

“A Conversation at a Table”**William J. Hrdina****7/21/03**

“Tell me your feelings about death.”

“Why?”

“I want to know what you think about it. Does it scare you?”

“That always confused me. Why are we supposed to fear death when we don't fear sleep? Aren't they the same thing? I mean, from the point of view of experience? It's just...darkness. But then again, our personalities come back when we sleep. We're not comfortable in unconsciousness; so we have dreams. Is death really any different? Is life any different for that matter?”

“But there is a difference of course. Between what you are saying and what you did.”

“There is no difference. Everything is the same-- life, death, and dreams.”

“You can think whatever metaphysical picture you want, but forcing others to make the transition between the states, that's simply outside of your realm of authority.”

“Could you say that in slightly plainer English?”

There's a difference between life and death and you don't have the right to move people from the living column to the dead one.”

“Is it OK to kill in a dream?”

“Yes dreams aren't real.”

“Nothing is real.”

“Nothing is *necessarily* real from the point of view of the individual. But there is another point of view, the collective human one. In that one I can kick you and it will hurt no matter what you individually think about it.”

A swift kick to the shin punctuated the statement.

The man flinched.

“See?” The interrogator asked, smirking.

“But don't you see?” The accused retorted. “That's the difference. In death, the collective world, the one that can really hurt you; it's gone. All that's left is the individual mind. Or nothing. Either way, no more pain.”

“What about God, what about Heaven and Hell?”

“I thought you were an educated fella.”

“Lot's of educated men believed in God.”

“God yes. Heaven and Hell, not so much. Not in the literal fire/brimstone-clouds/angels dichotomy.”

“So you're smart enough to reject blindly asserted dogma, but stupid enough to think you have the right to kill others. This is really where I lose you. You seem to be smart and intuitive. Yet you are broken. I know you can see that what you've done is wrong, even as you make specious philosophical excuses about why you did it.”

“Sure it's wrong from your point of view. I'm not crazy. I can see that in your eyes I'm a sociopath. You think I'm evil. You think I'm a monster. But I'm not evil. I'm not a monster. I'm someone who knew the truth and acted from it. The shared world is a world of pain. It is, as the Buddhists say, Dukkha, suffering. I freed them from the pain, released them from the illusion of life.”

“Your truth, not necessarily theirs.”

“I ask you again, is it OK to kill in dreams?”

“And I answer you again, there is a difference.”

“And round and round we go. It's the wheel.”

“Do not Buddhists also speak of the dangers of desire? Is not desire supposed to be the source of the suffering that you spoke of?”

“Yes.”

“And isn't saving people from their delusions a desire that you had?”

Silence.

“Well isn't it. Aren't you just using Buddhism as a rather lame attempt to justify an unjustifiable position.”

No answer, but a slight smile.

“I'm waiting.”

“You can wait all you want.”

Silence. A minute went by. Two minutes.

Finally the interrogator said, “So basically you're admitting I'm right. I should take your silence to mean you know you're full of crap.”

A change suddenly came over the man's face. It was like a light bulb in his head was suddenly turned off.

“I'm sorry.” He said with a sincere look.

“For what?”

“The voices told me to do it. I didn't want to, it was just they're always there.”

“What voices?”

“The demons. There are five of them. They have been sent from Hell. They rule the inside of my head. I think I might be the antichrist.”

“Two minutes ago you said that you didn't believe in Hell.”

“I know. The demons made me say that.”

“So how can you say what you're saying now?”

“What?”

“Why aren't the demons keeping you from telling me about them now?”

“They know you won't believe me.”

“I gotta admit, that's pretty convenient.”

“Sure, for the demons. Sucks for me.”

“So you're saying you are totally innocent now. That you had no choice but to do what you did.”

“That's the truth. I am innocent.”

The interrogator raised a tentacle and scratched the side of its head.

“Yet you lived through the horror didn't you.”

“That's the final irony, the worst part of the demon's punishment.”

“What are you being punished for if you are innocent?”

“I said I was innocent of the murders, I'm not totally innocent.”

“So what was your crime?”

“It wasn't me. It was my Father. He sold my soul. He sold everyone in the family's soul. That's why the demons came. I was chosen because I was the weakest, the least able to fight back. I drank too much, did cocaine. Everyone else was so smart. I wasn't. I struggled, I had to cheat. I kept failing. I just wanted to drink and tell dirty jokes. I really do like people. Then, one day, the voices came. They said they were angels. They helped me succeed. Sometimes they asked me to make decisions that I knew were unethical, like the Gulf War, the tax cuts, the formal repeal of the Constitution, but the angels were telling me that I was God's chosen, that I was going to save the entire world. They told me the setbacks were necessary for the greater good. I relied on the angels, I said what they wanted me to say, did what they wanted me to do.”

“But now you know they weren't angels?”

“They told me. Right after. They told me that they were lying to me, once it was too late...”

“So at the beginning of this interview?”

“I was listening to them again, saying what they wanted me to say. The demons said they would get me out of this mess. I was scared so I went along with them even though I knew they were evil. Then they just left, disappeared from my head like smoke. I don't even understand the stuff I was saying to you before. Heck, I didn't even know what that word 'Duck-ha' meant until the demons told you it meant suffering. I'm like Ronald Reagan. I just repeated what they told me to say.”

“So that's your excuse? You were just acting on orders? The whole world? Did you really have to destroy the whole world- millions of years of evolution ended; because of your weakness. Life on earth is gone because of

you.”

Silence.

“Well George?”

The man stopped talking. He never spoke again. The interrogator led him from the stand.

The judge, a seven armed Terullian stood up on the great golden pedestal of judgement and read the jury's verdict.

“In the case of Life on Planet Earth Vs. George W. Bush for the crime of gross incompetence at running the free world, the jury finds the defendant... guilty.”

A contented murmur swept through the court.

The judge continued, “In regard to the charge of willful planetary genocide the panel is split. Half think he is guilty. Half think he is innocent due to gross stupidity. The hapless human's retrial will planned for sometime in the galactic Summer. Till then, court is adjourned.”