

"Black Helicopter Productions"

"...an organization which will serve to centralize and crystallize the efforts of those who would meet the exigencies of our changing times by a pooling of all of the wisdom and power of the guardians of civilization, the protectors of Society."

J. Edgar Hoover

So Gib started work for Black Helicopter Productions. The company was a stupidly run company, that was one of the first things that Gib learned. Most of the employees were overpaid and overworked. The attitude in the office ranged from elated to enraged, with very little time in between. Screaming matches and fights seemed to break out every day between the Suits, the Gearheads and the Creatives.

The main business of Black Helicopter was doing digital projects for clients, including CD-ROMs and kiosks. And now, the Web was taking over. The new business people were constantly out talking to clients and pitching the wonders of Black Helicopter, so Gib never really met any of them, but the client service people were around all the time and were at the center of most of the fights. And the theme of the battles tended to be: "Why *can't* we do that? The client wants it." Which tended to be code for: "I didn't know what the hell I was talking about, so I promised something, and now you have to make me look good."

The Gearheads, who didn't really have a leader, were the chief opponents in most of those fights. Technically, the senior Gearhead was Greg Igoe (known as OddGreg), but Greg's response to a question he considered stupid was to walk away from the person who asked the question, walk into his office (which also held all the servers), close the door, and not come back out for days at a time. There was a rumor going through the office that OddGreg had a secret entrance to his office, because the longest recorded example of his door being closed and locked was eight days, in which time not one person saw him leave or anyone, not even food delivery people, enter. But when he finally emerged, he had the same crisply ironed white shirt on, the same shined wingtips, the same skinny black tie, the same close shave. It was one of the great mysteries of the offices.

The main Creative was Taylor Jackson, an athletic guy in his mid-30s who had moved back to his native California from the East Coast, where he had spent over a decade working in advertising. While Jackson oversaw a department of around 12 designers, including freelancers, his main job seemed to be attitude adjustment. Free Beer Friday always began with Jackson ran sounding off an air horn and demanding everyone come and start drinking.

OddGreg told Gib of a rumor that Jackson had gotten fired from his last job for throttling a Senior Account Executive at a Major New York Ad Firm who had described one of Jackson's ideas to show off a well-known luxury car as "too street; too black." When the blond, blue-eyed Jackson had asked the Executive what he meant by that, the Suit had replied, "We don't want pimps and drug dealers buying our car, like with BMW." That was when Jackson went over the table at the guy.

After he started coming to the office every day, Gib ended up being seen with suspicion by the Suits, because he was working on both of the two projects at Black Helicopter that were taking up a ton of man hours, bushel baskets full of money, but

weren't bringing any revenue back.

The Black Box was the easier of the two projects, because all Gib had to do was let OddGreg demonstrate and describe to him, put some words together with a design from Jackson and voila!, they had a business plan, marketing documents and other piles of nice looking and reading paper. Gib found out that Black Box was the project that Jameson Feyrer and Rick Bodio had been talking to Pinkwater about on the first day they had met. Those guys were the ones who were on the receiving end of the faxes and FedExes of material that he produced about the Black Box project. Sidney claimed that with the venture capital he would get from Bodio and Feyrer's company (Bennett, Jaffe, and Geller Investments), he could make the Black Box a product ready for mass production, after which they could go public and everyone would be rich.

Every time Sidney talked in those kind of grandiose terms, Gib would just nod his head and try to leave as quickly as possible to go play pool. He liked Pinkwater well enough, but the man had a bad tendency toward pep talks. It was a minor enough failing, though.

Even Sidney Pinkwater was hard pressed to claim anyone would get rich off his other pet project, the Black Helicopter Webzine. At most, Sidney expected it to break even if they could sell ads, though he wasn't entirely sure how to go about that. If nothing else, the zine could be a loss leader for developing other corporate clients, showing what kind of cutting edge work Black Helicopter was capable of doing.

They still hadn't picked a name for the thing, even though the zine was about to launch its initial content, with articles about how to burn your own CD-ROMs, vintage clothing, and an obscure Latin American who had made Esquivel-style lounge music for three years in the mid-70s before dying of a Xanax overdose. Oh, and Taylor Jackson was writing a history of the ukulele.

"The name of the thing has got to start with an S," Pinkwater proclaimed.

"Why?" Taylor Jackson asked.

"Because that's the best letter to start the name of a zine with. Salon, Stim, Spiv, Suck and all the other best webzines."

"Best?" OddGreg asked. "You mean like Feed, Word and HotWired?"

"Shut up, Gregory. The other reason is that Success also start with an S, and that's what I want this webzine to be."

The rest of the table groaned.

So Gib and OddGreg went to the Internic registry with a dictionary in hand. Gib would call out an interesting sounding name and OddGreg would look to see if the domain was registered. The list of potential names that were already registered was amazing. Gib suggested, and had shot down, among others: sanguine.com, sane.com, salve.com, sachem.com (Gib: "Oh, come on! *Sachem.com* is taken?"), sap.com, saute.com (OddGreg: "No frikkin' French!"), sauce.com, saucy.com, savor.com, scald.com, scatter.com, scattergun.com, scorch.com, scour.com, scram.com, seize.com, say.com, shakedown.com, shaken.com, shay.com, shellac.com, shifty.com, slack.com, shoofly.com, and stoat.com (OddGreg: "*Stoat?*" Gib: "I'm getting desperate.").

After a cigarette break for OddGreg, they settled on five finalists to present to Pinkwater: SCALDED.COM, SHERPA.COM, STOOLIE.COM, STRAWBOSS.COM, STREW.COM. Since Pinkwater had given them no idea at all what the zine was

supposed to be about, they figured these names were both aggressive and vague enough to satisfy. The reader could add their own meaning, if they felt the need.

Pinkwater wasn't overly happy with his choices, but Gib and OddGreg also gave him the list of their other attempts, which shut him up quick. ("Sachem.com is taken?") After much hemming and hawing, he decided that "Scalded" would do fine.

"We can try something without a "S", Sidney," Gib suggested.

Pinkwater shook his head. *Scalded* it was.

It was only a couple of days later that Gib was dragooned into becoming *Scalded's* first regular columnist. During some of his free time waiting around for OddGreg or Taylor Jackson, Gib had been checking out the potential competition for *Scalded*, and he had run across a zine-style web site targeted at teenage girls. The site was amateurish, unbearably so, and it used a coy, overly enthusiastic voice, kind of like a 45-year old man's idea of how a 12-year old cheerleader would speak. It made Gib's skin crawl. And when he checked out the "About Us" section (which was confusingly called "Dear Diary"), the site turned out to be the product of a holding company based out of Houston, best known for making 9 mm ammunition, a popular brand of malt liquor, and tampons. The tampon brand was the sponsor for the site. So Gib sent an email to Pinkwater, OddGreg and Jackson, making fun of the site. Then he forgot about it and kept surfing.

About an hour later, Pinkwater came charging over to Gib and shouted, "This is great! I didn't know you could write like this!"

"What?"

"Funny! This essay about the tampon company! I especially like the line "this company should be legally required to announce their presence as soon as they move into a new neighborhood, just like any other child molester". That's fantastic!"

"If you say so." Upon reflection, Gib thought it sounded awfully dumb -- and worse, awfully self-righteous -- being read back to him.

But Pinkwater was overjoyed. He decided then and there to make Gib a regular columnist for *Scalded*, no matter how much Gib objected. Three times a week, Gib would produce 500 words about stupid things. In fact, that became the name of the columns: "Stupid Things". Gib figured the name would describe both the subjects and the column itself. But he completely balked at using his real name on the column.

"Why not?" Pinkwater asked.

Gib could hardly tell him he was worried about web surfers from the FBI running across his name. So he said, "I don't want to get heat from the people I'm mocking."

Pinkwater frowned. "That's kind of gutless."

"So I'm gutless. I don't want everyone to know me as the "mean guy" because of this. And you can't tell anyone I'm the one who writes these things."

"If you say so. What name do you want to use?"

For a brief second, Gib thought about saying, "Make it "Edward Gibson", but those kind of jokes go better with silence. "I don't have any idea."

"Well, since you'll be writing about the Web, how about you call yourself "The Spiderman"?" Pinkwater suggested.

"That's fucking *awful*, Sidney," Gib said.

Pinkwater looked offended. "Did I ever *say* I was the writer here? Did I ever *say* that?" The man was actually upset, Gib realized.

To placate Pinkwater, Gib temporized. "I didn't mean Spiderman was so awful. It's just a copyright thing. How about we make it a proper name? And we spell it differently."

"Like how?"

Gib grabbed a piece of paper. "Speiderman, like this. And we just put an initial in front of it."

"Like J. Peterman," Pinkwater said.

"Sure. J. Speiderman. It even vaguely looks like a real name."

The column kicked off the next day. Within three columns (and with Pinkwater emailing all his friends in the industry), it had been mentioned on fourteen "Cool Site" pages. Then, based on the amount of hate mail it got, Pinkwater had "Stupid Things, by J. Speiderman" moved to the front page. A lot of the hate mail centered around the fact that the name was a pseudonym, some of it was about the actual content of the columns, but the majority of it was people antagonistic about the nasty tone. And, inevitably, some of the mail was even positive. The thing Gib didn't understand is that the amount of mail seemed increase, no matter how nasty he was. In fact, the nastier he was, the more mail he got, both positive and negative. It was like poking a hornet's nest, but a nest where half of the hornets came out and offered to buy you a beer and ask you how you got to be so good at poking.

Within two weeks, he ran out of things to write about, but the his e-pen pals solved that problem. At first, they sent him URLs to abuse. But even so, Gib ran out ways to say, "Boy, this is ugly. Dumb, too. Dumber than paint. And did I mention it was ugly?" So he started responding to the email in the column. And finally he just started making fun of random things that came across his radar. TV shows? Trends? Tits? You name the topic, Gib was able to come up with a hackneyed, yet hostile attack on it. He was absurdly pleased at how idiotic his arguments were, when he even bothered to advance an argument instead of just spewing bile.

The week he wrote his tenth column, OddGreg, Taylor Jackson and Pinkwater took him to a meet-n-greet party thrown by some local investor at a bar called Zeitgeist. Terrifyingly, Gib met one of his readers. A bearded guy name Douglas, who knew OddGreg from a former job, saw the four of them walk in, so he introduced them around the party. Douglas had a thick unruly head of hair, a thicker beard that crawled around his face as if it had been sprayed on from a couple feet away, glasses that were thicker yet, and a belly that was the thickest of them all. It made Gib tired just to listen to him, as Douglas described new technologies that were coming, movies he had seen, books he had read, cool websites he recommended, and so on and so on. After ten minutes, Gib started thinking about how to make a graceful exit. That was when Douglas felt the need to include Gib in the conversation.

"So," Douglas asked, "what do you do?"

"I work with Taylor and OddGreg."

"But what do you *do*?"

Gib figured he might as well greet his public. He was sure Douglas was a person who read something like "Stupid Things, by J. Speiderman". So he told Douglas that he was "J. Speiderman."

Douglas stared at him. "You?" he blurted. "You don't look like an asshole!"

That was the last time Gib felt the need to hang out with the new media movers and shakers. He kept writing the column, though, and the next one was about bad grooming and manners in new media circles, complete with illustrations from OddGreg. Douglas sent him an enthusiastic fan letter.

At the same time, Pinkwater started asking Gib to sit in on the meetings with Bodio and Feyrer, which Gib hated. The two young MBAs seemed like callow copies of Gibson Senior. Gib found himself shocked to actually compare his father favorably to somebody. Gibson Senior was a prick bastard, but at least he was good at it. Bodio and Feyrer were so confident in their world and their place in it, based on so little evidence, that it made Gib want to bash them with a recoilless hammer. During the meetings, Gib made full use of the Sally Field face.

The most frustrating thing was seeing Pinkwater deal with them. Or, more accurately, be dealt with by them. During the meetings, they consistently showed Sidney a veiled contempt. (Gib himself wasn't even on their radar.) Mostly, they complained about the money Sidney was already spending and the cash influx he expected to get from Bodio and Feyrer's firm. They complained about the results, the time it was taking, the value they were getting, Pinkwater's *lasses-faire* management style, and any other nut-cutting topic they could come up with. Worse, Pinkwater's personal banker, a short, fat and sweaty man named Dick Moran, sat in and seemed to agree with his two peers rather than his client. Moran twitched and nodded his head, like a puppy begging for a bone, every time Bodio and Feyrer picked apart the finances on the Black Box project.

Gib spent his time in the meetings listening with only half an ear, because he knew Sidney only wanted him there for some half-assed moral support, so that it wasn't one against two (or three, depending on how you counted Moran). OddGreg whipsawed between bored and panicked around the bankers, which had developed into a habit of nervous vomiting. During the meetings. And Taylor Jackson just shook his head "no" every time Sidney asked him to sit in. Based on the rumors about Jackson's temper toward suits, Sidney eventually decided to stop asking. So until Gib started working for Black Helicopter, Sidney sat through the abuse in the meetings, alone and unsupported.

So Gib pursued time-killing techniques. His most method was "Dear Sidney" letters. Gib would pick an idiotic topic out of the air, then write a letter for an imaginary suggestion box. Like Cross Dressing Wednesdays, or Mandatory Mud Wrestling Mondays. The letters weren't particularly funny, but Gib still ended used most of them for J. Spiderman. Gib had learned the phrase "copy hole" from Jackson Taylor, to refer to the words that had to be produced for every issue of a magazine. Sit down at the keyboard, start shoveling in words, phrases, whole sentences. Eventually you filled up the hole.

The "Dear Sidney" letters were as good as anything else to fill the Spiderman copy hole, though Gib was careful to change the name from "Sidney" to "Stanley". (It amused Gib to think about Stanley Campanella reacting to all the letters.) Best of all, writing "Dear Sidney" letters looked like taking notes, so Gib couldn't get busted for paying absolutely no attention to what was going on.

"Dear Sidney.

"It has come to my attention..."

Gib started every "Dear Sidney" that way: "It has come to my attention". It was a

mantra, like “Once upon a time”. By starting the letter that way, it cleared his head from distractions, from irritation at Bodio and Feyrer, from weariness, from the hole world, so he could find the rhythm of the writing.

“It has come to my attention that members of the Creative Staff have been taking older monitors home for personal use. I believe that a sounder use of our resources would be to take each outdated monitor, strip out the machinery, turn them upside and use them as either bird habitats or aquariums. Furthermore...”

And then Bodio interrupted Gib’s rhythm, with a raised voice and a manicured stubbed at a spreadsheet full of disbursements and impedimenta. Gib put down his pen. One of his other time-killers was to picture these meetings how they would appear in a Tex Avery cartoon. Sidney Pinkwater was a huge bear, Hawaiian shirt and all, beset by vicious wolves. But that was giving Bodio and Feyrer too much credit. They weren’t predators, just silk-tied flunkies of New York money people. So Gib downgraded them from wolves to foxes. Then dogs. Then Gib declared them ferrets and to hell with them. So Sidney was a brightly colored bear, beset by sniping ferrets. At best, Dick Moran was a fearful possum, watching how the fight went so he could choose the winning side.

That was where Gib’s head was when he realized Bodio was staring at him. He had clearly asked a question, and was waiting for an answer. Gib looked around and the rest of the table was staring at him. Pinkwater looked grateful for the interruption.

“Could you repeat the question?” Gib asked.

Bodio rolled his eyes. “I asked you what you were grinning about. This is very serious business.”

Ah. Pissing match. Gib had vaguely expected this. Bodio and Feyrer either wanted Gib gone, or his presence at the meetings explained. Just another way of putting Pinkwater on the defensive.

It reminded Gib of Uncle Joseph’s son, Joe Junior. Growing up, he had always tried to get his way by this kind of browbeating and bullying. It had worked on Owen, Joe Junior’s younger brother, but Wallis had never tolerated Joe Junior’s shit, and Gib had been shielded by default.

Joe Junior never stopped trying, though, no matter how much he got smacked down. The month Gib had graduated Virginia, he had gone out to dinner with all three Arlen children, Wallis, Owen and Joe Junior. Joe Junior had picked the restaurant, a steak place named Tooley’s near Times Square, even though Owen had been a Vegan for at least six years and no one besides Joe Junior had liked the old-boy clubbishness of the place. The dinner had gone miserably, with Owen walking out on the verge of tears after a half an hour of being called a “faggot” by his older brother. When dinner arrived, Joe Junior spotted some of his bosses from the trading house walking in to have dinner, so he abandoned Gib and Wallis to their filet while he went to go brown nose.

When Joe Junior finally got back to his ribeye, he found it cold and congealing. So he called the waiter over and loudly upbraided him. Wallis and Gib would have walked out, but by that point they were only hanging in to see that the waiter got a decent tip. Joe Junior tried to resist, but Wallis grabbed the check out of his hand and calculated a 40% tip, and wrote an additional note: “Sorry for my asshole brother.”

Just another night out with Joseph Arlen, Junior.

Though Uncle Joseph had never said anything, Gib was sure that this was at the

heart of Uncle Joseph's disappointment in Joe Junior. Not only was he unable to impose his will on others, he was also too stupid to stop trying. Weak and dumb was not a combination designed to impress Uncle Joseph.

Bodio was still staring at him. That was what Gib hated most about these meetings: seeing Pinkwater like this. The huge man was a dominant force, he filled a room, everyone wanted to talk to him, to buy him a drink, to hear what he had to say. But during these meetings, he diminished, shrunk, faded away. It was appalling. Because Pinkwater was smarter than Bodio and Feyrer, was a good man, was frankly *better* than the two suits. If the bear would just think to turn around and roar, the two ferrets would back off at supersonic speeds. It was embarrassing, like accidentally walking in on a friend and finding him with his cock in his hand, furiously stroking away. Portnoy's Taint.

Gib heard the voice of Gibson Senior talking to him. *Edward, nothing in the world is as important as being strong. And even if you don't have strength, you still must be perceived to have it.* And Gib didn't owe Bodio or Feyrer a dime.

So fuck him. "I was probably grinning because you're such a goddamn clown."

Around the table, there was a drawing-in of breath.

"Clown?!" Bodio yelled.

"It's common sense," Feyrer interrupted. "If this company wants our investment so badly, we should be entitled to see all of the financials for all of Black Helicopter. Not just the project."

"Oh, that's a steaming pile of horseshit. Where'd you learn how to lie that badly? Harvard Business School? Oh, wait, I've seen your resume. You couldn't get in."

"What's wrong with *Wharton*?" Feyrer started.

So Gib decided to let loose his inner Gibson Senior.

"Frankly, Sidney, I don't know why you don't toss that little prick out on his ass for asking to see your books." Dick Moran gave a breathy little gasp.

Gib continued on into the silence, "They're trying to nibble you to death to get themselves a better deal, when we all know that you're in the catbird seat. You have something they want. You can smell it on them. Just *look* at them, Sidney. Why don't you ask them what their bosses back in New York would do if you took the Black Box project to some other investment firm? They'd shitcan these two assholes in a second."

By that point, Bodio and Feyrer had gathered up their papers in to the briefcases and walked furiously out of the meeting. Dick Moran ran after them, only sparing the time for one anxious glance at Sidney and Gib before he went.

There was silence in the meeting room. In fact, there was silence outside the meeting room, because everyone at the desks nearest to the conference room had turned to watch the two suits storm out.

After two full minutes had passed, Pinkwater asked, "Gibson, are you utterly, utterly mad?"

"No. The only thing vipers like that respect is strength. Once you show them the whip hand, they'll roll over like good little doggies. You should try it, Sidney."

Sidney's face was pale as he looked at Gib. "That money is important, you know."

"I know that, Sidney. You know how I know that?"

"Because you're working on the Black Box, too."

Gib rolled his eyes. "No, I know it because of how you act whenever those two

assholes come around.”

Pinkwater looked startled. “How do I look?”

“Desperate. Have you ever gotten laid when you’re desperate, Sidney?”

Sidney groaned and lowered his head into his arms on the table. “I’m doomed,” he said through the cover of his burly forearms.

“Sidney, get up. Let me show you something.” Gib stood up and dragged a limp Pinkwater to his feet, then herded him outside to the reception area, where they could see the elevator area. Bodio and Feyrer were still standing in the hallway, waiting for the elevator. Dick Moran was gesticulating helplessly at the two younger men.

“You might ask yourself, Sidney, why two guys who seemed so angry when they stormed out are calm enough to wait around for an elevator.”

Pinkwater stared at the spectacle. “Why don’t they just take the stairs?” Pinkwater asked quietly.

“They might work up a sweat. And then their suits wouldn’t look perfect. They’re *Suits*, Sidney. Image is all. And *those* are the people who have you so worried?”

Pinkwater shook his head. “They are a pathetic pair of pricks, aren’t they?”

“They’re smarmy Armani ferrets. You’re a grizzly bear in an ugly Hawaiian shirt. The bear wins every time. Except maybe a beauty contest.”

Pinkwater laughed. It sounded unfortunately hysterical to Gib’s ears, but it seemed to do Pinkwater a load of good. And he looked a lot less desperate when he stopped.

“And what’s the worst that could happen?” Gib added. “So they don’t fund you. You go to some other firm. Even if the whole Black Box thing goes in the dumper, you’re still rich. You can just sit back and watch TV until something good comes along.”

“Good grief,” Pinkwater said, after a brief pause to think. “I feel tremendously better. Gibson, I can’t thank you enough.”

“Does that mean I can stop coming to these meetings?”

“Certainly not.”

"Battle of the Stars"

Space. The final frontier

Gene Roddenberry

For all the uproar and foofaraw at Black Helicopter, things at The Space were going very smoothly. Frank and Garrity seemed to have accepted Gib as a junior partner in their enterprises, since he was around so regularly. Only Campy still seemed suspicious. He alternated between completely ignoring Gib or staring blankly at him with what looked to Gib like incipient cannibalism. Anger or hunger, it didn't keep him from playing Hearts when Gib sat down to join them.

Gib did notice that his reports about Campy had started to get more or less hostile base don how much the big man mocked Gib's ongoing losing streak in Hearts during the card game that day.

For Ruth's part, she treated like an assistant, and regularly teased him about "the article".

"So, writer-boy, you pitched the article to anyone?"

"I've got a few letters out."

Ruth smiled. "I get you a job, and you're *still* looking to get paid here, aren't you?"

Days passed.

"So, writer-boy, any answers from those letters yet?"

"Not yet."

"Still looking to get laid, aren't you?"

"Nope."

"Ain't gonna happen, Hemingway."

The regularity of these exchanges seemed to reassure her. She started asking Gib to handle tasks of increasing responsibility. Gib would open up the doors to the public, collect cover charges or tickets, wrestle with kegs and cases of beer, set up speakers with Frank Marion, help pack boxes, and so on. Of all the jobs, he liked helping out Frank Marion the best, because it was both the most interesting and relaxing.

The sound and light boards were combined and tucked into a cul de sac underneath one of the staircases leading up to the balcony. Marion would do sound checks for each band, and set up light shows for those that requested it. Frank had programmed a few standard light show patterns for the shows. If it was a Deadhead-style jam band, Frank would tell Gib to do the "Dirtwizard" setup (psychedelic, multi color lights in no particular rhythm); for sludgy, thick guitar rock bands, it was "Ferro Lad" (the patterns were triggered by the bass monitor, and usually involved big spotlight going off like flares); for punk bands, Frank called the light array the "Asshole" setup. (This was the pattern he always chose when Green Rage played, for example.) There were four or five others, but often Marion just fiddled and tweaked during the show.

One night, Gib and Marion were sitting in the balcony, watching the lights flicker and incite the crowd. Gib spotted Norman Haddal holding court in the middle of the floor, a lone spot of immobility amidst the frenetic. Purple and yellow lights highlighted Haddal's shaved head, like a marshmallow in a pile of charcoal. Gib pointed Haddal's head out to Marion.

“Oh sure. I always look for Norman’s head, too. I use his bald head like a white balance. Just so I know the lights are going right.”

Gib asked why there wasn’t a special techno setup, since there were a lot of those at The Space. Marion told him, “I just take ‘Dirtwizard’ and triple the speed. That works just fine.”

The first time Gib saw Marion run a show, he asked how pre-programmed patterns could work for so many different bands. Marion explained, “It’s chaos theory and human perception. I flip a bunch of switches, and the audience *makes* the lights make sense. Just like people fill in the spaces between comic book panels.” At least, that was what Gib thought Marion said. Marion was like that. The superficial appearance of oblivious geekery was only a thin layer over a deep and abiding geekery, one that was based on research, education and passion.

After weeks of working for no pay, Gib wondered if it looked suspicious that he was hanging around so much for so little in return. When he broached the question with Marion, Frank happily answered, “Ruth figures you’ve got some scam running. Probably unemployment checks and learning how to run a club. I dunno.”

“Is that what everyone thinks? That I’m just loafing on unemployment? Even though I’m working with Black Helicopter?”

“Oh, no,” Marion said, surprised. “That’s just Ruth. She’s a little too cynical sometimes. *I think so, anyway.*”

“What’s the consensus with everyone else, then?”

Marion shrugged. “No consensus. Ethan thinks you’re a sincere volunteer and you’re trying to help us out so we can spread the word about the planet.” When Marion said the last few words, they sounded by rote, a line from one of Ethan Garrity’s speeches. If Gib had learned one thing about Frank Marion, it was that he was part of Green Rage because he was friends with the other two men. He agreed with them that something “needed to be done about the environment”, but only in the vaguest of ways. If necessary, he could quote statistics and reports about everything from global warming to deforestation, but it was obvious he didn’t have the deep-seated feeling about it that the others had, even Ruth. But Marion enjoyed the planning involved in the Green Rage actions and activities, from filming tree-spiking expeditions, to editing the videos, to running shows at The Space.

At the beginning of September, the two of them were hanging out in the balcony and watching a new light design go through its paces (“Daddy-O”, for a night of cocktails and swing bands that Ruth had booked, a trend that Gib disliked and that Marion was indifferent towards). Marion had stuck in a swing band demo tape and watched to see if the lights would be OK.

“That looks all right, doesn’t it?” he asked Gib, who had just brought a six pack of beer into the balcony. Gib handed a can of Budweiser to the sweaty other man, opened one for himself, and propped his feet up on the guard rail before he answered.

“It looks good to me,” he said. “Maybe you would want more blue lights, though. Smoky lounges, vodka martinis, and all other trappings of an idiotic trend about an idiotic decade.”

Marion smiled. “I was thinking it needed more blue, too. Nice to have agreement” He drank some beer. “You’re wrong about the fifties, though. That’s just a

cliché, that the fifties were about conformity. The Fifties had Kerouac and the Beats, and Charlie Parker, and they had the first important victories for civil rights. 1954. Brown versus Board of Education.”

It was already the longest discussion Gib had had with Frank Marion that didn't involve some reference to math. Gib tried to keep it going.

“It's funny everyone wonders about me. I wonder how you got involved in this.”

“You mean, a black guy?” Marion asked.

“Sort of.”

“You know what my middle name is, Gib?” Marion finally offered.

“No.”

“Thurgood.”

While Gib thought about it, Marion continued, “Maybe saving the environment isn't the struggle for Civil Rights, but it's important. And if I get to have a good time doing it?” Marion grinned. “In the words of the Negro spiritual, Free at last, free at last, Great God almighty, I am free at last,” he quoted in a carrying voice.

TO: Jan Reuben, Special Agent, San Francisco

FROM: [Agent Code #: SF677-900-980]

Subject: Frank Marion

Subject has a family history of civil unrest...

It was a few days after that when Ruth asked Gib how he felt about being a bouncer.

“Why? What's going on?”

“We have this religious seminar tonight, and I think it might get ugly,” Ruth said

“Religious? What kind of religious?”

“Um, they say they're teaching about Forces.”

“Some kind of New Age crap, then?”

Ruth nodded, and kept nodding just a little too anxiously. “I booked this thing because they offered a lot of money. More than we normally get for a night. I should have checked them out more thoroughly, but I got sucked in by the damn money.”

“Confused the kind of green you care about, did you?”

Ruth kept nodding for a second, then snapped her head around angrily. “What? Hey, fuck you!” She stomped away.

Gib followed along, finally stopping her by grabbing her arm. “Sorry! I was just making a joke.”

Ruth threw his hand off, but then screamed inarticulately and slapped her palms against her thighs. “That's what pisses me off. You're right. I got my greens mixed up.”

Ruth was really pissed, Gib realized. She was clenching her fists, and didn't even seem to be aware she was doing it. “Hey, relax. Just tell me why you need a bouncer.”

“Well, there's some religious group that's opposed to the one we're hosting. And

these two groups fight a lot, I guess. Like, really fight.”

Ruth was looking away from Gib, and he realized she was lying about something, leaving something out, and doing it badly. Overcome by the sympathy a professional feels when an amateur is playing way above her head, he tried to bail her out.

“Like the Middle East?”

Ruth made a ‘maybe so-maybe no’ motion with her hand. “More like they believe the same general thing, but different details. The danger is always in the details.”

“That’s what the Pope said to Martin Luther, I’m sure.”

Ruth laughed, but only politely. “So can you look threatening? Once I booked this group, I started getting threatening letters. It’s probably bullshit, but I want some extra people here tonight just in case.”

“Sure. I’ll dress all in black and look menacing.”

At eight, he was back at The Space, dressed and glowering as promised. Outside the front door, the gathering crowd didn’t look too dangerous. In fact, they looked downright respectable for a bunch of freaks involved in a nutty religion. There were a lot more men in the waiting crowd, by a noticeable margin, but both genders were dressed conservatively – jeans and button-down shirts predominated. The one thing that caught Gib’s eye, though, was that many of the women had strange haircuts, which he wasn’t able to place in his memory until after he had let himself into The Space and was walking up to the stage level.

They were Princess Leia haircuts.

Then he walked into the performance area and saw all the Star Wars™ decorations. For a minute, he thought he must have gotten the nights confused. There was a huge white curtain stretched out across the back of the stage and a huge projection was being shown on it from the balcony in the rear of the room. The projection looked of professional quality, but it was hard to tell with the lights still bright. Projected to a height of over 20 feet were two figures, one dressed all in black, from his metallic mask to his flowing robes, and the other figure dressed in a white shirt and tan pants and boots. The dark figure on the left had his right hand upraised at his side and a glowing red beam pointing straight up, while his left hand beckoned toward the viewer tantalizingly. The white and tan figure to his left was a mirror image, only the upraised beam was green instead of red.

They looked like medieval pictures of the saints, blessing the flock, missing only the yellow halos.

They were, of course, Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker.

Gib sought out Ruth. She was behind the bar, but she tried to sneak away when she saw Gib’s face.

“Hey!”

Ruth didn’t turn as he shouted. He ran to catch her before she escaped down into the storage area, tapping her on the shoulder before the stairway door could close behind her.

Ruth turned around with a guilty smile positioned on her face like bad plastic surgery. “Hey, Gib! Thanks for coming out and helping.”

“What the fuck is this?” Gib shouted. He liked the sound of it so much he shouted it louder, “*What the fuck is this?*”

"It's the religion I told you about," Ruth said in the careful manner you use talking to a hostile drunk in a bar at 4 AM. "Didn't you see the parishioners outside?"

"Parishioners?"

"Well, sure," Ruth said cheerily. "They have a religion they feel very strongly about. And they have some people who don't like what they're doing.

"How *about* that?"

"It's the history of any new religion, really. I was thinking you would stand in the back of the audience with Campy in case of any trouble. Would that be cool with you? We'll have five other guys around the area, plus one at the front door at all times. And then Frank will be watching from upstairs."

"What aren't you telling me?" Gib demanded.

Ruth looked him in the eye and said, "I swear I'm not keeping anything important from you. This is a religion, they have some enemies who have started brawls at the last six Follower meetings. That's it."

"Really?" Gib asked, still dubious.

Ruth took one of his hands and held in both of her own. "I promise you."

Nodding his head, Gib walked off to find Campy. The big man was talking with a medium-sized, brown haired man in dark brown robes. When Campy saw Gib come along, he stopped speaking, except to introduce the shorter man.

"Gibson Edwards, this is Force Leader Wedge."

Gib shook the man's hand with a twisted smile.

"I see you find this as funny as Mr. Campanella does," Wedge said.

"I'm not sure funny is the right word. What kind of a name is Wedge'? Is it from the movies?"

"Every Force Leader takes a movie name for the meetings. But not the major characters. That would be egotistical."

"Heretical," Campy added, with a straight face.

The Force Leader continued, "In any case, Wedge was a follower of Luke, and so am I."

"So in your day job, you go by your birth name?" Gib asked.

Force Leader Wedge shrugged. "If you'll excuse me, I have some work to finish before the ceremony begins. But I think the coffee and snacks are set up in the back. Is the front door open?"

"Not yet," Campy said.

"Open it, please. I don't want the other Followers forced to hang around outside."

Force Leader Wedge walked off casually and conferred with some other men in brown robes who were setting up life-size cardboard figures representing all the major Star Wars™ characters on the stage. Wedge started testing the microphone.

Campy signaled to Gib to follow and the two men went down to let in the rest of the Followers.

"Do you know why they call themselves the Followers?" Gib asked.

Campy said, "Followers of the Force."

Campy opened the door, waving the Followers inside. A few hundred people walked calmly and quietly into The Space as they murmured among themselves. Sprinkled amidst the crowd were some people who looked embarrassed or confused, many of whom

were carrying flyers. One guy in a blue sweater walked back and forth while the line steadily reduced in size, until the only choices were to join the end of the line or walk away. He walked away.

Later, while Gib stood with Campy at the back of the rows of folding chairs, he saw the same indecisive man in his blue sweater walk furtively into The Space and find a seat. By that time, the lights had dimmed and Force Leader Wedge walked out onto the stage, flanked by two men dressed in robes, their faces obscured by hoods.

Wedge raised both his hands to the crowd in a benediction and said, "Welcome, everyone. May the Force be with you." Once the crowd responded with the same phrase, Wedge nodded toward the balcony. Gib turned around to see Frank Marion, grinning, respond to the cue.

The lights went dark and John Williams' brass fanfare for the movie filled the room. Then the whole orchestra swelled and started playing the main theme to the movie, brass thundering and strings wailing. A flickering light came down from the balcony, and Gib flashed back twenty years to when he had seen Star Wars™ for the first time. The projector in the theater had been cheap, and the sound system had been blown, but Gib had still screamed and shouted in delight with the rest of the crowd.

If nothing else, Gib admitted to himself, they know how to put on a show.

On the curtain, white words appeared in a familiar, moving scrawl against a black background full of stars..

"Chapter 0," the words read. "A New Beginning."

"On Earth, a small planet in the Milky Way galaxy, the Followers of the Force gathered."

A spotlight snapped on, pinpointing Force Leader Wedge.

"The Force has two sides. Not good and evil, not order and chaos, though both of these are related dichotomies."

Gib started in surprise. That was a pretty big vocab word to hear in the middle of a freak show.

The projector started up and a scene from the fight scene between Luke and Vader in *The Empire Strikes Back* played out on the curtain above Wedge's head.

"The two sides of the Force are light and dark. But both sides are not equal. The dark side is easier; it provides quicker answers, simpler solutions. But it is *not* more powerful. A parent comes home from a long day of mind-numbing work to see their child waiting for them at the front door. The wave of love that courses through the parent is a powerful thing, as powerful as any hatred. And that love is as surely part of the light side as the hatred is part of the dark side.

Wedge turned around and watched some of the fight scene carry out. When he continued his talk, the sound from the projection went away, but scenes from the various movies continued to show above him, reinforcing, even in peripheral ways, the rest of his talk.

"As humans, most of us think we live in a world of concrete. Walls, desks, chairs, sidewalks. But really, we are also living in a world of metaphor. A world of stories. We all accept that these texts that are playing out above me are stories, but the underlying meaning has resonance for all of humanity in a way that is pure and untainted. In our perceived worlds of only concrete, we are also constantly choosing between the dark and

light sides of our nature, of our communities, of our world. We all know, in our hearts, which choices are good and which are bad. And naming those choices as aspects of the light or dark side of The Force is as useful a metaphor as any. It is a metaphor that allows us to name ourselves as the architects of our own destinies.”

“What the hell is he talking about?” Gib muttered to Campy.

Without turning his eyes away from the man on stage, Campy said quietly, “It’s basically rugged Manichaeism individualism. Except they’ve eliminated the excuse of God or Satan.”

“Uh, what?” Gib asked.

Force Leader Wedge continued sermonizing for about fifteen minutes before the dark side of the Force suddenly stood up in the middle of the crowd, wearing a blue sweater.

“Heathens! Heretics!”

The screamer yanked his sweater over his head, revealing a yellow polyester shirt with black trim around the wrist and neck and a stylized arrow on the left breast.

“Oh, damn,” Campy said, mildly.

Force Leader Wedge yelled into the mike. “Trekkies! It’s the damn Trekkies!”

“Trekkers! *Trekkers!*” screamed out the guy in the yellow Kirk shirt.

Gib turned to Campy. “This is going to get bad, isn’t it?”

Campy turned, nodded, and showed Gib a happy smile. A screaming mob of Trekkies burst out from the staircase where they had snuck into The Space and plowed into the audience full of Followers. Mayhem ensued.

The next twenty minutes flashed by in bits and pieces for Gib. While a collage of Star Wars™ scenes played out on the curtain, the combatants argued about the Stars with screams, punches, and kicks.

At one point, Gib saw Campy holding one Trekkie under his arm while he punched another in the face, all the while screaming happily, “Live long and prosper, my *ass!*” Gib fought his way out of the main mass back to the bar, where he shouted at Ruth to call the cops before he noticed she was already yelling into the phone.

“Just get your asses over here!” she finished and slammed down the phone.

Gib followed her as she ran up to the balcony and found Marion stunned and staring at the display going on below him.

“Frank!” Ruth shouted, “turn on the spotlights. Turn ‘em up all the way! And patch me into the sound system!”

Spurred out of his stupor, Marion flipped a couple of switches, lighting The Space up bright enough to read the want ads, and handed Ruth a mike. Gib looked down over the balcony and saw that some of the combatants were already stopping and covering their eyes. Gib eyes watered in the sudden bright light.

“Hey! Assholes!” Ruth yelled into the mike. Her words had no effect on the brawl, but the vicious whine of feedback that cut through the speakers did. A goodly portion of the crowd slapped their hands over their ears. *Eyes covered, ears covered*, Gib thought giddily, *if she can only get the rest of them to cover their mouths, we’ll have every kind of monkey.*

“The cops are already on their way,” Ruth continued. “All you Trekkies –“
“Trekkers!” came the yells from the crowd.

“Whatever. You’d better start running or you get to play blue alien lady with all the Captain Kirks in the jail downtown.”

Dozens of Trekkies in red and blue shirts staggered toward the door, looking like a high school drill team after a street fight. Some of the Followers wanted to harass their retreating enemy, but Campy and the rest of the security team dissuaded them. The last Trekkie to leave was the ringleader, the only one in a yellow shirt. “You’ll be sorry! Next time, I’m bringing a trademark lawyer from LucasArts!” When two or three Followers started for him in spite of Campy’s efforts, Yellow Shirt waved both his hands in a large ‘V’, the “live long and prosper” sign, at the crowd. Then he ran.

When the cops showed up, Gib and Campy met them downstairs and explained what had happened. The first officer on the scene groaned. The Followers refused to press any charges.

Then, after cleaning up the worst of the mess, most of the Followers departed as well, along with the temporary security people. Force Leader Wedge hung around for awhile and drank with Ruth, Campy and Gib. Frank Marion had left for home, freaked out.

“Thanks for all your help,” Wedge said to the three of them. “That was quick thinking with the lights and the feedback.”

“The feedback was an accident,” Ruth admitted.

Wedge drained a shot glass full of whiskey and slapped the empty glass on the bar. “Either way, it worked. The last ceremony we had, in Golden Gate Park, the fight with the damn Trekkies lasted for almost twenty minutes before we all ran away from the cops. That’s why we tried the ceremony indoors this time, to try and cut down on the Trekkie contingent.”

“Why the hostility?” Gib asked. “Aren’t you all kind of into the same thing?”

Campy laughed at Gib, and Wedge looked offended. “Of course not. They’re into juvenile theater – learning fake languages and dressing up in makeup.” Wedge put on a falsetto voice. “*Oh, my, I’m a big, fierce Klingon warrior.* You can tell because I’ve got latex on my head.” He grabbed for the bottle of whiskey and refilled his glass. “Morons.” After he took another sip from his glass, he continued, “We don’t believe that Star Wars™ is *real*, or that we’re actually pretending to be *part* of it. We use the role-playing and the metaphors of the films to explore our human natures.”

Ruth shrugged and grabbed another cold beer out from under the bar. “It’s all New Age to me. I’m just a good lapsed Catholic.”

Force Leader Wedge smiled. “Me too!”

"Full Fathom Five"

If you want to organize anything, assume that everybody is absolutely stupid. And assume yourself that you're stupid.

Bayard Rustin

One of the things that being an undercover agent had in common with freelance writing was that you didn't have to wake up particularly early. In fact, by the time fall grabbed a firm hold of 1996, Gib took it as a personal affront if someone called him before one in the afternoon, when he could be assumed to have had his first cup of coffee of the day.

Luckily, no one needed him to be a morning person. Nothing really started up at The Space before the early afternoon. And neither or OddGreg Igoe or Taylor Jackson got to Black Helicopter much before noon themselves. The only exceptions to his sleep were Jan Reuben and Sidney Pinkwater.

Pinkwater would call any time of day or night and leave a messages full of suggestions, requests, corrections to earlier messages and occasional friendly greetings and inquiries about Gib's welfare. At some point, Gib got into the habit of deleting any message the instant he heard Pinkwater's voice, then calling him right back, because Sidney would always repeat everything he had said on the message. Half the time when Gib called back, it was after 3 AM, and Pinkwater would still pick up the phone after the first ring, seemingly bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and ready to talk business.

Jan Reuben was nearly as bad. They were nearly two months into the investigation, and while Gib's reports were saying all the right things, it was clear that Reuben wanted more. And if she was pressuring Gib, then she was certainly getting pressure from Masturbatin' Bob Maynard.

Bosses. Maynard giving pressure to Reuben meant pressure on Gib. Bodio and Feyrer giving pressure to Pinkwater meant pressure on Gib. Gib figured that the pressure would eventually turn him into a diamond or crack him like charcoal. But Green Rage didn't seem to be ready to *do* anything. And there were only so many ways Gib could punch up Garrity's speeches.

Then...

On a Wednesday during the second week of September, there was a free night at The Space, so Gib invited Ruth out to dinner. Dinner was nice, at a family-run Mexican restaurant deep in the Mission. The Mama who ran the place with an iron hand came by the table more than once to urge the two of them to "eat, kiss, enjoy!" Gib initiated much flirtatious conversation. Outside on the sidewalk, waiting for a cab, they had kissed, which was nicer than dinner. But then Ruth broke away and smothered a burp.

"Hemingway! You caught me!"

Then the cab finally arrived and honked at them until Ruth jumped in, which made for an early evening, which was not so nice.

As Gib drove home, he luxuriated in the kiss, which had been redolent of beans and tequila. When he got home, the phone was ringing. Gib was I a "pick it up" kind of mood, so he did.

Ethan Garrity asked him, "Have you ever been scuba diving?"

An hour later, he had parked near Ghiradelli Square and walked through thinning groups of tourists to Fisherman's Wharf, where Garrity had said to meet the Ragers. Sure enough, there they were, loitering with intent. Frank Marion had an ice cream cone with three scoops on it (all vanilla), and it was dripping all over his fingers.

"Scuba diving?" Gib said.

"Sure!" Garrity said. "Where'd you learn how?"

"A trip to Hawaii," Gib said.

Campy glowered. "This isn't Hawaii. You're here to work."

"How was dinner with Ruth?" Frank Marion asked Gib, glancing at Campy out of the corner of his eye. The big man stomped off angrily.

The rest of them followed Campy off the main tourist drag and back toward what appeared to be a marine supply warehouse. The lights were off, but as the four of them trudged past the counter and into the back room, they emerged into a well-lit room where Norman Haddal was filling a scuba tank with air.

Gib was surprised. He had seen Haddal around The Space almost every night, but he hadn't ever thought the drug dealer was actively involved in Green Rage activities. At most, Gib had thought Haddal would be something to offer up to Reuben and Maynard if Green Rage turned out to be a bust of an investigation.

Without speaking, Haddal pointed at a group of beaten-down looking tanks, which the Ragers picked up and carried out to a house boat that was tied up to the dock in the back of the supply store. Gib grabbed tanks of his own and joined in the work. The five of them loaded suits (Haddal looked at Gib and tossed a size L on the pile of suits), goggles, fins, and various other tools. Eventually, Haddal looked at the piles of equipment and declared the group ready to cast off. Campy untied the house boat and Haddal carefully navigated their way out into San Francisco Bay.

"Whose boat is this?" Gib asked.

Haddal grunted, then muttered, "Keep your voice down. Sound carries a long way on water."

The only one who didn't suit up to dive was Norman Haddal. Frank Marion prepared a video camera designed for underwater work, while Garrity and Campy got dressed and backpacks with gallon cans of paint.

"Where are we going?" Gib asked, when they were finally a good way out.

Instead of answering, Haddal pointed to an island west of them, out in the middle of the bay.

"That's *Alcatraz!*" Gib said.

"Yup," Campy said. The big man was finally over his pique on the Wharf. He grinned as he sprayed anti-fog fluid into his mask and shook it out. "We're going to tag the place. Now why don't you shut up and help us pack?"

As the Green Ragers and Gib got ready to go into the bay, Campy was a checklist of nervous tics. He tapped his feet, clenched his fists, stood up, then sat back down, paced back and forth on the small confines of the boat, checked his equipment over and over, checked everyone *else's* equipment. Eventually, Gib decided it was a kind of stage fright.

The houseboat had a top speed of lethargic, and even that strained the engines, so Haddal kept the throttle mainly in the mopey range. While Gib knew they couldn't have

very far to go, it still took twenty minutes before Haddal cut the engine and threw a dive marker over the side.

As the houseboat settled, Campy took a chemical light stick out of his equipment bag, snapped it and shook it up so that it glowed a grim green.

"It's supposed to be a clear night down there, so just follow our lights. We all have red lights attached to our vests, but I didn't think to get one for you. I hate to use these chemical lights, because they're bad for the fish. So don't drop this. In fact..."

Campy turned Gib around and taped the green stick on the back of Gib's tank. Then he broke another stick and taped it to Gib's vest, his buoyancy compensator.

"There, you have two lights. You can see your gauges with the one I taped to your BC."

Campy handed a bag full of two paint cans to Gib. Garrity had already fastened a bag full of paint to his weight belt.

"All you have to do is tote these cans, plus a mop, and follow us," Campy said.

"All right, that's it," Gib said. "Before I go into the water, I want to know what the hell we're doing."

Campy grimaced, but Garrity cut in before the big man could answer. "Have you ever been to Alcatraz?"

"Yes."

"So you've seen the graffiti from the Indian takeover in 1969. They painted words that face toward the East Bay. We're going to paint one of the walls that face San Francisco."

"Why the hell don't we just drive this boat right up the island?"

Garrity said, "Because someone might see the boat, and –"

"And because it's more entertaining this way," Norman Haddal interrupted.

"More entertaining?" Gib demanded.

Campy nodded his head, his good humor firmly back in place. Then he grabbed a long mop from the deck in both hands, put on his facemask, stuck in his mouthpiece and stepped in the water, quickly followed by Garrity and Marion. Wanting more of an explanation but knowing that Haddal would, at best, offer nothing but a superior smile, Gib picked up a mop and stepped over the side of the boat.

Campy set the level of the swim no more than fifteen feet below the surface of the water, so Gib had to inflate his vest a bit to reach the level of buoyancy he wanted, (especially with the cans of paint hanging from his weight belt). Fifteen feet wasn't very deep, but the water was pitch black and completely disorienting. Gib was anxious to stay near the three other men, their lights, and being close to the surface of the bay was also just fine.

Gib settled into a swimming rhythm behind Garrity, and the time passed quickly. Frank Marion was the only one of the group not loaded down with equipment besides his camera, and he swam back and forth to various angles to film the other three swimmers as they made their way to the abandoned island prison.

Gib's green chemical light combined with the red lights from the other two men to make for a Lovecraftian glow in the water, equal parts bloody mayhem and demons from other dimensions. Gib looked down into the depths of water and imagined beats with hundreds of tentacles and thousands of eyes rising up from the blackness to envelop the

intrepid little band of swimmers.

Haddal was right. It *was* more entertaining this way.

Gib was startled by a large ray gliding though the outer radius of his light. He had never seen a ray that closely before, not outside of an aquarium, and he couldn't remember if they had a sting on the end of their tails.

The chemlight on his chest was just starting to dim when he saw Campy leading the way upward. Gib's fists emerged into the air with the mop. A little more swimming, and then they were walking up the rocky side of the island.

All four men took off their fins, piling them up with a lit chemlight that would only be visible from the island, so they could find the equipment later. Frank Marion took the opportunity to open up his waterproof camera and put in a fresh tape. Then Campy led the way up the hill and produced a screwdriver to open up the cans of paint.

Gib watched as Campy grabbed a mop and started to paint the walls of Alcatraz prison with bright red paint. With the mop, Campy extended his height to make the tops of the red letters nearly twelve feet tall. The three of them (Marion was busy as a documentary filmmaker) alternated with the mops and sloppily painted the words "SAVE THE EARTH" in tall red letters. With the green paint; with the green, the words "GREEN RAGE" were added to the left and right the red letters.

The two Es in the "GREEN" on the left were so messy that the word ended up looking more like "GABBN" where the lines of paint had rolled down the wall. But they all agreed that most people would be able to figure the word out from context.

Back at the pile of fins, they packed up their refuse, not wanting to leave any extra evidence of their tagging trip behind for authorities to poke through. Gib put up a bitter argument, but they ended up bringing the empty cans of paint back to Haddal's houseboat. If they dumped them on the bottom of the bay, Garrity reasoned, they might poison a striped bass or two.

As they shuffled back into the water, Gib asked about the kinds of fish that lived in the Bay. Garrity reeled off a long list, while Campy grunted agreement.

"What about sharks?" Gib asked. "I meant to ask about that."

"Sure, there's a bunch of sharks!" Garrity answered, happily. "Leopard sharks, seven gill sharks, blue sharks. Fisherman's Wharf has a great aquarium where you can find out all about the fish in the bay." Casting a nervous glance at Campy, Garrity added, "I know that zoos and aquariums are supposed to be awful and artificial and all that, but some of them are pretty informative."

Campy didn't appear to hear Garrity's slight heresy.

"Are rays dangerous?" Gib asked. "I saw one while I was swimming out here."

"Enough talk," Campy said.

The big man let the other three walk into the water ahead of him, before he said, "Gib, if a ray comes for you, the sting's the least of your worry. Some of those bastards get to be over a hundred and fifty pounds. Bigger. They could drag you right out into the ocean, probably."

Gib turned around and looked at the big man, who smiled.

Back on the boat, Gib and Garrity pulled up the dive line while Haddal turned the houseboat and headed for shore.

Gib figured this might be a good time to investigate, while the Ragers were

celebrating a successful mission. Garrity and Marion were happy to describe how they planned to edit and distribute the tape Marion had made.

"It'll be a great media hack." Marion said.

"Media hack?"

Garrity said, "We try to use the tools of the establishment against them.

Advertising, video, all that. Frank's holding an incredibly expensive camera right there to make sure the video is of high enough quality to look right on the evening news. The more we can get our message out on the airwaves, the more people can start to ask questions about the environment." Garrity looked about ready to go into a longer speech, but he and Marion were exhausted. Campy was never Gib's choice for conversation. So Gib started talking to Norman Haddal.

"Norman, do you live on the boat?"

"Yes. Actually," Haddal said with a smile. "you could say this boat is zoned for live-work. Below decks is where I create my finest products."

"You have a lab below decks?"

"I do. That's so if something happens to ignite, there's a lot of water to put out the fire. I have life vests stashed all over this humperdinck, so even if the damn thing blows itself to bits, I figure I can jump in to the Bay and take my chances with the sharks and the narcs."

"What would blow up?"

Haddal looked puzzled. "Campy? Are you sure about this guy?"

Campy shrugged.

"Ruth likes him," Frank Marion added.

"Well, Gib, the designer pills I sell at The Space are only my hobby. And I practically *give* those away. In my actual business dealings, I follow strict rules of economic supply and demand. If it's in demand, I supply it. Right now, I'm making a lot of meth. And good meth means ether. And ether means *boom*."

Gib asked carefully, "Is there a lot of ether on this boat right now?"

Haddal said, "The life vest nearest to you is right behind your left shoulder."

Silence followed. It continued until Garrity said, "Gib, there's something I've been meaning to ask you."

"What's that?"

Garrity exchanged looks with Marion and Campy before he continued. "We just wanted to say."

Campy snorted unhappily.

Garrity ignored the big man for a change. "We *all* wanted to say that we think Ruth is excellent. She's really important to all of us. But we've decided that you're OK, too."

"Thanks," Gib said, uncertainly.

Campy looked over at Gib and glowered.

The rest of the boat ride back to the dock went without any more small talk.

TO: Jan Reuben, Special Agent, San Francisco

FROM: [Agent Code #: SF677-900-980]

Subject: Norman Haddal

Subject has been under observation by local agents of the Drug Enforcement Agency. DEA has been unable to locate subject's lab...

"Scotch, Condoms, and Company"

I find it extraordinary that a straightforward if inelegant device for ensuring the survival of the species should involve human beings in such emotional turmoil. Does sex have to be taken so seriously?

P. D. James

This is how it finally happened. If you like, it could even be described as a victory. When 145, 211 men died in three and a half minutes at Antietam, the North called it a victory. When 65 million men died in 44 seconds on the third day of fighting at the Sorbonne, the English, with characteristic humor, called it a victory after they carefully measured and found their front lines had moved ahead an average of three and a half inches.

You get the idea.

Two nights after tagging Alcatraz, Gib had spent a night with Reuben, describing the Alcatraz swim, and promising to get a copy of the video tape when Marion was done editing. Then he had avoided having sex with her and had gone home to watch porn instead.

When the phone rang, it was late enough that Thursday had turned into Friday. Gib thought about letting the machine pick up, but he didn't think anyone was currently pissed at him. And it might be Reuben, looking for longer night after all. The porn had made him think more positively about her – about any female, really. So Gib fumbled for the remote, figuring the sounds of pay-per-view porn wouldn't go across so well.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Gib. It's Ruth." Ruth was speaking very carefully, pronouncing each word distinctly, and Gib realized she was loaded. That afternoon, Frank Marion had told Gib that Ruth was going to a party for a friend that night.

"Hi, Ruth, what's --"

"I have three questions for you," she interrupted. "Please answer very carefully." Ruth cleared her throat.

"One: Do you have scotch?"

"Yes. Ruth, is there --"

"Two: Do you have condoms?"

At that distinct moment, Gib went both limp and rigid, depending on what part of him you were talking about. The languid excitement he felt sweeping over him still caused beads of sweat to pop up on his forehead.

"Yes."

"Fine. Three: do you have company right now?"

"No."

"I'll see you in fifteen minutes."

Ruth hung up.

Fifteen minutes later, Gib had swept away all the dust bunnies; stacked all the empty pizza boxes and hid them in a kitchen cabinet; kicked, screamed and thrown all the loose magazines and assorted crap under his couch; and carefully placed a box of condoms, a bottle of scotch, and two glasses on the coffee table in front of the couch.

This was the longest seduction Gib had ever attempted. If a woman wasn't

interested in the first ten minutes or so, Gib was ready to move on and find more fertile soil. But because of the job, because of proximity, because of reasons he couldn't quite explain to himself, he had kept at this one, no matter how resistant she had seemed.

Would have felt relieved if he wasn't so goddamn nervous.

He stood in the middle of the room, hopping from left foot to right, before he finally went and grabbed a couple of condoms from the stash in the bookcase next to his bed and hid them in the couch cushions.

Finally, he was standing at the front door and making one final assessment of his place when the buzzer rang. He buzzed Ruth in, unlocked his door and went to sit on the couch.

That's when he looked up at the TV and saw the porn.

Then he realized he had put the remote away in the crazed cleaning frenzy.

Somewhere.

The concepts backed up in his head, stunned at his stupidity. Gaper's block of the brain.

Put the remote. Away. Somewhere. Somewhere he couldn't remember.

The words all ran together. Puttheremoteawaysomewherehecouldn'tremember!

He rolled off the couch and started digging through the crap he had shoved under then couch. There was no time to be delicate, so he hauled out handfuls of magazines, dust and loose change in a search for the remote. Nothing.

He jumped to his feet, ran across the room, and pressed every button he saw on the front of the TV. A documentary about monkeys flashed onto the screen, then a *Friday the 13th* movie, then a cooking show, before Gib got himself under control.

"Idiot. Calm down." He leaned around the back of the TV and pulled the plug out of the wall.

Then he looked around at the scattered crap he had flung out from under the couch, realized the place was back to the mess it had been before the cleaning fit. He shrugged, went back to the couch to pour himself a scotch. As he took his first sip, he heard a knock at the door.

"It's open," he yelled.

Ruth walked in, focused carefully on him, then smiled as she closed the door behind herself.

"So," Gib started, "how's it going?"

Instead of answering, Ruth walked over, sat down next to him, and took the scotch out of his hands. She took a long drink, then looked at Gib with a dreamy look in her eyes.

"Shut up."

Gib shut up, his teeth clicking together in his haste to follow instructions..

Ruth took another drink of scotch. "Good boy. That's an amdirable -- no, an addirable -- uh, it's a *good* quality. For you to shut up."

Suddenly, her face turned pale.

"Where's your bathroom?" she asked in a watery voice.

Gib pointed to the requested door.

Ruth stood up and ran. In a moment, noises of distress came from behind the door. Then after a long while, Gib could faintly hear the sounds of running water.

Another long while after that, Ruth came back out. Her eyes were red-rimmed and teary, but her smile was bright, and she was walking much more steadily.

"Are you all right?" Gib asked again.

"Much better," Ruth said. She sat down next to him, took his face in her hands, and when she kissed him, Gib tasted a layer of toothpaste and mouthwash over stomach acid.

A few hours later, Gib woke up in bed alone. The shades on his window were wide open, and sunlight was pouring in on him. For a minute, before he shook off the sleepiness, he was stunned at the depth of loss he felt because Ruth wasn't laying next to him.

Then he smelled coffee being brewed.

Ruth walked back into the bedroom, carrying two cups of coffee, wearing one of his grey Virginia t-shirts. She handed a steaming cup to Gib.

"Hey, did you know you had pizza boxes in your kitchen cabinets?" she asked.

Gib drew a blank for a second, then remembered the cleaning. "Have to keep them someplace."

"Why are you saving *pizza boxes*?"

"Don't *you* save your pizza boxes? Good for the environment."

Ruth laughed, until she stopped short and put her hand to her head in pain.

"Good party?"

"Yeah. We're all pretty proud of Corinna"

"I can understand why," Gib said.

Ruth looked at him cynically. "You can, huh? I'd love to hear why. Since I'm pretty sure you have no idea who Corinna is."

Gib groaned quietly. "Sure. My take." He sipped some coffee before continuing in a pompous TV voice. "Isn't the need for -- it *is* Corinna, right? -- for Corinna's project *obvious* to anyone who looks closely? "

"Amazing. Open mouth, spew bullshit. You're an artist. A bullshit artist."

"After hours of studying all the data," Gib continued, "and of course giving extra attention to the public testimony, any concerned citizen can see that not only does Corinna *deserve* the grant, it's practically our *duty* to help. By the way, what the hell is she doing?"

"Youth center programs for sex education."

Gib waved his hand in the air importantly. "Oh, well, then it's *patently clear* that *not only* should the community be involved in teenage sexuality, they should *encourage* it on *every* occasion."

"Should I assume you're interested in educating large-breasted eighteen year-olds?"

"Well, certainly they're a high risk demographic, yes?" Gib asked. "However, speaking for myself, I find that I am personally interested in blondes in their mid-20s. With rock-hard abs."

Ruth lifted her borrowed sweatshirt and patted her stomach. Gib noted with a dry throat that she hadn't borrowed any underwear.

"Abs like these, you mean?" Ruth asked. "or did you have some other ones in mind?"

Later.

She: "Hold on."

He: "What?"

She: "Stop!"

He: "Why? What's wrong?"

She: "You're banging my head on the bookcase. Scoot down."

More later, more better.

Gib lay next to Ruth, his arm wrapped around her. He was controlling his breathing, keeping himself calm, trying to figure out what was going on inside his head. He looked out of the corner of his eye at Ruth's profile: her sweaty forehead, her long, straight nose. Looking at her gave him pangs he couldn't identify.

Maybe I'm coming down with a cold.

Ruth opened her eyes and caught him peeking. Her lips slowly built up a grin. She turned to face him, grabbed and turned his head so that they were staring straight into each other's eyes.

Blue-eyed hypnotism, he thought.

Yes, Master, he thought.

Ruth got an extremely serious look on her face, and Gib thought he knew exactly what she was about to ask.

"What are you thinking?" It was an awful question, one that every woman asked him after sex. Am I beautiful? Am I good? Then tell me what you're thinking, because we should be as close as possible, our bodies, our minds, ourselves. Gib had learned that honest answers ("Nothing") never satisfied. And funny answers ("Pancakes?") were ten times worse.

Gib desperately hoped he wouldn't have to use one of the standard responses ("I was thinking about how beautiful you are.") he had developed. Even remembering some of the hackneyed phrases made him want to cringe.

Then he caught himself. Because for the first time, it was actually a good question. What the hell *was* he thinking?

Ruth opened her mouth to speak. *Please, he silently begged, please don't ask.*

"Do you have any aspirin?" Ruth asked.

"Sure," he said. "In the bathroom." When she walked out into the other room, Gib reconsidered over twenty-five years of atheism, as he had plainly witnessed a miracle.

Ruth came back into the bedroom, set down a glass of water and crawled back next to him.

After a long silence broken only by a few sips from the glass of water, Ruth asked, "What the hell was *that* all about?"

"What was *what* all about?"

"Just before I asked you about aspirin. What was that look on your face? Like I was about to blow up Congress or John Wayne Bobbitt you."

"Oh." Gib thought about it. "I was wondering why you decided to come over last night."

"You're lying again," Ruth said.

"No, I'm not," Gib said hotly.

Ruth looked closely at him. "Why did I come over? Because I finally decided that you're reliable enough, you aren't working some scam at The Space, and you can keep your mouth shut." Ruth drank some more water. "Plus, I was pretty drunk and it seemed like a good idea at the time. Now what did you really want to ask? What? If I had herpes or AIDS or something?"

"No, nothing like that."

"Then what? You were white as a sheet."

Gib blurted out, "I thought you were going to ask me what I was thinking."

Ruth considered that while drinking more water.

"Well, no offense," she finally said, "but that's very weird. Why would that be any of my business?"

And with that response, Gib finally identified what he was feeling. Smart, funny, beautiful, took no shit, had passion, and gave passion, but minded her own business. Ruth was perfect, his fantasy, his perfect woman. He had only felt this way once before, when he was just a kid. *Aw, crap*, he thought.

"I guess I've just been asked that a lot after sex."

"Hum," Ruth said, to herself. Finally, she said, "Well, you're a pretty open book, Gib."

"How do you mean?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Well, first of all, you're funny. And smart. And nice enough, I guess. So let me just say that first. I do like you."

"But?"

"But you've never exactly struck me as deep."

"So you're saying," Gib began, carefully picking his words, "that you don't really *care* what I'm thinking."

"You don't owe me anything. I don't owe you anything. This was a fair exchange right here. Anything else gets messy."

"Messy! How can you know things would get messy!" Everything was roller coaster loop-the-loop.

"Stop shouting, all right?" Ruth said. "My head is killing me. If it means that much to you, what were you thinking?"

Gib stopped short. "Pancakes!" he blurted out.

Ruth stared at him goggle-eyed until she finally burst out laughing again. This time, even the hangover couldn't stop her.

"Well, *that's* certainly earth shaking," she whooped, and she pounded on the mattress in amusement.

Gib could feel it building inside him, as if he'd drunk far too much. He fought to keep it down, but as Ruth kept laughing, he found it harder and harder until at last he burst out, "Shut up, okay? I was going to say I'm in love with you."

"Ohhhhhhhhh, shit," Ruth said.

"Shit?"

She smiled comfortably at him.

"I told you things would get messy."

PART TWO

SEPTEMBER 1996

*In which we finally catch up to Gib in the bathroom,
with a fuller understanding of the metaphorical shithole he
has dug for himself; further amusements, declarations and
photography sessions ensue;
also: the first betrayal.*

"Linty Fresh"

Between lovers a little confession is a dangerous thing.

Helen Rowland

Messy.

That afternoon, Gib crossed the street to meet Jan Reuben at a Berkeley café, little knowing he would soon be hiding in a bathroom. He had parked the GTO at the safe house and walked to the café so he would have more time to plan. While waiting for traffic, he admired her muscular jogger's legs from across the street. He tried to convince himself that Reuben was OK, even if she was a Hard Worked. He would just have to tell her. She wouldn't let it get in the way of the job. Reuben would obviously realize they would have to set aside their half-assed relationship because Ruth might get suspicious.

And there was no way he could keep it secret from Reuben. She had been pushing to install bugs and wiretaps for weeks, and he knew she would find out soon enough. And, he admitted to himself, it would be a way to get her to leave him alone. He wished he hadn't ever slept with her, that first day in San Francisco.

Best done quickly, he thought. Like ripping off a bandage.

He sat down across from Reuben and announced cheerily, "I finally fucked Ruth Radley."

Reuben nodded blankly, holding the full cup of coffee in both her hands. Hot coffee started spilling over her clenched fingers. She didn't appear to notice.

"It was the only way to get deep into their operation."

That was when the thick ceramic handle cracked off in Reuben's hands. The full cup of coffee fell out of one hand, with the jagged edges of the handle cutting her other hand.

Gib yelled for a towel. When the startled waitress rushed over, he grabbed the towel out of her apron and wrapped it around Reuben's bleeding hand. He had to force her other hand to hold the towel firmly on the cuts. After a minute, when the waitress had gone to get paper towels to clean up the spilled coffee, Gib whispered to Reuben, "What's *wrong* with you?"

She looked at him coldly and took the towel away from her hand. The bleeding had already stopped, and Gib tried to signal the waitress that everything was okay. When he turned back, Reuben slapped him hard enough to knock him down, if he hadn't caught the edge of the table. When he touched his face, he was shocked to see blood, before realizing she had slapped him with the cut hand.

Under his breath, he muttered to her, "You're making a goddamn scene. We should get out of here and go talk at the safe house. Give me your keys. You're in no shape to drive."

After a second, she nodded angrily, handed him her keys and walked off. Gib tossed a few bills down on the table as the waitress walked up.

"Nothing to worry about," he said cheerily to her.

She sneered at him, though the bolt through her upper lip made that a challenge. "Guys like you are a fucking menace," she said.

Two women sitting at the table behind her started to applaud the waitress'

sentiment. After a second, the man sitting behind them joined in, though he snapped his fingers instead of applauding. Gib decided to cut his losses.

He caught up with Reuben as she got to her standard-issue federal Ford. All the way to the safe house, Gib tried to draw Reuben out, but she ignored him while simmering in her anger. So in the silence of the short drive back to the safe house he worked on his Sally Field face.

That distraction got Gib ambushed by Reuben when they walked into the safe house. But he had been paying just enough attention, and he got to the bathroom in reasonable safety and settled down to read newsmagazines while Reuben raged on the other side of the door.

In Medias Res Resolved

In the bathroom, Gib read and waited.

After reading a few essays about the collapse of society, Gib realized that he couldn't hear any more sounds of destruction coming from the kitchen. Before opening the door, he carefully went over the various threads of the argument he had prepared.

If he kept his bullshit solid, tightly packed, and impossible to scrape away, he'd probably end up in the sack with Reuben, clearing up the problems with a final goodbye screw. But if he only produced a weak trickle, a sloppy mixture of excuses and whining, he might end up in the hospital.

He heard Reuben crying quietly, so he decided to give her a few more minutes alone. To kill time, he counted the words that rhymed with "grovel". Novel? Shovel? Hovel? Hobble? Vaclav Havel? It wasn't very entertaining. So he just counted off seconds to himself. *One thousand one; one thousand two* until finally he reached *one thousand five-hundred*. Finally, he ventured carefully back out into the kitchen.

The wave of destruction had included cupboards full of pans, cutlery, and crockery, he discovered. Shattered corpses of plates and dishes covered the floor, with dented pots and pans serving as mourners and pallbearers. A lone butcher knife was stuck point-first in the floor like a warning. *Abandon all hopes of lunch, ye who enter here.*

Reuben was sitting in the breakfast nook with her face in her hands. There were no longer sounds of crying; just hoarse, shuddering breaths. Gib wasn't surprised her throat was aching from so much screaming. Both of Reuben's hands were bleeding now, probably the last revenge of some dead dish warrior, and the blood was streaming down where she held her face, forming a small pattern around her elbows.

Start with the back rub, Gib thought. He sat down and started massaging Reuben's shoulders.

"Don't touch me, you son of a bitch", she said. The screaming had turned her voice into an awful croak, like a UCLA cheerleader after the Rose Bowl. She tried to shake him off, but he knew her adrenaline had crashed. He kept his hands on her. Contact was essential for selling the line of crap he had prepared in the bathroom. It didn't matter what the lyrics to a song were, as long as the singer *meant* it.

"It's my job, Reuben. That's what I'm here for. You *know* that. You know it because it's your job, too." After the back rub, the appeal to patriotism, to dedication.

"It wasn't your job to fuck her."

"Wasn't it? Without complete trust, these people won't bring me into the inner

circle." Inner circle, that was a good one.

"That's just a excuse."

True enough, he thought. *But at least she didn't say it was NO excuse. Let's go with Paranoid Patriot. C'mon, Reuben. Close your eyes and think of J. Edgar.*

"Look, do you want me to give up? To let these bastards just go?" he hissed. "Because if that *is* what you want, I'll *do* it. For you. Because I love you that much." He made sure to gasp just a little bit on the word *love*. Making it sound like the manliest of manly men was struggling with his hidden passionate nature. Gib imagined how it would sound in a romance novel, and let that be his guide. Funny how the word sounded entirely different than it had in front of Ruth. It didn't bother him at all to say it here, to Reuben.

Gib took a deep breath. He tried to put a macho huskiness into his voice, with just a sprinkling of heavy, *heavy* emotion. "I love you, Reuben. If I have to let these *traitors* go, then I'll do it. Whatever the consequences to the country." *Careful! Don't oversell it!* "It's not as important as what you and I have together."

Reuben started crying openly now. Gib recognized it as guilt, and decided to go for the quick turnaround. "But you and I both know how dangerous these people are. They're not going to stop with demonstrations and protests. Don't we both know that?"

Gib could feel Reuben's muscular shoulders start to loosen under his massaging fingers. He had to keep the flow going. She was poised on the precipice of repentance, which would lead to forgiveness, and he had to push her over.

He stopped massaging for a second and took a deep, sincere-sounding breath.

"I had to do it. It was either that or have her completely distrust me. We would have had to abort the whole operation." He wondered if he had ever heard someone use the phrase "abort the operation" out loud before. By this point, he was almost on autopilot

Gib finally felt her shoulders go soft and knew he had hooked her.

"I didn't exactly get a chance to finish my report, did I?" Gib asked wryly.

Reuben laughed in embarrassment, and began to apologize. Gib tuned out the rest, and buried a smile inside a kiss on the nape of her neck.

Minutes later, they were naked in the bedroom upstairs. As he kissed her, Gib could still see how troubled her eyes were. *Duty to country* and all that, sure, and of course we couldn't *abort the operation*. But wasn't it his *also* his duty not to fuck other women if he said he loved her? She was a Bureau fanatic, but not a complete idiot. Reuben needed something more to reassure her.

A idea came to him. It was something new, but he had nothing better to try. So instead of stopping his kisses at Reuben's neck, Gib continued to move downward.

"Hey, what...?"

"Lie still," he growled. *Good growl*, he thought. That was the kind of stylized macho shit that would wipe the doubts away. If her prepared her properly, her orgasm would be a emotional eraser.

Gib straightened Reuben's arms at her sides, then arranged her legs together, as if she were laying at attention. He crawled down to the bottom edge of the bed. Then he started kissing her toes. While kissing them, he massaged the soles of her feet as hard as he could without actually hurting her. He heard her groan in pleasure and knew he was on to something.

His lips moved up to the tops of her feet, where thick blue veins curled, then to her ankles. He moved all the way up her muscular legs with his lips and tongue, composing out a melody while his hands set the rhythm – sometimes softening up her knees with his strong fingers while he kissed her shins, sometimes loosening her calves while he began to kiss the inside of her thighs.

During the entire route from bottom to top, there were only two times where he almost broke the mood.

Once, while concentrating on her groin, he knew he was having a powerful effect so he kept on licking her long after he had lost interest. He started thinking about lunch.

Gee, a tuna sandwich might be nice.

Instantly, he drew in a breath to keep himself from snorting out laughter. But the sudden cold from his inhalation made Reuben twist in what was clearly delicious discomfort, and the pause let him get his concentration back.

The second time was when he kissed her belly button. He darted his tongue into it, and was rewarded with a tongue covered in lint.

God damn it, he thought. That's awful!

Gib choked back a cough, but he couldn't wash the taste out of his mouth. A little nauseated, he jumped up past Reuben's ribs to her breasts. He spent just a cursory bit of time there. Reuben was ready to go anyway.

He used his teeth to scrape the lint to the front of his tongue just as Reuben opened up her mouth to kiss him. As he spit the lint into Reuben's mouth, he used his hand to insert himself into her. He wasn't quite sure which was more entertaining, but he knew he would remember the lint a lot longer than the sex.

Once he was inside her, he lost a lot of his interest.

Grind, grind, grind. Moan, moan moan

Thirty-five minutes later, he was in the Goat, top down, driving back over the Bay Bridge into San Francisco. The tape deck was blaring out a Fishbone song ("Lyin' Ass Bitch."). Before he had gotten on the highway, he had stopped at a sandwich shop. His t-shirt, ripped during Reuben's shoe attack, drew some stares while he placed his to-go order. As he sped across the bridge, Gib kept only one hand on the wheel. In the other was a large tuna sandwich.