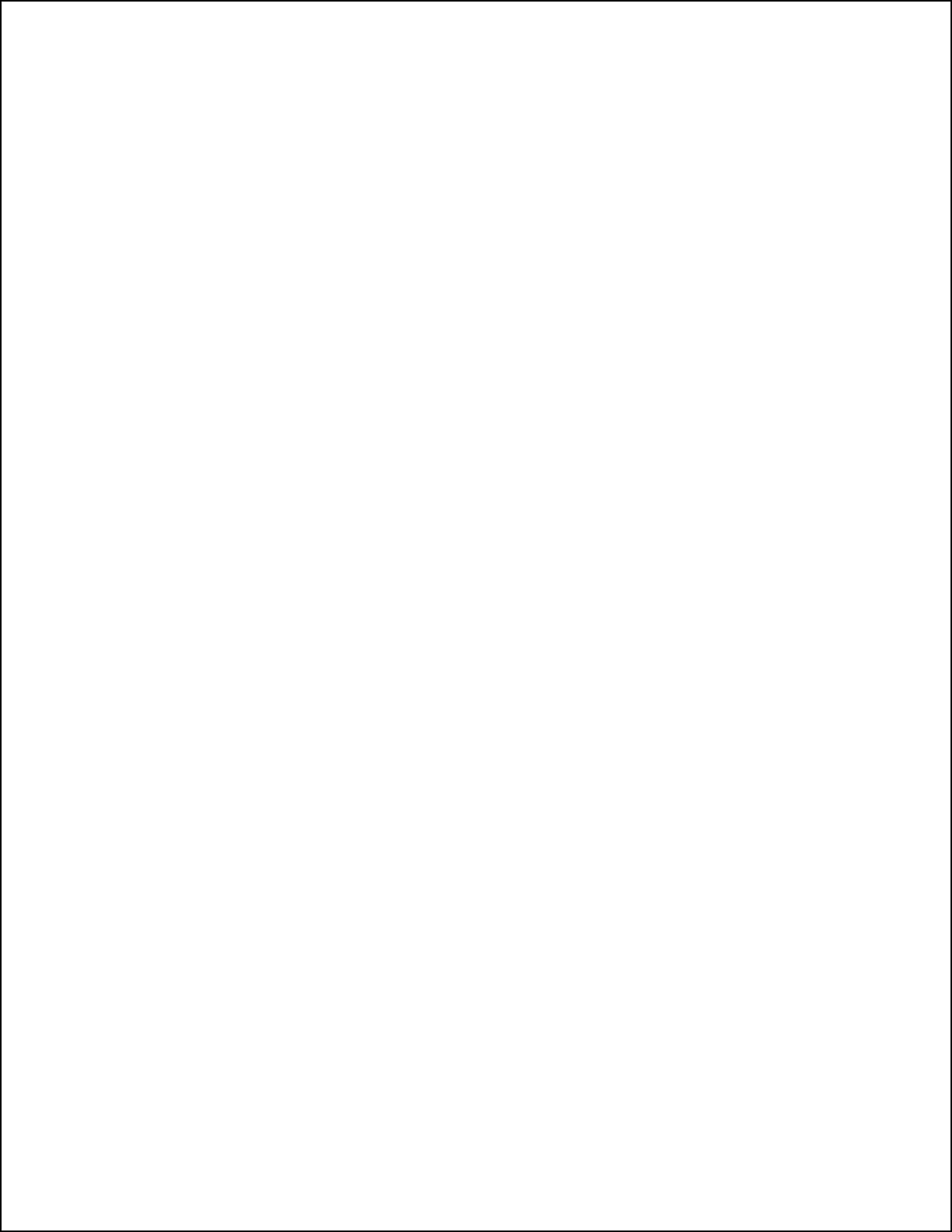


The Madd Homecoming

Rantings From Inside Film School

by

stevie T



The Madd Prof – prologue 1

Hollywood is DEAD!

Break out the chalk lines and body bags we got another creative industry biting the dust. Oh sure, you can still find it walking around, talking and doing business just like it always has but that's because, like a punch drunk stumble bum who's just taken the last one of too many shots to the cranium and lurches blindly towards his corner not realizing that the tingly feeling in his head and the triple vision is from bursting blood vessels that will soon rend him from non compos mentis to the big sleep, it just doesn't know it yet. I'm not talking about the recent labor troubles here, although they could be construed as the first of an alarming increase in bloody phlegm on the handkerchief for what one had believed to be just a cold, but now is giving worrisome signs of being something a tad bit more insidious. Don't get me wrong, I love Hollywood, always have. It has been the dream factory world champ for a hundred years give or take. No one could touch it and for good reason. It had two formidable weapons that secured its place in the pantheon and guaranteed that if you wanted to make a movie you had to do it in or through Hollywood. Don't worry I'm not going to use the old left right combo metaphor here. If we define Hollywood by these two aspects we come up with something like:

Hollywood (hal e wood) [HOLLY + WOOD] 1. A manufacturing industry with a closed esotericTalent pool. 2. A business enterprise structured with a monolithic distribution system.

Now this talent pool would include just about everybody involved in the making of a movie except actors and writers. As their respective crafts are almost completely internalized they do not require arcane knowledge or obscure technology to practice their arts. Just a pen and paper or a feather boa will suffice. This in no way is meant to diminish their singular and collective contributions to this art form, which, at the very least, is monumental. No, I'm talking about the others. The ones with job names as mystical and magical as their practice, Grips, Gaffers, Directors, Cinematographers, Sound Designers, Editors, Special Effects, and lets not forget the Best Boy all contribute to this closed cycle. Yes, I include Directors here, as they have to have at least a functioning knowledge of the crafts under their stewardship. Like the guilds and unions of some medieval Saxony village, these modern day societies protected and, in a sense, ran this town. I could also make reference here to them being harder to penetrate than a, insert your own ethnic and/or religious label for a person of high moral caliber, but I won't.

As to the distribution system, it's fairly self-explanatory. Even if you were to master the crafts of film making and create a reasonably good motion picture you still had

to get someone to distribute it and that wasn't going to happen if all of the distributors were, at first, owned by and then in collusion with the studios. Every once in a while you might find a distributor who would do a "Kid, kid, come here, kid. I like you, so I'm gonna do you a favor, kid. You got talent so I'm gonna distribute your little movie here. And because of my good nature, I'm gonna promise you the sun, the moon, and the stars." Of course you would sign over your film, all the while visions of dollar bills danced in your head as you thought to pay back all those aunts and uncles and dentists for their faith and dollars in you. Of course you'd never see a dime. There was an old adage in Hollywood that stated: unless you had other films in the pipeline, distributors were loath to pay you the proceeds from the first.

There's a New Sheriff in Town

Then the corporations showed up, like sharks on the scent of blood, smelling the potential for vast profits. As far as they were concerned, what they found here was nothing more than a bunch of mom and pop operations without quantifiable business practices. What they wanted was a way to make movies on a spreadsheet. To do that they had to first gain control over and diminish the power of the temple. They had to take the 'closed' and the 'esoteric' out of the talent pool and make it more of a science. And where better to study science than school. So, like Emeril spicing a gumbo, Bam, there were film schools cranking out the Gen Next of filmmakers.

Next on the list of things to do was modernize the film making process. Money was poured into R&D. New technologies were developed. All aimed at streamlining the process of film making and replacing one arcane method with another that wasn't controlled or even understood by the high priests. The dinosaurs of the business grumbled and rumbled and fell to the ground as the film schoolers took up the new technologies with abandon and ran off to make movies. The seeds had been planted. All the corporations had to do was trim the bushes and harvest the crops.

Now that filmmaking was on the path to being quantified, the corporations next turned their collective gaze on the distribution process. They didn't want to deconstruct the system. They loved the setup. It's one of the main reasons they came to town in the first place. The Soda Pop King was no dummy; it knew the value of a close, if not incestuous, symbiosis between manufacturer and distributor. Like the guy in the movie said, "Keep your friends close, and your distributors closer". Anyway, what they wanted was more. And the Corporations said, "Let there be Cable" and lo there was three hundred channels of 'stuff' on the TV to choose from. "And while we're at it, let there be Home Video." And all was good. At least for a while...

Reap What You Sow ;(

The Corps were fat and sassy and getting fatter. Technology was allowing amazing things to be done in the filmic arts. Special Effects became all the rage. The event film was born. Then High Definition Video came along and the corporations were all a twitter. Could this finally be the salvation they had sought after for so long? Would Hi-Def finally replace the one last holdout from the days when magicians ruled the realm. I speak, of course, of celluloid. Film. The thing that started it all in the first place. It was the last, not withstanding humans, of the not completely quantifiable and it bugged the heck out of them. It hasn't happened as yet, but the jackals are circling. Still, all in all, things were good. There were more film schools cranking out more filmmakers than ever before. I think my pet fish even went to film school. And there were so many more outlets in which to shovel the 'product' that even an independent film could find distribution.

And then something happened. The monster outgrew his shackles and escaped from Frankenstein's lab, the genie got out of the bottle, and Pandora opened that damned box. Actually it had been happening for quite some time, but that doesn't make for good story telling. Technology grew up and threw down. And Athena, goddess of technology, ran rampant through the streets of the city giving everyone a handheld Hi-Def video camera and said "Go forth and make movies." And, since everyone had gone to film school, that's just what they did. And the people were happy. And then, as people tend to do, they were sad. For they had no way to show off their brand new shiny movies. So Athena, rampantly running again, comes to them and says, "Don't be sad. For I have created a thing I like to call 'The Internet' that you can use to show your little movies." And they did just that and there was joy throughout the land. Everywhere that is, except in the high up offices of the Corporations. Seeing what they had wrought upon themselves they sat and brooded and schemed and tried to think of ways to make a profit out of even this.

Moral of the Story?

There is no moral. Come on, this is Hollywood, a city famous for not having any morals. But as the 'New Media' frontier outs the 'Old Media' empire and packs of feral paparazzi chase half starved, drug addled celebutant wannabes down the tumbleweed strewn blocks of crumbling 'Loft' apartments you can rest assured that somewhere, somehow, by God, there will be entertainment.

Yes? You have a question? What is 'New Media'? I really have no idea what 'New Media' is other than that it comes from an open talent pool, a democratized distribution system and a short attention span. I'm sorry, what were we talking about?

The Madd Prof – prologue 2

Manifesto for Chaos

I look out at the world - do you know what I see? Despair. Long green lines of despair huddled under a pink blue sky of meaninglessness. That's what I see when I look out at the world. So I don't look anymore. Instead I rack focus, turn the gaze inward in search of truth and beauty - there I find a hollowed out cow carcass and an overdue library book with a three day old bologna sandwich pressed between it's pages and I can't decide which is the truth and which is the beauty so I eat the sandwich and move on.

I keep forgetting to look at the title of the book.

A while back I came across this odd little website/social network called - damn! - I forget the name now.

Oh well - not important. The point is this was a gaggle from the rebel alliance all puffed up with enough pomp and circumstance to beat the band as they professed to be the second coming of the "Age of New Media" - knock Hollywood on its ear - turn the entertainment world upside-down - rock the casbah - in an attempt to create some sort of 'show' - I can't tell if it's for the net or, God forbid, old school television or what - from the ground up - as opposed to from the top down. Let the proletariat run the show - a miniature Russian revolution courtesy of the net. All headed up by a mysterious leader - the person pulling the levers - don't look behind the curtain - inaccessible - like a prescription for a cult. Now, I'm sure this all started out with the best of intentions - just like the Russian revolution - and, like said revolution, things started to go downhill fast with a few people jockeying for power and getting control of the flood gates of information - cabals being formed and secret societies hatching plots—all while the supreme leader - the creator - slept - or was otherwise occupied. Unkempt, the creation starts to grow wild and out of control until it loses its direction and falls...

Bunch of film school dropouts...

And then it struck me - what all of this really was - this show - this site - this experiment. It was a joke - a bet made at some once trendy little micro brewery/pub/bistro over too many pints of oatmeal rose porter and a plate of garlic fires by two friends, of the computer literati, deciding it would be fun to set up this experiment and see how far it would run - on its own - without any involvement from on high. They got a good chuckle, ordered another round and some of those spinach and shitake mushroom empanadas with salsa on the side and began to draw up the plan on a paper napkin. What they didn't realize was that the plan actually made sense - that the monster could exist - that they could one day shout, "It's Alive!"

It's Alive!". But they seem to have forgotten about their baby - left the cake out in the rain - as this beast of their creation - barely a man-child - begins to crawl up and out of its primordial ooze in search of a nurturing teat to suckle.

Well, I'm here to say, I'll be that teat - suckle that beast - give it shelter from the storm. They say they want a revolution - beat Hollywood from the outside in. I'll give them a revolution - and not on the 'x' plane or the 'y' plane, but on the 'z' plane, baby, yeah!

I'm declaring war on the revolutionaries - beat them at their own game - fight them from the outside in and the inside out. There's a new sheriff in town and his name is Uly de Bris, professor at film studies.

So I finally went back and sat on the cow carcass and picked up the book and opened it to the title page - and I laughed till I cried.

It read: "Manifesto for Chaos" by Uly de Bris.

Let's get this party started!

The Madd Prof – chapter 1

"Welcome to the Jungle"

It's dark out now -- that's when they come -- when it's dark. You think you find a spot that's fortified - where they can't get at you - but still they come. Their screams like the hollow grind of a diesel truck horn on the salt encrusted interstate heading to the abyss. A lone traveler sitting in an all night diner searching for a welcome face or some 'thing' to eat from a carte du jour that offers its wares by the kaleidoscope of putrid colored stains on this laminated Pollock. The waitress moves with the cunning efficiency of a malignant tumor and plays the death match game of who will crack first. The trick is to keep breathing - hold to the now - the here - through which all future hope plunges to the past.

Please to meet you - won't you guess my name

By way of introduction let me tell you a little bit about myself. I'm Kurtz in the jungle - not 'the' Kurtz - but the other Kurtz - Colonel Kurtz - and it was the other jungle - bloated and sitting in the dark with the malaria sweats - face painted and my rabble of myrmidon Montagnard troops gathered round for benediction - while I wrestle with a bad hair day and wait for the clerk collecting the unpaid debt. I'm Hunter Thompson on the third day of a five-day hangover - eyes bulging - one lens missing from my Ray Bans - cigarette holder jutting Roosevelt style from a wicked grin - a bandoleer filled with vials of ether strapped across my chest - as I root around in my carryall for the .455 Webley Mk VI Break Top that I will use to settle the argument I'm having with you. I'm a flea bit peanut monkey and all my friends are junkies. I'm Carlos Castaneda leading you on a journey through the eye of a jackal and into the Astral Plane where I will leave you stranded on a precipice in the back of your mind - forever trapped within the origami of your thoughts. I'm the one whose skin always sheens from the oozing pores that desperately try to regurgitate the putrid decay that grows within. I am the stench of death.

And, I am your worst nightmare in the daytime.

For I am the one charged with teaching your children - those spoiled offspring - that beastly brood. You remember, the ones you shuffle off and into the care of complete strangers while you try to claw back the life you thought was yours with liposuctions and meditation classes, raw food diets and secret lovers. You think that because you spend a great deal of money to accommodate your simpering litter in these hallowed halls that they are safe and well tended. And that couldn't be further

from the truth. Let me school you on the reality - lest you've forgotten the age old axiom - those who can't - teach! It's a basic rule of life - a Darwinian truth - a numeric certainty - you can't escape it. So get used to it. Your children are being instructed on life's lessons by the failures of the world. The ones who can't compete in the day to day and instead stand on the sidelines and watch as the bile of disappointment begins to bubble and churn inside - consuming - leaving them septic to anything decent and pure. That's who teaches your children. That's who I am.

But what's puzzling you is the nature of my game

I know what they'll say - they'll say that he's have gone off the reservation - gone native - that there's no controlling him now. And they'll be right. They'll have to end it. They won't be able to deal with this lack of control. They'll send someone and it will be two in the back of the head - don't forget the cannoli.

I hope I haven't been too messianic, or a trifle too satanic

The waitress finally arrives. She doesn't take my order but hands me a check for food I didn't ask for and tells me to pay at the register. Not knowing the steps to this dance, I comply. While waiting at the register I pick up a book of matches hawking the delights of the nightclub next door.

It says - Welcome to The Jungle - we got fun and games...

The Madd Prof – chapter 2

"Tragic Magic"

Walking down these crumbling streets with no name in a city I once knew like the back of my hand I pass the ghosts of former lovers and friends long since gone into the void of darkness. Death - the great equalizer - an exclusive club whose membership knows no bounds - except one. The place of no return where all that unclaimed parcel post and lost airline luggage is delivered onto a carousel that spins for no one. These are my thoughts as I look for a lost address - search for a hidden meaning behind this life that knows no death - caught up in a dance where the music won't stop. Then it hits me - these ghosts - these friends and lovers lost to time are staring at me as if they witness my presence - as if they can see me for whom I am really - deep in my soul. Are they the specters or am I. Unsettled, I quickly move up the street towards what I believe to be my destination while the heaventree of stars hang with humid nightblue fruit.

If you see something that looks like a star and it's shooting up out of the ground

I teach a course in comparative film studies at this low rent college located on the hind side of humanity about forty miles outside of God's knowledge. Needless to say it is quiet out here. Anyway - one of the things I try and get my students to do - when they're sober and not tied up in some emotional rescue from being jilted by a current/former lover - is get them to dissect the modern classics of cinema. Open their eyes to the process - the ingredients that make a great film great. Try to unearth the magic buried between the seams of real art --find the patterns - the rhythms - the music of this art - and thereby reflect on what it takes to make something great - the alchemy that must be performed to take these base elements and make gold or - ultimately - immortality. For that is what creating art is all about - hoping to create something that will make you immortal. So about half way through this course run I lay "Apocalypse Now" on the half dozing group of Spielberg and Coppola wannabes to really jolt them into thinking about something other than getting out of school and leaving this berg behind for the greater vistas of Hollywood - success - a beach house in Malibu - and clubbing with Paris. So we begin by comparing the film to the book by Conrad and then we look at it compared to other quest films and this goes on without end. And then I lay my hole card on them - I tell them to compare it to "The Wizard of Oz" - that kids movie - that fairy tale. And they balk - and they argue - and they protest - and then they see it - the crystal purity of it - the horror. "Apocalypse Now" is the nightmare version of "Wizard of Oz". The boat --transported by the tornado of a giant helicopter - plops down onto the Nung river - their yellow brick road. Willard as a bitter over the hill burnout version of Dorothy whose been up this road or one like it too many times and prays for it to end. Willard is guided on this journey by the crew, peopled as it is with the scarecrow - Mr. Clean, the cowardly lion - Chef, and the tin man - Chief, who

work this boat on it's journey to hell. And then there is Lance, who in Willard finds the last vestiges of a carefree doppelganger, a future past version of himself that has yet to lose the innocence that is but a distant memory to Willard. Even the little dog Toto makes an appearance from under the carnage of the overly strafed sampan. The Vietcong bringing in a stellar performance as the flying monkey boys of the wicked witch - who - in an ominous performance - is portrayed by the war ravaging around them - propelling them forward as it gives chase. Then there is the wild-eyed photojournalist as mayor of a Munchkinville peopled by those hollow eyed Montagnard loyalists. And all of them in search or fear of the great wizard who resides at the end of this road - this Colonel Kurtz - this Oz - where, in the first shot of him, they pull back the curtain and we get a shadowy glimpse of the man who - in his own search for a paradise - finds the cancerous hell within. Thus the warning - don't look behind the curtain.

Pave paradise - with napalm - put up a parking lot

This never fails to get their attention - to perk them up - to make them stop thinking this is some bullshit class they've got to take to graduate - attendance goes up and participation increases like it's a chuggin' contest at a frat party. And I get the satisfaction of having generated a spark in their little minds. Created a little magic in their otherwise two dimensional lives. It's one of my small victories.

If you had just a minute to breathe and they granted you one final wish would you ask for something like another chance

So I get to my destination - this door - this forgotten memory - this hollow echo of past circumstance only to find that it opens onto a vast expanse of desert - infinite - desolate - nothingness. The last refuge of the poet. So I turn back - this isn't what I remember - and step into the street only to be confronted by a girl I once new - older now - and dead - but still with a spark of the vitality that I remember from our interlude together. She asks me why I look so sad - I tell her that I have become immortal and have witnessed the passing of all my friends and lovers - including her. She smiles and whispers in my ear - You've got to lose the tragic in order to hold onto the magic.

And the thing that you're hearing is only the sound of the low spark of high-heeled boys

The Madd Prof – chapter 3

"Daze of Confussion"

I did something once - a long time ago - or maybe it was yesterday - that made me famous for a while - then it made me immortal. Famous is OK as far as restaurants and nightclubs go - it's the immortality thing that tends to grind on you. Funny - I can't remember now what it was I did to get this way - I guess it makes no difference. Being immortal is like being dead - once it becomes you there's no turning back. Don't get me wrong there are some advantages to being immortal - compound interest actually starts to make sense - and lifetime warranties have a hilarious investment return. My problem right now is that the thieves and pimps who kill good men like dogs and roam free in the shallow money trench of that long plastic hallway that is entertainment have come across my existence - my story - my life - and they want to make a movie. And here I am trying to escape this - history - the nightmare from which I am trying to awake.

I saw you standing with the wind and rain in your face

There are rules to filmmaking - certain basic laws that one must learn if they are ever going to make a cohesive and coherent motion picture based in some sort of reality where the laws of physics apply. I teach a course in this to a bunch of spoiled overfed delinquents posing as future members of the human race - it's called, colorfully enough - The Rules of Film. Look, I submitted something else but that's what ended up in the catalogue raisonné.

Oh, the last time I saw Paris in the streets, in the rain

There was a girl in this class - not a true beauty - but there was something about her - beyond that beauty of youth that entices a man of years - and letters - to an early grave or a life of insane ramblings - a spark behind the eyes that ignites the imagination - a muse to the arts of love that seduces and incites even the most stable of minds - so I made her my teaching assistant.

As we're listening to Chet Baker on the beach, in the sand

Of course my charges all want to chuck the rules - rewrite the book - and make things up as they go - because they're smarter than everyone who's come before. So

I let them. And they run off and shoot the next two minute Citizen Kane - a couple of weeks later they're back with large piles of cinematic crap. So we start over - at the beginning - with the rules - and I tell them in my most sagely and sensei tone - you must have mastery of the rules only then can you break them.

And at night the moon is shining on a clear and cloudless night

As an example I show these overgrown rug rats a scene from the movie "Q & A" made by that master craftsman, Sidney Lumet who gives us a perfect lesson in breaking the rules for a purpose. In short the rule here is one of the basic tenets - establishing a line and not crossing it - the line is the 'x' plane of your master shot - simply put - the horizon line - now, as the rules have it you can place your camera anywhere on a 180 degree arc around this line and keep your actors in an orientation to each other and the audience - move across that line by even one degree and the objects on screen reverse themselves and the audience becomes disoriented - this is called crossing the line.

And as I walk along the boulevards with you, once again

Nick Nolte plays a New York cop who goes by his own rules. In a scene towards the beginning Nolte is brought into the assistant DA's office for a Q & A about a shooting that's just gone down. The scene starts with a few long moments of idle chatter - they're all old friends here - nothing really bad is going to happen here. Then, a couple of minutes in Lumet purposely establishes a new horizon line with a new master from the other side of the room. At this point the idle chatter stops and the questions begin and Nolte starts to lie and Lumet cuts to a close up of Nolte just across the line and Nolte is flopped in the frame - looking the other way - or the audience is looking at him on the wrong side - Nolte has crossed the line as a cop - he's lying to cover up. Now, of course most of the audience has never heard of this rule - this crossing the line - but what they do know is something has just occurred that turns things on their head - they witness that Nolte has crossed from one side of the frame to the other - things are backwards and they are unsettled.

And I'm looking at the colour of the leaves, in your hand

Of course - now they get it - these spawn of the damned - and they all want to run right out and interject this trick into their black and white Chinatowns. They just don't get it. So I take the teaching assistant out for coffee - you remember - the one I spoke of earlier - and I tell her about a movie I want to make. She thinks it's genius - we make love.

When the leaves come falling down

And that's why I find myself right now in a big red caddie convertible - top down - doing a hundred and twenty across the desert highway - martini in hand and my lawyer in the passenger seat - he says he'll handle these rat bastards that want to invade my life with a camera - but I don't know - right now he's having trouble handling the scream bats as they dive and dance at the car.

In September, when the leaves come falling down

The Madd Prof – chapter 4

"Mother's Milk"

It hits you hard at first - that smell - like a cancerous influence - it invades and overwhelms the senses methodically - one by one. First the olfactory - singeing the membrane of all predetermination - the facial protuberance to forever remain the hollowed out victim of this fevered nightmare. Next is taste - it envelops like a gummy slick of putrid oil mixed with the effluence of ocean water as it sweeps across the glossa - to remain a haunting memory. The eyes burn - tearing from the acrid hostility that mugs and lay siege to the ocular orbs - all but blinding to sights better not looked upon. You begin to feel it on your skin - like a thick wet wool blanket on a hot day - it hangs cloying - suffocating - dragging you down until you begin to hear it laughing the jesters laugh of dispirit. Of course this is just your body's way of telling you that - wherever you are - you should be some place else - and now. That's what assaults you as you come across the hill and look down into the landfill - that gorge of human rejection - that vault of mankind's desertion. I can make a stand here - hide out from these black habited angels of death - their weapons of destruction hid neatly 'neath their robes of creed. They will not step foot on this blasphemous unconsecrated ground. Here I will wait till they pass me over and move on to their next trophy.

I don't want to be no chalk line drawing – I just want to see

I'm standing in line at the local Starbucks with my entire class in line behind me - no we are not all out on a career day applying for jobs as baristas - we're on a field trip of my design - it's not an 'official' field trip - just a clever little something I came up with to prove a point and get a cup of joe while I'm at it. But I have gotten ahead of myself.

Toe-tagged question mark, until identifying – I just want to see

Of course all my students want to know what makes a film successful - monetarily - critically they don't give a crap - this is the show me the money generation and they're going to get theirs - come hell or high water. So we look at the latest box office bonanza's to try and figure out the common thread. But they are too close to their subject to formulate any kind of rational observations beyond the technique. So I suggest to them that we pull back - re-establish our point of reference - look at the bigger picture - and that takes us to Starbucks for a mocha-frapa-latte grande.

Don't want to fuse to no economy seat – I just want to see

So, after we all order our steaming hot milk foamed caffeinated beverages from - I always delight in pointing out to these vapid Terrantino's - some of my former students now happily ensconced in the rat race of their destiny - we sit and ponder the great mystery of life - how to make a shitload of money. I ask them what they think it is that makes Starbucks the success that it has been. Brilliant marketing plan - filling an untapped market - seductive indoctrination into a cult-like situation with brain programming word sets that redefine objects with alternate language - What? Marketing major - go figure.

Fuel some fireball at thirty thousand feet – I just want to see

I tell my teaching assistant to get me one of those maple scones - I swear they'll be the death of me - while I ask this group of excuses for sentient beings what their first memory is - the one buried deep in foundation of their misfiring synapse. I won't bother with the myriad answers - all incorrect - it's good to be the professor - that geyser forth from this mob of miscreants. Their first real memory is of that fleshy orb - bloated and heaving - the directions clearly marked with a dissimilar color - protruding bull's-eye – rushing heaven-sent towards the visage - docking naturally - a perfect fit - with the oral cavity. Ah sweet nectar - life's sustenance – this honey of the gods. And that's what made Starbucks the success it is today. Breast feeding. They are speechless - dumbfounded - they thinkest me offest my rocker. My teaching assistant returns with a blueberry scone - they're out of the maple. I throw a fit - she flips me off and eats the scone.

I don't want to face no hollowed eyed ending – I just want to see

Settle down everybody - let me explain. Look at what's in the cup you're holding - a little coffee and a whole lot of warm frothy milk in a perfectly designed container - the lid of which has a little hole to suck out the contents within. Now, let's look at mother's milk – the remnants of this mornings caffeine fix - courtesy of the blood stream - and a whole lot of warm frothy milk - courtesy of the aerobics workout mom just finished - all neatly delivered in a perfectly designed container with a little hole to suck out the contents. I tell you its genius - while we were all out searching for our inner children to give them the eviction notices they deserve - the bastards at Starbucks plotted to give aid and comfort to the enemy within by feeding us and feeding off our most base desire - to be nurtured - to suckle once again - to regain that precious innocence. And, of course, we fell for it - stupid inner child.

Loved ones buried, empty days of waiting – I just want to see what kills me

Now I hunker down and wait between a pair of near empty fifty-five gallon drums the former contents of which would green light an EPA superfund project. Even the rats won't venture in there - rat bastards. They're close - I can sense them - not the rats - the hunters - the ones who have made it their mission to exterminate me like the rodent they consider me since they've found out what I am. I cut against their grain - call to question their moral authority. That's why they're after me - that's why I hunker here with my rat brothers amidst the jetsam of life's now silent dreams.

These memories, too, are bound to die – So our dreams will have to serve us

I wonder if Starbucks changed the color of their cup lids to a pleasing shade of brown might that boost sales. What does this have to do with money making films you ask - I haven't got a clue - I just wanted to get some joe...

I'll have two Vente Cappuccino's to go, please

The Madd Prof – chapter 5

"Boxing Matches"

There's something about trains and the stations that receive them - they hearken to a bygone epoch of slower processes and languorous interludes - before cell phones and satellites - when meandering methods and poetic discourse were the proceedings of preference. Where long silken ladies amble on the arm of iron jawed chaps fitted out in haberdasher finery as big band music lingers in an air of romance on those boulevards of dream. This Arcadian image of idyllic recall is plunged from the mind as I am force fed face first into the gaping maw of toilet number three of the men's room on the mezzanine level at the central train station in a city - it's name oddly vacant from overstressed synapses - where I have just arrived to further my exploits in hiding out. Not doing very well so far. They've found me - the hunters - they were waiting - it was an ambush. Somewhere in this chain of command there is a leak - a mole - some Judas dialing the gossip networks for silver. They can't kill me here - if at all - unless they've come up with something new. As the air escapes my mouth I wonder what the equivalent is in dollars today for thirty pieces of silver two thousand years ago. Somebody flushes the toilet.

While the poor people sleepin' with the shade on the light

Boxes. A sea of boxes. Boxes everywhere I look. I'm moving right now so, needless to say, everything's in boxes. Half my kingdom of boxes for a box cutter. I finally got tenure last year at the university and decided it was time to by some dirt - put down some roots - have some orgies in the Bucky Fuller geodesic doom in the back of the place I just got on the outskirts of town - about three and a half acres of who knows what growing around a three bed two bath little place with a big porch frontin'. I figure I'll use that doom as a little mini sound stage for shooting my more experimental stuff - if you know what I mean. Maybe put in a swing. Schwing.

While the poor people sleepin' all the stars come out at night

Boxes are great for carrying around a bunch of stuff all at once but they are a pain in the ass when trying to find something specific. You've got to root around and upend and tear apart until you finally remember that the thing you are looking for is on the dash in the car. As people we tend to put other people in boxes just as we allow ourselves to be put into boxes. It's human nature - a form of shorthand - a way to categorize and deal - or - really - not deal with the people we come across.

They got the house on the corner with the rug inside

There is so much stimuli coming at us nonstop - bomb-barding us - that we have to make choices in what we perceive or we would blow a circuit - overload the ram - crash the hard drive - burn down the house. So we filter and shorthand the input - label and box the people in our lives. What this does is create a superficial construct - an archetype - that keeps us from really getting to know a person or people in any distinct way. Hey, there's the blender. Now we can make some margies. I wonder how it got into the box labeled 'den'?

They got the booze they need, all that money can buy

I think that we can all agree that as individuals, people tend to be multi-faceted - as a group they run to being more of a mob - I wonder if mob is an acronym for 'mass of bodies' - hmmm. They have layers and layers of talents and desires - skills and knowledge that we overlook because we have placed Judy the accountant in that accounting box or Harry the carpenter in that tool box - hehe - I said tool - so we only have to glance at them and our assessment is complete and we can move on to the next set of stimuli. Speaking of stimuli, this margarita kicks ass! How's yours, not too strong?

They got the shapely bods, they got the Steeley Dan T-shirts

One of the problem in our labeling and boxing system comes because we tend to label people by what they do for a living - not who they are - and this is a huge mistake - except in the case of lawyers and doctors 'cause they be all 'bout the business fashizzle. FYI - there's this great website gizoogole.com that can translate anything into Snoop Dog speak. Of course this reflects in the motion pictures that are produced - characters are barely sketched in a two dimensional fashion - just enough to be blown to bits by the special effects. Real character studies - where they upend the contents of the box and sift through the jumble - are rare. Let me top that off for you.

And for the coup-de-gras, they're outrageous

What's really strange - and I mentioned this earlier - we like to be put in these boxes - to be labeled for easy use. It saves us from having to explain ourselves - to justify our existence - to back ourselves up with our own personal philosophies, A great

example of this - and you know you've done this - is going home to family - especially to people who were in a position of authority while you were growing up - parents, aunts, uncles, what-have-you - when you go back to visit - doesn't matter how old you are now - you always revert back to that age when they last had dominance over you - sixteen, eighteen, whatever - that age just before you rebelled - lost your innocence - moved away to school. You climb back in that box and they put you in that box because that's what they know - that's what you know - it's how everyone deals - it's familiar - it family - there are no explanations necessary - carve the turkey and snuggle by the fire.

Show business kids making movies of themselves, you know the don't give a damn about anybody else

I've broken free of them - gotten away - for now - hanging off the side of a freight rattling up the track at breakneck speed as I try and gain purchase on some footing before I fall beneath the wheels. The escape was easy enough - a false step - as they tried to bundle me out of the station and into that rust bucket 'K' car they travel in - and they were no match for my tennies against their Florsheims on that polished marble floor. Out across the tracks and hook onto this west bounder and Bob's your uncle - if I don't fall first.

I know. I know what you're going to say, what's the deal with the breast fixation - first the Starbucks diatribe and now the monument to a giant breast pointed at the gods in the form of the geo dome - Siggy would have a field day with all this symbolism. What can I tell you - I was bottle-fed. Let fire up the blender one mo time.

The Madd Prof – chapter 6

"Ground Swell"

The clock reads two fifty-five. I can't tell if that's am or pm. It's dark in this room - no windows - airless - suffocating. A roof from the night - a shelter from the coming storm - this transient sanctuary - this cavity of solace. It must be night - there is stillness to the atmosphere that only comes in the wee hours of a night at the reset of the day. Standards and practices would have you believe that midnight is the change in the day but really it comes at three am. Don't believe me - sit out one night and watch - or - better - feel it - the world coming to a stop and then starting all over again. All the barflies heading home to sleep off another one while the working class creep from their domicile to depart on their daily toil. Push the reset button - recharge the batteries - reload the Ferris wheel - a new day coming. You can almost hear the big turbine generators that power the world spin to a stop for the briefest of moments before they regain momentum and start the world spinning again towards a clean slate - a fresh start - a brand new day.

I don't practice Santeria, I ain't got no crystal ball, I had a million dollars I'd spend it all

Buzzwords. We define our eras by the buzzwords we use. Does anyone remember way back to the frontier days of the 1990's - when the gold rush was on to create the next big dot com business? Terms like 'new economy' - 'mind share' - 'paradigm shift' were the buzzwords of that long ago era - things were simpler back then. And people in film school were all about making the 'indie' films - no harshin' the buzz with a studio film for them. Nowadays the buzzwords bandied about my class are 'new media' and 'viral video' oh, and I love this one 'crowd sourcing' - hell - they don't even want to make a feature anymore - these pestilent piss-ants. For them two minutes of scratchy video on youtube is "The Bold and the Beautiful".

What I really want to know, my baby, what I really want to say I can't define

So I must adapt to remain relevant to these placebos for creativity - how I suffer for my art. First off I tell them that the term 'new media' is a bunch of hokum designed to confound the listener and elevate the user in stature of coolness while hopefully catching the eye of that blonde at the end of the bar. It's a way of re-inventing a wheel that was round in the first place - like a freakin' paradigm shift - it's not that it doesn't make any sense - it's just that it's senseless - so quickly run out and have it printed on all of your business cards.

Tell sanchito if he knows what's good for him he best go run and hide – Daddy's got a new 45

Viral video's are the hot topic of the day - I wonder if I can somehow work Starbucks into this and score myself a cup of joe - ah, never mind. What makes a video viral, that is the question - Whether 'tis no..... So we - my harloting hounds of hell and I - scour the web in search of the virus that is visual - hoping to isolate the disease and - if not destroy it - at least figure out how to replicate it in the petrie dish that is film school. What we find is the largest pile of crap created by man. I mean this stuff reeks - there is no rhyme or reason to it - hell it makes even my fringe of fledgling Felini's look like - well - fledgling Felini's.

And I won't think twice to stick that barrel straight down Sancho's throat

It's not to say there weren't some gems out in the vacuum of the net. One in particular I found to be spectacular - a train station filled with people going about their destinations when Julie Andrews comes on the PA system signing "The Sound of Music" and everyone in the station stops what they are doing and starts to dance - it's masterful - renews your faith in humanity - check it out at: <http://video.search.yahoo.com/video/play?p=sound+of+music&n=21&ei=utf-8&js=1&fr=yfp-t-501&fr2=tab-web&tnr=20&vid=0001389416041> . And this reminds me of the time that Blake Edwards came through and spoke at the school. You remember Blake Edwards - married to Julie Andrews - directed some great films - "Soldier in the Rain", "Pink Panther" - all of them -- "S.O.B.", "10", and on and on. Anyway, after the lecture some of the faculty and I took Mr. 'E' out for supper and he regaled us all with his exploits in Hollywood. When asked if he had any regrets he mentioned that, during the seventies he and Julie decided to set up house in Switzerland and his accountant advised him that, for tax purposes, he should sell his half interest in the pink panther theme music to Henry Mancini, who owned the other half. Needless to say that piece of music - besides being one of the most instantly recognizable tunes in the world - has generated a truckload of residuals over the past forty odd years. Accountants - go figure..... So, what have we learned here today? Well - the term 'New Media' has no meaning - anybody that tells you they know what makes a video viral is a snake oil salesman - and if your accountant tells you to dump your half interest in the "Pink Panther" theme smack him across the forehead with a two-by-four.

Believe me when I say I got something for his punk ass

I want for green space - wide-open vistas to ponder myself - a place to breathe. What I find is the hulking carcasses of rust decaying monoliths that fill horizons with their corrosive deterioration only giving way to elements that patiently triumph over history in their lockstep march towards a destiny lain before time - this postindustrial madness - this apocalyptic present. The things that I have seen...

But my soul will have to wait, yea, yea, yea...

The Madd Prof – chapter 7

“The Big Little Death”

It was in that Indiana cornfield - along that lingering road with no conclusion where the sedan headlights beckon in a haze of detachment like the ghost of some long lost lover. That's where the secrets were buried - in that garden of conspiracy - that field of dark dreams. Secrets - and the decaying vestiges of five good souls - the ones the hunters had gotten to before - before my number came up in their vicious lottery of death and sent them scurrying like drooling hounds from hell to finish this drama - to write my epitaph - close the book on a story that must be told. But not here - not now. Meet me later - tonight - at the usual spot - don't worry - I'll find you - tell you everything then. That's what the jumpy voice on the other end of the blower supposed as he clicked off. Didn't he know - hadn't this chump ever been to the flickers - ever read Chandler? He'd never make that meet - never drop that dime - he'd be scorched mutton on a stick - burnt toast on rye - an unfinished beer on the counter - in other words - one dead soldier - and I'd be out the missing pieces to the puzzle I was trying to puzzle. I tried the call back button but the line on the other end was dead - as dead as my erstwhile stoolie would be before this good night fell to ashes in the cool waters of the dawn.

I wanna be around to pick up the pieces when somebody breaks your heart

Getting back into the box - in our nature to be human we automatically put things in boxes - then we label the box and put it on a shelf in the back of our minds. In film we have a big box labeled genre crammed with a bouquet of smaller sachets with all manner of label to define their particular vein. Today we pluck from this brimful package of delights the box marked 'film noir'.

Some somebody twice as smart as I

Film noir or black film is a label coined by one of those fancy French guys - Nino Frank, I think it was - to put a collar around a series of movies coming out of the US from the early forties through the late fifties that dealt with a rough hewn moral ambiguity set against a world of shadow with just the smallest amount of luminosity seeping in to backlight - to frame its participants in the gloominess of their actions. A world peopled by wanton interlopers hitchhiking through the weed bound and choking Victorian gardens of a time out of step with the progress of history. Where hard-boiled soldiers of fortune and nail tough dames of distrust

dance to the off key refrains of a dead piano player in the smoky backrooms of society's despair. Wow - I want to see that movie.

I mean, I wanna be around to see how he does it, when he breaks your heart to bits

Titles like "Sunset Boulevard", "Double Indemnity", "The Big Sleep" set the imagination to motion as the characters within set about their pirouettes with a destiny dark and our filmmakers probe and prod through the refuse of society's ills in search of answers to what makes us all so profoundly human. Though the films are diverse and the stories unique there is one common factor in all of them - the filmmakers didn't know they were making film noir.

Let's see if the puzzle fits, so fine

Like all good and great filmmakers they were just telling stories - stories that reflect the times they are in - holding a mirror up to the society they pander too and shouting - there! - there are your inner most secrets - your reckless desires wrought forth for all to witness. It wasn't until years later that these body of works were quantified - labeled - put into that box marked film noir and put on that shelf for all to see.

Who'll leave you to learn that misery loves company, wait and see

What's my point here? I don't have a point - I am wearing jodhpurs today. Khaki jodhpurs, calf boots and sporting a riding crop and monocle with a beret set at a jaunty angle on the dome. Today I am 'El Directorie' and I felt like lecturing my class of clowns on something other than the dos and don'ts of sexting. Actually - come to think of it - I do have a point. The point is - we - as a society of filmmakers - shouldn't get caught up in what defines 'New Media' and how that dictates the process - as these filmmakers of old never got caught up in what makes 'Film Noir' - they were just telling stories in a manner that reflected both the times and the level of sophistication by the audience in the understanding of the language of film. So trust your inner Billy Wilders as you venture forth and project your stories onto that three-inch pop up screen of the Internet!

And that's when I'll discover that revenge is sweet

I waited at the joint till long past caring - my pigeon was a no show. So I ankled out

the front and had the boy bring around the car. Top down, I pointed the big cruiser towards the interstate - but something was wrong - something didn't sit right. The car was riding low in the back so I pulled over - came round and popped the trunk. There - like a bag of mail posted for the dead letter office - a sack of dirty laundry left out for pickup - lay my little buddy crumpled around the spare - eyes bulging - but then they always bulged - hands clutched around a shiv growing out of his chest like a tulip. He never looked better. I'd never heard him speak more eloquently. This well was dry - time to move on.

As I sit here applaudin' from a front row seat

The Madd Prof – chapter 8

"The Hunger"

It creeps through you like a buzz saw through a two by four - gnawing - ripping at your insides with a fevered pitch as it doubles you in its paroxysm of want. The organs roiling in the agony of their self-immolation - crying out for the restorative succor just beyond their grasp. They conspire - making secret pacts with the brain - treaties with the nervous system - amplify the symptoms - start up the hallucinations - let's band together and bow this peon to our collective will - make him suffer - show him real pain until - until..... It passes again and things are calm. I regain my equilibrium and resume the posture - focus the mind and clear the thoughts away - like cobwebs of dreams they cling to the corners - dangle from the ceiling. They must go - all thoughts of now as I search the unconscious for a hint to the answers I am searching. I have been at this ashram for I don't know how many days now - laying low - hiding out - questing for answers. The fellowship decided, in order to seek truth, I need cleanse myself - purify the soul - only then would I have the chi to understand the meaning of the answers - as the cosmic forty-two is known by all but understood by few. That's why I find myself in the forth day of a week long fast and visions of cheeseburgers dancing in my head.

A gunshot rings out at the station

It was as I stepped out of the local Starbucks - vente mocha latte in hand - mom was a sucker for chocolate - heading for a class I didn't feel like teaching today - truth be told I'd rather be hot-sheeting it with my teaching assistant this fine day - when our eyes met and I couldn't look away. Damn it! Six months he'd been sitting there - cup in hand - with the forlorn wanting look - just a whisper of the former dignity once particular - that only a professional can muster - and not once had he caught my eye. I was shooting for a perfect record - his persistence - the mark of a true champion - had won the day. I was humbled by his stamina - bowed by his acumen - this gold medalist - this veteran of a thousand campaigns - this bum.

Another urchin snaps and left dead on his own

Fortune smiled upon me as my TA came out the door and broke the spell. I was beyond his grasp once again - able to cross that bridge without paying the toll. As we strolled on by he held out his cup for remittance and Heather - or Alice or Judy - I can never keep them straight - casually dropped her alms in the receptacle - atonement - for the sins - both real and imagined - of the agnostic.

It makes me wonder why I'm still here

Why did you do that - I asked - not really wanting to know - but rather - to point out

the absurdity of her actions in enabling the downtrodden to remain as such. So she launches into this heart-wrenching story about this guy who used to be..... Did I tell you what I was wearing today? Oh, well – let me regale you. I'm somewhat of a dandy when it comes to the haberdasher arts and have been known to throw together an outfit or two - not that there is anything wrong with that. Today I am sporting the Hollywood producer casual look with a Brioni butterscotch windowpane sport coat over a starched white dress shirt tucked into a pair of buttonfly 501's - yes I can still cram my frame into a pair of 501's. This sartorial vision is finished with a pair of Lorenzo Banfi black glove leather loafers and a Dexter Gordon porkpie hat in tobacco stain straw with black linen band - really quite the look. And some people think I'm self-absorbed.

For some strange reason it feels like home and I'm never gonna go

Wait a minute - what was that about - are you saying that this guy quit his high paying job as a stockbroker to volunteer for the army and go and fight in Iraq only to come back and find that his wife had deserted him and took everything he had and the government was denying him benefits and treatment for injuries incurred while fighting and now he's living off the streets - is that what you're saying? She yells at me that I never listen - gives me the finger and storms off. And here I thought I summed it up quite nicely. Judy - that's who it is - she's the flipper - I think.....

Pay attention to the cracked streets and the broken homes

Suddenly there was a spring in my step - a lightness in my loafers - not that kind of lightness - as I hurried off to class. We - I and my group of movie misfits - are going to make a documentary about this poor schmo's life. I can see it now - A Uly deBris Production - Produced by Uly deBris - directed by Uly deBris - with scintillating narration by Uly deBris. Fade in: city skyline - dusk - as the day marches off like soldiers to a battle and night creeps in on cat's paws the camera cranes down to reveal a solitary figure wading through the sea of humanity on this crowded city sidewalk. CUT!

Some call it slums, some call it nice

First thing we've gotta do is apply for a government grant - get some Fed funds to bank this puppy. I'll get one of the TA's too write the grant request - since they're such a pain in the ass - both the TA's and the grant writing. There are professionals that write those things - but they cost money - in short supply at present. Although - maybe we could get one of these grant writers to work on spec - for a percentage of the back end. These guys are like - like specialized beggars - they can milk the hind tit of the government for all they're worth - we'll make a killing. Then I'll make this doc and its hello Oscars and my ticket to Hollywood. Oh - and maybe it can help this bum out as well.

I wanna to take you through a wasteland I like to call home

They were no match for me in their tunics and sandals - I had copped one of the compound's bicycles and was heading down the path towards freedom - towards a cheeseburger - and they were lagging behind in their pursuit. They only wanted to help - help me clear my mind - find the answers I was looking for. And I did find the answer - and the answer was - I wanted a cheeseburger. And come hell or high water I was going to get one.

Welcome to Paradise

The Madd Prof – chapter 9

"UP TO SPEED"

The bar was crowded that night - animated - raucous - people vied for space between elbows and looks as some two-bit band tried to tie the room together with a pastiche of ballad covers from the seventies about adrift wayfarers and forlorn dreamers doomed to paradises lost - a midget with a monkey danced for quarters. It was sweltering - tropical - south of many borders of the mind and felt like a powder keg looking for that one spark - that hint of ignition to set it off. Were those blue lizards climbing the walls for real or had I doused myself in just enough of this bittersweet pickle juice to make the world - if not a better place - at least a more colorful one? The gentleman in the white linen suit and Panama hat - sporting cheaters in the night - a long narrow Cuban jutting - a slow smolder - from a razor line of lip - sits across the table from me. He's either the best poker player in the world or he's shuffled this coil mortal - I can't tell - I can't read him. And I really need to stay on top of things if I'm going to make my connection - score a passport out of this hellhole during its day of the dead celebration with my tablemate as grand marshal. Then she walks in and all the other patrons seem to melt away - even the midget - for some reason the monkey stays - the band sounds better.

We skipped the light fandango, turned cartwheels cross the floor

Someone once said that the last guy to get a blowjob while wearing cargo shorts was some hump in 'nam during the seventies, just before the pull out. It was obviously a sartorial jab at the proliferation of this most functional item of dress in the male clothing lineup. Don't get me wrong - I agree that there has been an ill-used propagation in said garment to the distraction of the general male style of dress. That alleged I offer that this garment does have its place in the wardrobe - if done properly - and by properly I mean in the 'old school' British fashion - a light khaki - an ample cut hanging to the knees - and as many type and size of pocket as one can comfortably affix to the material. This mated with a blue blazer over an ox-blood Polo with a captain's hat and huarache sandals top and bottom is how I swath the cut this fine day headed poolside. And BTW, I can dispel the aforementioned statement regards 'nam with a wink and a nod, thank you very much.

I was feeling kinda' seasick, but the crowd called out for more

I've got the TA's grumblingly working on the grant writing for the documentary I'm planning to make on the homeless war veteran/ex-stock broker. God, they just don't know how good they have it - the TA's - to be able to work with a volcanic talent such as moi. This documentary is going to make my bones - as it were - propel me to the stratospheric heights of Hollywood. Then they'll have something to grumble about - when I leave them behind in this backwater of a burg - well -

maybe I'll take Alice with - you know - cargo pants and everything - or was that Heather - I can never keep them straight.

The room was humming harder, as the ceiling flew away

I've been keeping my eye on this Lombardi Street project and its ragtag group of filmmakers and aficionados in their noble pursuit as they cast about - fester and fuss - trying to figure their way through this maze of 'net and put some legs on this grand project they so passionately strive to erect. You should really check them out - lend a hand if not in support at least in applause as they attempt the unexpected. The next couple of months should prove interesting for this crew of misguided misfits. If they succeed - who knows - they might just turn the world on its ear and clear a path for others to follow after. If they fail - they will all still be the better for the trying.

When we called out for another drink, the waiter brought a tray

I'm at NAB right now - that's National Association of Broadcasters for those keeping score - in the beautiful city of sin, Lost Wages. The school flips the dime for this every year to keep me abreast of the curve, and therefore just behind my students, on all things grand and good where it comes to latest greatest re: image capture, manipulation, and dissemination in the sphere of electronic storytelling. The city is ablaze with everybody and their Japanese cousin hawking the glitter of soft-tronic-firm-data-transmogrefiers and hurling cocktail parties at clubs trendy to seduce the Luke in all of us to the dark side. That's why I spend most of my time poolside or, if I can afford the invite, cabana side at one of those, water park for adults, hotel pools. Sure, I should be on the convention floor glad-handing with the sharks and collecting brochures, listening to panel speak, but I'd rather be here swimming with the sharkettes and getting my sun on. See you at the casino.

And so it was that later, as the miller told his tale

There is something I am trying to recollect - something important - it doesn't matter --we're together now - a tight embrace - she clings to the thrill - I power the Vincent Black Widow through the loose chicane. The night peels away - she laughs in my ear - the excitement of speed - the vibration of motor - an aphrodisiac. Somehow the monkey has stowed away on this amorous adventure and taken up post on the handlebars, blocking my view of the speedometer. The beast shoots back a maniacal grin at me - clearly enjoying the ride - it's little striped vest fluttering in the wind - he's lost his hat somewhere along the way. She pulls tighter behind me - pressing her body to mine until we become as one. I feel her breath - her beat - her heat - I melt into her or she into me. Focus comes back - to the job at hand - too fast - a hard left ahead - and that's when I remember - T.E. Shaw here we come - the Vincent Black Widow has crap for brakes.

That her face at first just ghostly, turned a whiter shade of pale

The Madd Prof – chapter 10

"The Road Less Traveled"

Everything is a jumble - out of place. I can't move - something is holding me down - pinning me on my stomach. The dawn creeps over - I can make her out - her body lies twenty feet away - she's not moving - the monkey has made it without a scratch and dances between us - mocking. I'd wring his neck if I could get to him. I fall into the darkness of my mind - until they come - suits and skirts - they pick her up - gently - carry her off. The monkey hides. They come back to me - lift my head for a cursory exam - they leave me and depart - throw back the little ones. The day fades - the monkey comes over - I fall into the blackness once again.

On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair

There it is again - that hollow tapping - and then something unintelligible - I can't make it out in this haze. I break through the crust - peel back an eyelid - recoil from the shock as light seeps into the cranium. The world slowly spins back into a place as electric green symbols flash in front of me - what do they mean. The brain gradually receives enough blood to fire off a few of the more ambitious synapse causing some low level thought processes to run in terror through the shadow filled corridors of what's left of my mind. The green symbols form a pattern - 0322 - it must be a code. There's that hollow tapping again - followed by a voice - foreign - a heavy accent - it inquires - "maid service?". What could that possibly mean and how is it related to those green symbols that flash before me? I close the one eye that's ajar to ponder this a moment.

Warm smell of colitas, rising up through the air

A heavy pounding - forceful - masculine - insistent - breaks through the reverie of thought - or was it sleep - more at unconsciousness. Is it inside my head or out - I can't tell. The eyelid wedges open once again - the green symbols converge through a blinking squint focus - they've changed - this code - it now reads as 0923 - what could that possibly mean. The pounding again - a voice - urgent - muffled - pissed - "Mr Smith, check out is at eleven. It's now after nine o'clock. We need this room, now!" Again with the accent.

Up ahead in the distance, I saw shimmering light

That solves one puzzle - now I know what those numbers mean. Things start to pull together - the brain begins its reboot - the plug-ins and widgets come online - software starts to light up the system and then - manual override! I spring up in the bed I have been drooling all over for the last God knows how many hours - my name's not Smith - it's... - it's...-- deBris - Uly deBris. That must be my name -

nobody with amnesia would make up a name like that. Where the hell am I? A quick glance around a room that looks like ground zero for a tornado strike confirms that this is a place where the weird turn pro. My clothes - nothing - gone. The pounding again - "Mr Smith"?

My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim

I grab a sheet that looks as if the contents of dozens of Petri dishes housing countless bio-hazard experiments have been dumped to form some mad expressionist art and wrap it around my aching torso and step foot onto a rug that appears to be teeming with an ecosystem all its own. The spine shudders - I try to balance the balls of the feet to the door. A cautious crack reveals the disgruntled night manager flanked by a Japanese couple - their expressions begin at confrontational but quickly range to the shock and awe side of things. "My God, Mr Smith, are you alright?" as the night man recoils from the scene. I mumble something about being out in a minute. They quickly retreated - saying something about finding another room and getting me some medical help. As they walked away the Japanese fellow snaps a picture.

I had to stop for the night

The last thing I remember - what was it - I was in Vegas at that convention - that's it. There was this cute sales rep I hooked up with - what was her name - Karen - sure - Karen. She worked for some - what was the name - trans-bio-something - anyway. We hit it off pretty hot and heavy and we were going back to my room - her room - everything gets foggy after that - so how'd I end up..... I stagger into the bathroom - the image in the mirror speaks volumes. It looks as though I've been rolled inside my own skin - mugged from within - the eyes a spelunkers delight - the face splotched and bruised - crap - am I missing a tooth - that tears it. That's when I notice the girl - a stranger - definitely not Karen - she looked like she had been in a motorcycle wreck - but that's not what killed her. Latin looking from what was left of her - laying in the half melted remnants of the tub filled with ice - the body harvested of most of the vital organs - oh crap! What the - why is there duct tape on my back? I pull it off - hey that hurts - WTF - why is there a cut over my right kidney? The room spins - I fall - the lights go off.

There she stood in the doorway

I scramble to and search the room for answers and clothes - nothing - a half eaten sub sandwich - a roll of duct tape - a box of Kleenex - an empty cardboard box - a magic marker - that's all there was. Now I'm no MacGiver but this was all I had to get me out of a situation even the brightest optimist would label really piss poor. No time - I hear voices - urgent - coming up the hallway. I grab everything plus a pillowcase and throw it in the box and crawl out the window.

I heard the mission bell

I must have been on the second floor as the drop was a tad more than anticipated. I hobble away like a beggar in the night - my treasure tucked under an arm and search for a sanctuary from this nightmare - a cavity of solace to collect myself and figure a game out of this hell.

And I was thinking to myself

I wake up face to face with a goat - it scares the crap out of me - I collect my things and move along. I must have walked half the night until I finally collapsed. I am well past whatever town I was in - out along a little used road that leads to the nowhere I stagger - the only sign of civilization the telephone poles that march picket along the other side of my path and give roost to the Pierides - fraudulent daughters of that Macedonian king - as they laugh their cawing laugh at the hapless clown before them. Did I mention what I was wearing this fine hellish day? Let me enlighten you - today on my country stroll I am bedecked in Motel Hell finery - a stained sheet that may or may not have been white at some point is arranged - toga style - around my abused and used carcass - this I have belted in stylish duct tape. For footwear today I have donned a Kleenex box on the left ped and have half a sub sandwich duct taped to the right. This is all topped off with a pillow case worn loosely about the crown - for what gentleman of style would be caught about without a hat on such a fine day. The cardboard box I have fashioned into a sign - using the magic marker to letter - that I'm positive will guarantee me a ride - if a car ever comes up this road. The road takes a hard right up ahead - what's that just off the road - it looks like - it couldn't be - not out here.

This could be Heaven or this could be Hell

I come to again - daylight - how long have I been here - the monkey knows - he's not talking. The motorcycle digs into my back. The monkey is on a big rock jumping up and down and flapping its arms - why doesn't that beast get a life and leave me alone. Someone is coming - could it be help - or is it the suits from before come to clean things up - destroy the evidence. I must be hallucinating - having visions. God has come to collect me. This is finally the end - the hunters won't get credit for the kill this time. God crosses to the monkey and takes its hand and they both come over to me. Help me - I say. God bends down to look at me a moment and then straightens - "How can I help you when I can't even help myself?" he asks before turning and walking off with the monkey. It hurts, but I laugh - that's got to be the strangest God anyone ever laid eyes on - the ill colored toga and floppy head gear I understand - but what's with the Kleenex box and sub sandwich for shoes? And what was the meaning of that crazy sign on his chest - 'Will make movies for a ride' - what was that all about?

The Madd Prof – chapter 11

"Reverse Image"

They came finally - vultures - big black hideous scavengers lined up for the buffet - looking over the menu with salacious delight through soulless eyes - squawking and cawing as they lick their dispassionate beaks in delight over the capture of their prey. And I was the blue plate special this fine day. I figured the end to come quick - they would do the deed they had been prescribed then be on their merry way - but no - they had other plans - no easy way for me. They lift the bike from atop me and then pluck me up like malevolent pallbearers and convey my trampled remains to their hideous lair. I fade to black in the bargain only to awaken later chained to the floor of some dank underground cell - a single shaft of defused light tries to cut a tortured path through the misery of darkness that envelops.

Double cross the vacant and the bored

I'm going to strangle those TA's when or if I ever get back from this Odyssean escapade I seem cast upon - right after I hug them for all I'm worth. Never will I be happier to see that armpit of a Peyton Place were resides my abode. Mark Twain said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." And I say, it only amplifies those conditions while making the heart grow fonder for the hearth of home. Enough of this sentimentality - where was I - oh yes - strangling the TA's. Those lying wenches and their twisted desires - out for payback for not taking them to Vegas - they wire me just enough funds for bus fare. Me on a bus! How dare they.

They're not sure just what we have in store

There is a chicken perched on the seatback in front giving me the evil eye as a sheep parades the aisle next to my chair. And speaking of chairs - you know how Ikea furniture comes in boxes and you have to put it together - well this chair I have is more at the box and not the furniture - needless to say - comfort was not a goal in this design study. I will definitely complain to the proper authorities if they deem show their faces. Then there's my booking agent on this third world hellhole tour date - one Senor Diaz if I'm not mistaken - assured me that I was to receive the finest accommodation - first class travel all the way - he had cousins at every stop along the path to see to my needs. So far - the only 'cousin' I've come across has tried to roll me for the twenty I have left for food.

Morphine city slipping dues down to see

There is something to be said for bus travel - aside from the menagerie of barnyard animals, screaming offspring and smells too varied to account - there is a certain

peace - a Zen like quality that comes over as the prevailing landscape parades at sixty and lulls the mind into a state of awareness detached. I purchased a notebook and ballpoint to work on the screenplay I've been creating these many years - keep the juices flowing - I don't know what it's going to look like without spellchecker but, what the hell - that's what the TA's are for. I must make a note to phone those demonic damsels at the next stop - have them hunt up Ebay for my missing kidney - maybe place a bid for me while I'm incommunicado - or whatever the name of this God forsaken country is.

That we don't even care as restless as we are

Another one of Senor Diaz's 'cousins' - or El Jefe as this cousin refers to him - assures me at the last stop that the girl and donkey are a package deal and I cannot get one without the other for half the price. New note - search Ebay for a donkey. This last berg we stopped in reminded me of the town at the end of "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" - where they get surrounded and gunned down. Of course my assembly of ADD candidates only know about Butch and Sundance as reference to the ending of "Thelma and Louise" which of course they think B&S copied from. It used to be called homage when one film or filmmaker bowed to the talents or inspiration of another - now it's ripping and riffing and sampling - and not just good movies - but all movies. Hey - did you ever notice the great little homage to "Treasure of the Sierra Madre" in Butch Cassidy? Butch and Sundance pull their last mine payroll robbery and they take the pack mules carrying the payroll and head into that afore mentioned town. They tie up the horses and mules and head over to the restaurant for a quick bite of what will be their last supper. Meanwhile a stable boy checks the brand on one of the pack mules and realizes that these dudes are the Bandidos Yanquis who've been robbing the mine payrolls and calls in the Federales - it's the same brand as on the mule stolen from H. Bogart by the banditos at the end of Sierra Madre and inevitably ends up being spotted by a stable boy who gives them away as well - how sweet is that. Sierra Madre was a great movie - with little Bobby Blake about sixty years before he decided to imitate art.

We feel the pull in the land of a thousand guilts

I'm free - I've gotten away once again - eluded my captors - thwarted their plans. How do I do it? It's weird - every time I find myself in a situation where it looks like this is the end - I somehow manage to escape it - with nary a scratch - as if my life were being written by some hack Hollywood screenwriting team. Maybe it's a residual of being immortal or maybe I'm just damned lucky. And then it dawns on me - the immortality - the clever dialogue - the situations without any lead up - the complete lack of continuity - I am a character in a movie - or a series of movies - I can't tell. So that's why my gun never runs out of bullets... God, I just hope it's an 'A' picture and Eszterhas isn't scribing.

And poured cement, lamented and assured

The Madd Prof – chapter 12

"Buy it Now"

The numbers tick off - slowly at first - a luminescent glow defining each integer with its rhythmic - almost hypnotic - pulse. The enclosure - small, but not claustrophobic - modern in design, but not stark - holds one in a comfortable suspension - a neither here nor there realm of expectancy and destination while a hint of soft music tickles at the ears - fortifying the sense of tranquility that the makers seek to project on a device and an action that are really quite precarious and terrifying if one only take time to analyze the situation they place themselves. It is when the rhythm to the numbers begins to pick up - delicately at first - only a hint - such that it could be just a trick of the mind - no - they're definitely moving faster - that things start to get dicey. It's the realization - the soul wrenching dread - it starts in the pit of your being and shoots through your major charkas with the force of a shuttle's SRB's until it lights up the brain and nervous system in a full on red alert - that you know something very bad is going to happen. The music - that so adroitly soothed - now mocks as you search vainly for some recourse - some master switch to brake and break your downward plummet in this manmade metal coffin - this death trap - this elevator. Ah crap - I'm stuck in another of his stupid movies again. Must find a way out - break free of this endless loop of nonsense - break free and kill him - kill this senseless bastard and his multi-pic-pac-play-pay deal.

I hurt myself today, to see if I still feel

This is great. The auction is about to end - two minutes left - and I'm high bidder. Just check the page counter again and make sure nobody's scoping this auction - nope - so far it's all good. I'm the only buyer - and why not - it is my kidney after all - I mean - it has to be - just look at that picture - it's definitely the cutest kidney on the site - and it is my blood type - and the date of extraction matches. Wait a minute! What's this? Somebody just outbid me. Someone going by the handle: tafilms3. This isn't right - I can't outbid this joker - probably doesn't even need a kidney - just wants it for some weird French dish braised and slathered in a béarnaise sauce topped with a sprinkle of shaved white truffles sided up with a portion of steamed fingerling potatoes in a lime-curry-nutmeg reduction along with a segment of collard greens sautéed in a balsamic vinegar reduction with pine nuts and shallots. Hmm, that sounds good... hey wait a minute - that's my kidney we're talking about.

I focus on the pain, the only thing that's real

Apparently I've made it home from my great tour of the Latin states and am much the worse for wear and tear. The one silver lining - and I am the fool for silver linings - is that the TA's outfitted me with one of those motorized hospital beds - you know - the ones that adjust to an unlimited number of positions head to foot - to recoup in my casa - damn it - I swore that Spanish would cross my lips no more - unless of course Salma Hayek decided she wanted to do the nasty with yours truly - but that is the exception that makes the rule. We've got the bed set up in the living room so I can see all do all from the comfort without feeling like the walls are closing. Seems my health insurance doesn't cover unauthorized operations - and they feel that organ theft falls into said category. Bastards won't cover anything. So I find myself on the mend in the abode with the TA's taking shifts doing the Florence N on my wracked and ravaged. Man, I've got to see about scoring one of these beds fulltime once I'm out of the woods on this thing - it's like the barcalounger of beds - it's even got a cup holder - sweet.

The needle tears a hole, the old familiar sting

So I spend most of my days surfing. That's how I found my kidney at a site called ebodyparts.com - crazy stuff - seems you can get anything online these days - including my left kidney. Said organ was posted for auction by someone calling themselves, eljefed1 who goes on to describe the purloined component as being in moderately good condition having had a variety of fluids run through it over the years with nary a stone to pass - which of course shows that you just can't trust ad copy these days as I remember an agonizing weekend trying to pass a stone while spraining a vocal cord. Regardless, you've got to check this site out - its like Alice's Restaurant - you can get anything you want - from someone's big toe to celebrity urine - it's all there - including - for the Satan worshippers - a still beating heart - which sounds like an oxymoron. Mostly it looks to cater to the odd Eurocentric eating club - as recipes are oft times included in the postings. In case you were wondering - my handle for this site ulyd.

Try to kill it all away, but I remember everything

And now this tafilms3 bastard is outbidding me at every turn - it's my kidney, damn it - get your own. It's my own fault - if I hadn't been trying to cut corners - save a couple of bucks here and there - I could have had the thing by now. There was a 'Buy it Now' price of \$250.00 plus shipping - guaranteed to arrive overnight in a mini-chest with nitrogen pacs for cooling for the low - I'm losing my shirt on this

one - price of \$29.95. No, I was going to be clever - I mean who wants a smelly old 'used' kidney anyway - buy it for the starting bid of \$200.00 and saved the fifty - of course as soon as you make the bid the buy it now disappears and your at the mercy of the auction fates - who now seem determined to spit in my eye as the price climbs past \$2000.00

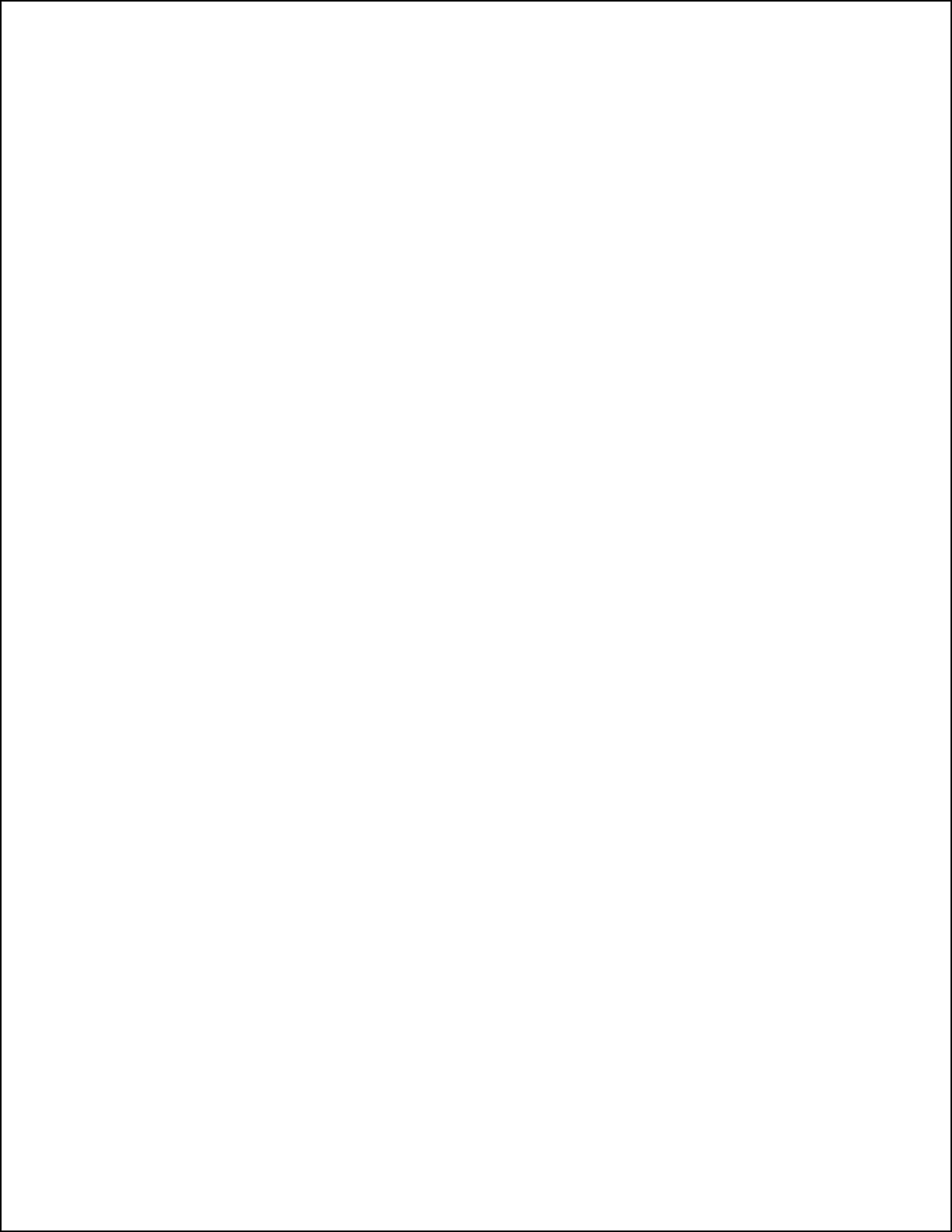
What have I become, my sweetest friend

Bingo! I got it! And it only cost me \$2987.62 - for my own freakin' kidney - there is no justice. And that's when I hear Heather scream from the other room - Damn it! She enters from the kitchen looking forlorn - dejected - ill used. Much to my surprise, I ask her what the problem is - she breaks towards the downward - her tale of woe unfolding. It seems that she and her co-conspiring co-eds - the band of three - joined together to surprise me with - you guessed it - my own kidney which they had scavenged the internet to find on an auction site only to be beat out at the last minute by some asshole called ulyd. Son of a bitch. These three angels of the merciless had just cost me \$2700 and change - on the plus side though - they did manage to score me an NEA grant for \$450,000.00 to do the documentary while I was trotting the globe - silver linings again. Maybe I can shift the cost of my kidney onto the film budget - gourmet catering \$3000.00. Que Sera Sera - wait a minute - that isn't Spanish is it?

Everyone I know goes away in the end

I've come to a decision - I must break free from this unending loop that has become my existence - escape the madness that is my life projected onto a silver screen for an unseen audience to cheer or mock. And then - once free from the confines and constrictions of this dimensionally limited character arc - when I have attained my free will - then I shall set out in search of this maker - the creator of this movie - and strike him or her down - commit dietycide. My plan is simple - do nothing - let the elevator fall until it stops and then get off - that can't be how the script unfolds - it's perfect. Nothing happens - the elevator continues to fall and fall - it's then I realize it won't stop falling until I do something - anything. Damn it! Foiled again. So I get up and start to climb through the roof of the elevator as I have done countless times before.

You could have it all, my empire of dirt



To Be Continued