now you're talking!" Albert says, not quite understanding what Warble means yet.

"At least *somebody* here knows which side of their bread is buttered," Warble notes, nodding at Albert, grudgingly and gradually forgiving the mechanic for his former display of disrespect (and also wanting to be on Taterskin's good side).

"We are here to sabotage these beatnik peacenik anti-establishment malcontents," Warble explains. "They think they are going to found the Peace Corps here this weekend, but instead of that we will head them off at the pass and get them to do a 180 and found the Violence Corps instead."

"The Violence Corps?" Marianne asks. "Well, I never! Why would we want them to do that?"

"Isn't it *obvious*?" Warble asks. "Especially to a *security* expert? Without violence, our soldiers and sailors, marines and flyboys will have nothing to do but play ping-pong and get themselves into other sorts of mischief. We need *wars* to keep the economy going. We need the economy to stay strong to keep consumerism ascendant. So, it's plain: the more violence we can generate, the better it is for everybody concerned.

"You see, the hippies—these tie-dyed, long-haired, dope-smoking, convention-flaunting, anti-establishment, anti-American whey, anti-capitalist wackos, weirdos, and freaks—are wrong about everything: pollution, the Vietnam War, that politicians can't be trusted, etc. And so, we've got to flip their minds over and upside down."

"How do you intend to do that?" Marianne asks, skeptical that such a thing is even possible (in a figurative sense, anyway), but curious as to what Warble might suggest.

"It will be a two-step process," Warble explains. "First, we buy all the LSD here, thus cornering the market—everyone will have to come to us to get their fix and fill of it. But first, before we dole it out (at a good profit, of course), we re-engineer it so that it contains megadoses of steroids. This will make the men big and buffed, which will make them want to show off their new-found muscles by beating people up, shooting them with machine guns, baking them with flamethrowers, defoliating them with a little Agent Orange[™], and so forth.

"It will have an even more profound effect on the female gender: It will give the women permanent PMS and menopausal symptoms, which will cause them to encourage their men to join the military—just to get them out of their hair."

"Wow!" is all Marianne can say in response, practically made speechless by the degree of duplicity and depths of depravity manifest in Warble's plan.

Comfy, though, who had been a little distracted by Jimi Hendrix' version of "The Star Spangled Banner," enters the conversation by asking what the second phase of the two-phase plan is.

Soundtrack note: Should be obvious. If not, leave them pills alone

"You see those monitors up there on the stage, people?" Warble says, pointing at the smaller amplifiers aiming back at the performers. "Those contain digital displays that prompt the singers—if you want to call that caterwauling they do singing—with the words to their songs. After all, they're all so high on marijuana and LSD and such that they barely know where they are or even *who* they are, let alone remember the song lyrics.

"As an example to prove my point, take that last song that that left-handed, bandana-wearing, purple-bedecked maniac played: he couldn't remember any of the lyrics at all, and so had to just fake it by flailing away at his electrified guitar.

"Anyway, we will bribe the guy feeding in the lyrics to replace the hippie's 'love love peace peace' nonsense with a little propaganda of our own. In this steroid-induced frenzy, the crowd will be hypnotized by the superliminal messages we'll send them."

"*Superliminal?*" Marianne asks.

"Yes, superliminal," Warble repeats. "We have nothing to hide. Everything is on the up and up here, out in the open and plain as day. Subliminal messages are so yesterday, anyway. We will give them our message straight out, no trickeration involved."

"Now what is the point of this propaganda again, Warble?" Mary asks, who had read Orwell's *1984* in high school (assigned by a hippie teacher) and is getting a queasy feeling in the pit of her stomach.

"The purpose of the propaganda is to help these poor misguided youths, Mary. To get their mind right and their thinking straight. The function of propaganda is to get people to do in cold blood what they would or could otherwise only do in the heat of passion.

"So, since these hippies have these crazy notions about peace—jeez, what a stupid idea!--we have to knock some sense into them, so to speak.

"Propaganda is your friend. Take television: All red-blooded Americans love TV and gentle toilet tissue, right? Right. Well, television is a great medium, as television can tell people what to think. When polls are taken, and viewers are told the results of those polls, they can and do change their opinions to that of the majority, because they want to fit in and it's just easier thataway, to "go with the flow"--you know.

"We have to make sure that from now on it is *real people*, like *us*, who control the polls. We can't have a return to the days of old when cows set national policy."

"Did I hear you right, Warble?" Jacques asks. "Did you say, 'cows'?"

CHAPTER 57

"You heard right, LaRue," Warble confirms. "Don't tell me you haven't heard of Polled Herefords. Not wanting to bother humans, who were busy with other things, early pollsters asked cows (which were domesticated in 1883 once the cowboy days ended) their opinions on anything and everything. Which were usually, not unlike these hippies here, all screwed up.

"As just one example of how crazy these cows were: When they were asked what their favorite type of donuts were, they answered grass, clover, alfalfa, soybean, etc., which found no market among humans and put many bakeries out of business. Think of all the bakery investors who went bankrupt heeding those polls! When all along, they should have been asking *me*—I'm more than willing to take time out to answer questions like that—anything for the good of the economy and my fellow consumers!

"And besides, I'm an expert on donuts—especially the holes. There are donuts I know I like (chocolate, jelly-filled, blueberry, etc.); donuts I know I don't like (spinach, sauerkraut, lima bean, etc.); donuts I don't know I like (but I don't know what they are, of course); and donuts I don't know I don't like (again, some I haven't tried yet, but I wouldn't like if and when I ate them, if I ever did, which I probably won't but might). And then there are all the rest."

"That's deep," Jacques replies sarcastically.

"Well, I don't mean to show you up and make you feel bad, LaRue" Warble says, "but I just can't help myself—a lion can't change his stripes, you know.

"In a classic case of stepwise refinement, the Hereford Polls were finally replaced by Gallop polls. These stemmed from the days of the Pony Express, when riders would gallop from frontier town to frontier town, asking people all sorts of nosy questions."

Mary has had enough. "Warble, what has all this" (she almost says 'nonsense') "to do with us here and now?"

"I'm getting to that, Mary. In our polls, the pinnacle of pollstering is reached. Of course, we will just ask people whose opinions we value: You can never go wrong with people who have doubled initials, such as A.A. Milne, B.B. King, C.C. Ryder, D. D. Ramone, e.e. cummings, H.H. Hornblower, J.J. "Kool" Bell, L.L. Bean, R.R. Crossing, S.S. Titanic, and Z.Z. Top."

"Z.Z. Top is not a person, it's a li'l ol' rock 'n' roll band from Texas," Albert objects.

"Says who?" Warble challenges.

"Says me—I know those guys personally—Billy Bob Thornton, Dustin the Wind, and Frank James," Albert jokes.

Warble, of course, doesn't get it. "It doesn't matter, anyway, those people aren't here. And besides, Texas is part of Mexico (thank God!) now, remember? So we have to ask *ourselves*. And who *better* to ask than us? Well, actually, *me*, as I know everything worth knowing.

Soundtrack Note: How about "Nobody Loves Me But My Mother" by B.B. King, followed by "Psycho Therapy" by the Ramones, "C.C. Rider" by Ray Charles, "Celebrate" by Kool and the Gang, and topped off with "Sharp Dressed Man" by Z.Z. Top here?

"So, here's what we do: we propagate the propaganda by changing the lyrics to all the songs that will be performed here at this festival or concert or whatever these wigged-out freaks want to call their little shindig. We promote war in every song, and in no time flat everyone will be transfixed, mesmerized, and hypnotized with no thoughts other than 'Point me to the Recruitment Office, Cats and Chicks!'"

"Such as?" Comfy asks. "What lyrics are you, in particular, planning on changing?"

"Well, I wish my favorite bands were here to play them, namely: The Bureaucrats of Utopia, Wasted Staples, Inca Hoots and Aztec Hollers, Monorail Spoonrocket, Rot Cheer, Deviated Septums, Brute Force & Ignorance, The Coal Mine Canaries, Umbrellas Turned Inside Out, The Non-

Returning Boomerangs, Rubber-Tired Dozer, Unstoppable Velocity, The Plug Uglies, Pocket Full of Rocks, Vacant Stare, Charmed Quark and the Antiquarks, Semantic Inversion, Willing Suspension of Disbelief, The Concatenated Order of Hoo-Hoos, The Society for the Prevention of Burying People Alive, Interrobang, The Border Ruffians, The Cosmetic Cucumbers, Whirr Ewe Knot, and, last but certainly not least, Mule-Donkey and the Sterile Asteroids.

"But, we'll just have to make do with these other dorks, so we'll pull the old bait and switch and the crowd will hear the following songs, thanks to our lyrical 'intrusions' and improvements:

"I'm Goin' In!" by Ten Years Later

"Feel Like I'm Fixin' To Kill Charlie" by Country Jack and the Fishmongers

"With a Little Help From My Buddies" by Joe Cocker-Spaniel

"Teach Your Recruits Well" by Bing Crosby, Still Life, Ramblin' Nash Elliott,
and the Young Rascals

"Summer in the Jungle" by Johann Sebastian and His Howling Commandos

"Everyday Bombings" by Sly and the Family Stallone

"If I Had a Machine Gun" by Pedro, Paolo, and Mary Ann

"Peace (What is it Good for?)" by Edwin R. Starr-Murrow

Soundtrack Note: If we can't get the original artists to redo these songs in this new way, perhaps we can talk "Weird" Al Jankovic into recording them

"After the closing encore rave-up, when all of them play those songs simultaneously, with their amplifiers turned up to 11, we'll be standing at the gates, handing out machine guns to the *former* flower children as they storm their way out of this pasture and move out on the double to the recruiting stations."

"You're a genius, Warble," Mary intones, shaking her head.

"I know it," Warble replies, nonchalantly. "And soon the whole world will know it, too. Not that they didn't already."

CHAPTER 58

Sadly for just about all concerned, Warble's plan works like gangbusters: All visitors to Woodstock are poisoned with steroids, the bands play militaristic songs, egging the listeners on to random acts of violence, the crowd is converted, and the draft is suspended. Why the latter? The government is swamped with so many volunteers that conscription is no longer necessary.

Peace signs become forgotten relics of a bygone era. Volkswagen goes out of business. Barber shops and soap manufacturers thrive again, and those who "bought low" enjoy boom times in the marketplace. The peace movement is relegated to a footnote in history textbooks.

Now, finally, Warble is satisfied. His work is accomplished, and he decides it's high time for he and his sidekicks to return to their own native place and time period.

Warble enters into the *GPS/CPS* the following:

Location: Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

Date: July 19th, 2009

CHAPTER 59

Warble lands the Arodnep in the spacious "back forty" of he and Mary's new mansion, and he and his entourage all pile out, happy to be "home" again (in their native time and place).

Warble hears Mary shriek, but at first thinks she is just expressing her delight at being home, to take care of her begonias and get back to her apple pie baking and other silly hobbies. But then he hears Mary yell:

"Look, Warble, across the street!"

Warble spins around. What used to be an oak savanna is now taken up by a humongous strip mall—concrete, neon, and plastic as far as the eye can see. The overarching sign reads: *McWallyland Super Duper Everything All Under One Roof Emporium*.

"Wow," Warble enthuses. "This is really neat! It makes the Maul of the Americas look like Walden Pond or pre-inundation Hetch-Hetchy!" (which places Warble considers to have been vast wastelands).

Not everyone is pleased with the changes, though. Ward notices that all the people emerging from the shops are wearing gas masks. He soon realizes why: the air reeks of chemicals, and is thick with an orange-ish haze.

Then Marianne, carefully scrutinizing the clothing worn by the shoppers, sees that, indeed, as Warble had intended, *everything* has been "price-tagged," or, to be more precise, bar-coded. Even people's foreheads are branded with UPC symbols. Nobody appears to be exempt: from babes in arms and strollers up to the most ancient and tottery old codgers, all have been "signed, sealed, and delivered."

Soundtrack note: "Signed, Sealed and Delivered" by Stevie Wonder

Mary is silently weeping. "Our neighborhood is ruined!" she laments.

"Now, now, Mary," Warble tries to console her. "I'll buy the Arodnep, and

you can sit in it and go back in time and gaze at that worthless, non-productive field any time you want—just leave the location the same, and change the date back...wait a minute: that won't work! Well, just keep going back in time until you see the empty lot again."

"Empty lot!" Mary screams. "Empty lot!!" she repeats. "That was NOT an empty lot—it was full of trees and wildflowers and birds and bees and butterflies and..."

"Now, Mary, calm yourself. I'll take care of everything," Warble tries to comfort his wife.

As Warble is about to begin negotiations with Comfy on terms for purchasing the Arodnep, he notices two officers exit a police squad car parked on the street between his giant lawn (actually, it might help you to visualize it if you recall to mind the one in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," except that there is no ocean close by) and the mall (perhaps you'd like to envision the mall as the ocean).

Anyway, the officers of the law walk toward Warble with a purpose, on the alert and poised for action. The lead officer, Matt Landreaux, has one hand on his service revolver, while his partner, Martin Eising, speaks into the radio strapped to his shoulder.

Soundtrack note: "Laundromat" by Rory Gallagher

Seeing who the officers have "targeted," the rest of the group back away from Warble, leaving him alone in the middle of his back yard, staring non-plussed at the approaching lawmen.

Warble thinks he realizes what the pair must be up to. He turns to his partners in time and space travel and reveals the inner workings of his mind: "Probably here to inform me about my winning the Nobel Peace Prize, Consumer of the Year, Capitalist of the Century, etc. You can stick around and watch, if you like, just don't any of you stand between Ward and I as he makes a record of this glorious event with my camera."

"Warble Poundcake McGorkle?" officer Landreaux asks, verifying Warble's

identity.

"Yes?" Warble responds, as he silently debates with himself over whether he should invite the officers into the house for coffee and donuts. He can't decide which setting will make for better photo ops—his kitchen or his back yard.

Landreaux yanks the camera containing the photographic portfolio of Warble's 'marvelous deeds' --which Warble was in the process of passing to Ward so that his image consultant could record the moment--away from Warble's vice-like grasp.

"Label that 'confiscated evidence' and seal it in a ziplock bag," Landreaux tells his partner. Directing his attention back to Warble, he informs him: "You are under arrest for CAH/CAU," pronouncing the charge as if it were a word rather than spelling out the letters individually, so that it sounds somewhat like a crow saying, 'caw caw.'

Officer Landreaux deftly grabs one of Warble's arms, and unhooks the handcuffs hanging from the side of his belt with the other.

In the blink of an eye, Warble is cuffed, and officer Eising begins reading Warble his Miranda rights, or more specifically, reciting them from memory: "You have the right to keep your trap shut, and I hope you do, ..." when Warble interrupts him, turning to officer Landreaux and addressing him:

"Caca? You're arresting me for *Caca*?" Warble pitifully bleats, more confused than he's ever been in his life (which is really saying something).

"That's right, Mr. McGorkle. CAH/CAU: Crimes Against Humanity/Crimes Against the Universe. Your unwarranted and unauthorized meddling and intervention in the past has caused--just to name a few things off the top of my head--the poles to reverse polarity; a monumental increase in pollution, crime, global warming, catastrophic hurricanes and other weather disasters; social unrest to spiral out of control; and the Rolling Stones to do yet another farewell tour."

Warble panics. "Officer, take these handcuffs off immediately!" he

demands.

"Why, what's your problem?" officer Landreaux responds dryly, expecting a complaint that the cuffs are too tight or that the subject is allergic to titanium.

"How do you expect me to bribe you if I can't even reach my wallet?" Warble reasons.

At this, officer Landreaux frowns, shakes his head, turns to his partner and says, "Add 'Impersonating a Politician' to the charges against Mr. McGorkle."

"MARY, SAVE ME!" Warble yells out plaintively, realizing his bribery attempt has utterly failed. "My wrists are getting claustrophobic! And besides that, I can't scratch me bum now!"

CHAPTER 60

Mary's maternal instinct (she doesn't have any children, and has to waste it all on Warble) kicks in. "Must save Warble, must save Warble," she begins muttering under her breath to herself, over and over, gritting her teeth fiercely, fighting back the tears.

Warble forces himself to calm down and think logically. He meditates for a few seconds, and then asks the officers: "So, besides those minor things you mentioned earlier, just what did I do that was so bad?"

The officers look at each other, and raise their eyebrows. Officer Landreaux sighs and replies: "Your globalization scheme caused Epcot Center to morph from a poor man's world tour to a museum of *former* world culture. Due to your mucking about where you had no business, a homogeneous world culture supplanted the beautiful and varied national cultures we previously enjoyed. Now everyone lives exactly the same everywhere. We eat the same food, wear the same clothes, listen to the same music, build using the same style of architecture, and speak the same language (American)."

"What's wrong with that?" Warble rebuts, trying to defend himself and minimize matters.

Officer Landreaux ignores Warble's interruption, and continues: "Even the literal landscape, or surroundings, became the same for everyone everywhere, as the mountains were leveled to extract every last bit of mineral wealth and to supposedly "level the consuming field," as you put it, for everyone. After your monkey wrenching—or King Kong wrenching, if you will—a person can no longer tell if he is in Nairobi or San Francisco, London or Kathmandu."

"Oh, give me a break, cut me some slack. After all, stuffing happens. Besides, what's the problem, anyway?" Warble asks, truly perplexed.

Officer Eising can't take any more. "You're a hopeless case, McGorkle! You're incorrigible! You're a habitual criminal, and ought to be..." He loses control, whips out his nightstick, and raises it above his head.

As he is about to bring his billy club crashing down on Warble's cranium, his partner intervenes. "Don't do that, Martin! We don't want him to get off on a technicality now, do we?"

The danger of that happening is enough to calm officer Eising down. Once he sees that his partner has gained control of his emotions again, Landreaux instructs him, "Now, finish reading Mr. McGorkle his rights."

"Mr. McGorkle," officer Eising complies, "Everything you say WILL be used against you in a court of law, you can bet on that. You can legally hire a shark to try to get you off, but take it from me: You shouldn't waste your time. Nobody wants to defend the likes of you, and you haven't got a chance in Dallas of winning your case, anyway. So, in other words: FUGITABOUTIT!"

During the recitation of the Miranda Rights (2009 edition), Warble's heart begins drumming a martial tattoo against his ribs. He now suddenly recalls the details about the nightmare he had had about Mary being shot by snipers, and comes up with a plan to get out of his predicament, which he considers to be even worse than the one in which Mary found herself in his dream.

Needing to communicate with Mary without the policemen decoding the message and intervening, he reverts to an old trick he and Mary used to use in high school to send 'love notes' to each other in class: Once Warble and Mary's eyebeams intertwine (after he "catches her eye," that is, so to speak) Warble sends Mary a Morse code message using his eyelids: Winking with his left eye represents a dot; winking with his right eye represents a dash. Officer Eising, as well as many of Warble and Mary's traveling companions, notice Warble's strange behavior but assume he is losing his composure and having a nervous breakdown, or perhaps is just getting fresh with Mary.

Marianne, a little embarrassed by what she considers to be a blatant public display of affection, is about to suggest that the pair "Get a Room!" when she sees Mary dash (no pun intended) for the Arodnep. Reaching into the console, Mary flips open the emergency panel.

Officer Landreaux, who is holding on to Warble with one arm to prevent an escape attempt on his part, orders his partner: "Stop her! She's trying to get away or find a laser gun or something! Her maternal or spousal instinct is running amok!"

That last was a shrewd insight on Officer Landreaux's part. That's why he's the lead officer, I guess.

As Officer Eising sprints toward Mary and the Arodnap, Mary frantically pushes the back button, over and over. As she does so, an overlay of each successive trip is superimposed on the present. All present gaze around themselves in wonder as they see faint images of the previous trips, in reverse chronological order of when the trips were taken, flashing in front of them: Woodstock/Violence Corps, Israel/Judas, St. Louis/Dam Nation, and so on.

Just as officer Eising grabs Mary and begins to pull her away (talk about a cliffhanger!), she has reached the end: Cooperstown/Preemptive Strikes. She is able to get *just* enough finger pressure on the back button one last time, and then hold it in *just* long enough (.314 seconds, as you might recall).

Mary blinks, and gradually, the scene seen in washed-out hues takes on rich and vibrant color and completely replaces the previous present—the 2009 of *McWallyland*, rampant pollution, etc. Mary sees the gang here in she and Warble's back yard, standing around the Arodnap, as Comfy explains its features. The officers are gone, as is their squad car. Warble is no longer handcuffed. Across the street is the oak savanna—the mega strip mall is gone. The air is (comparatively, anyway) fresh and clean.

All are admiring the Arodnap, listening to Comfy Stolen extol its virtues and cool features. It seems nobody but Mary has any memory of the scrapes they had all been in together and just returned from. Warble is proceeding exactly as he had the first time: telling everyone to climb aboard, that they were going to take the Arodnap for a "spin" to the past.

Mary rushes into the house, reaches into her kitchen drawer, and pulls out a hammer. Racing back outside, she is about to smash the GPS/CPS unit, rendering the futuristic Arodnap inoperable.

Soundtrack note: "If I Had a Hammer" by Peter, Paul and Mary

CHAPTER the LAST

"Hold your horses!" Comfy says, holding up an arm in a gesture that looks like a policeman indicating to pedestrians that they should not proceed into the crosswalk yet, or if they have already done so, to stop and go back to the sidewalk or median behind them and wait patiently until he gives them the "go ahead" signal. Actually, to some Comfy's gesture may remind them of the "Heil Hitler" salute, but that image is so contradictory and contrary to what's really going on here that any one who would think of it is probably overdue to take their mind in to their shrink's office for some maintenance work.

"Wait, Mary! It can go forward, too, you know!" Comfy informs her, grasping at straws, not knowing just what Mary's problem is.

"You mean, into the future?" Mary inquires, hammer suspended in mid-air over her head.

"That's exactly what I mean," Comfy sighs, sensing he 'hit the jackpot,' relieved that Mary didn't break up the sole prototype of the Arodnap—his boss, B.O. Wulf, would've had his head on a platter had he allowed it to get damaged, let alone smashed to smithereens by a hammer-wielding housewife.

"It hasn't been fully tested yet, but if you're willing to try it, then so am I. Please, put the hammer *down*, Mary," Comfy pleads.

"Yeah, Mary, what are you *thinkin'?*" Warble adds. "Do you know how much this thing *costs?* 'You break it, you own it.' After you got done paying for this marvel, you wouldn't be able to afford begonias for the rest of your born days!"

"Warble...honey?" Mary begins. "Will you do me a big favor?"

"Well, as long as it's not something really hard, or gross like clipping your toenails, or something like that," Warble responds warily.

"Oh, it's something easy," Mary says, and then fixes Warble with her 'you'd

better really listen or you've had it, buster' look. She walks up to Warble and whispers in his ear: "Instead of test-driving into the past, let's go into the future."

Warble considers Mary's request for a few seconds (3.14, to be exact). "Well, OK, if you insist, Mary. I don't know why you're so selfish and stubborn about it, though."

Warble pulls the same trick as before (getting Comfy and Albert to look behind them). But this time, there is one key difference: When Warble quickly enters the data into the GPS/CPS it is:

Location: Scotia, California

Date: June 22nd, 2109

Warble presses the ignition switch. The Arodnep hums to life. He turns his head and asks if all are aboard and ready for departure.

"Aye, aye, captain!" they respond, in unison. Warble hates that. He winces, pulls the throttle back, and away they fly, slipping the surly bonds of earth, into the wild blue yonder, and into the future. But that's a story for another day.

Soundtrack note: "What's Going On?" by Taste

~~~~~ FINIS ~~~~~