

Future Tense

By Keith Waddington

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Chapter Six

A Peter Pringle—From Head to Foot

Peter Pringle will be born on day five and a half of September, in the year nineteen ninety-nine and three quarters.

We enter the story with Peter a full eighteen years old—having reached that state of majority without the use of a safety net. Astounded? Well you should be.

During those intervening years he will have done more than most people half his age—and with almost as much success. But I jest. Peter Pringle will, in fact, be a genius from head to foot. Only one part of his body will be excluded from this distinction, a small part, admittedly, but a part which will prove to be the source of great embarrassment. Yes, he will never have made sex. Well, almost never. There will have been a time, once, in infant school, when several empty cereal boxes, an egg carton and a liberal application of glue brought about certain delights, though the experience will have been far from satisfying.

"Where are you going?" that mother will call out through an open kitchen window. It will be a warm summer's day in the middle of summer.

"Mind your own business, you old bag," he will politely reply, climbing into his ground level automobile. Peter will look rather like a hippie from the sixties, only different. He will wear that "I don't care" attitude like other people wear socks: i.e. only on his feet.

"Well, don't be long, there will be an eating experience at six-thirty." The French made car will pull away in a cloud of garlic.

"Humm humm, tiddle tiddle ooh. Humm humm, giggle gaggle goo," Peter is going to sing.

"Vroom vroom, vraam vraam vroom," the car will reply, and strangely, of the two, the car's utterances will be more pleasing to the ear, and enduring to the knee cap.

Peter will not be musical. He will play no instrument and even have trouble putting on a record.

So where will he go on that fine summer's day? Will he ever get there? And if so, what will he do on arrival? Will he do it alone, or with someone else? How much will it cost? And will it prove messy? Will he enjoy it half as much as he is expecting, or half as less? Will he do it again shortly after, or will once prove enough? Will once prove too much? Will it be messy? Will he know where to put it? Will it be messy? Well, due to censorship laws in this free country of ours, I can answer none of the above, except to say he will arrive back home some time later and say nothing of where he has been. It will remain forever a mystery—but yes, it will have been messy.

Chapter Eighty-Seven

Short of Cash

The next day, Peter Pringle, with five minutes to spare, will busy himself inventing something everyone will want. His goal will be fame and fortune and fornication on a grand scale. With this intent, he will set to work those things which make his brain such a formidable piece of equipment. And the moment those microscopic thingamabobs begin dodging about in that overly large head of his, the whole problem shall be solved in milliseconds. Three milliseconds to be precise. Yes, Peter will invent the ultimate in personal communication: THE SMELLOGRAM.

Within seven days, four hours, three minutes and a generous handful of seconds, Peter Pringle will be a household name, like carpet, only not so flat.

Door: Knockie knockie.

Wife: Yes?

Delivery boy: Smellogram Madame.

Wife: Ah, thanks.

(Inside house, she will open up the Smellogram).

Sniff, sniff, sniff. It's from mother.

Husband: What does the old battle axe smell?

Wife: She smells she's coming here to visit, today.

Husband: Oh shoot. How long will she be?

Wife: Five feet four. Sniff, sniff, sniff.
And there's a PS.

Husband: ?

Wife: She smells make sure that dumb husband of yours is good.

Husband: At what?

Wife: She doesn't smell.

Husband: That's a matter of opinion.

And remember, all this will be made possible by our wonder boy, Peter. Even the boss of I.B.M, a small house trained rodent named Felix, will be in awe.

"Aw heck, how'd you, squeak squeak, think up that?" Peter though will not be the kind of person to chit chat with furry beasts who have a liking for cheese, which will, one day, lead to a missed opportunity when invited to have supper with the President of the United States.

Chapter Five

Everything There is to Know

Peter, a university graduate eleven times over with more Ph.D.'s than even he knows what to do with, and still only eighteen and a bit—though using the bit more and more often and with increasing skill—will be finding life rather bland. The problem will be that he just knows too much.

"Bring me another beer!" Peter will order, surrounded by a bar. Unfortunately, he will have spoken to an unhealthy looking potted plant, and so no beer will be brought forth—or fifth come to that. The room in which he will sit is dark, and Peter has a vague suspicion that it might perhaps be the result of a serious lack of light.

"I said, bring me another beer!" Peter will holler, once again to no avail.

"Tell me my lad," a total stranger who could be Peter's long-lost illegitimate father will begin. "Why are you talking to that unhealthy looking potted plant?"

"Who said that?"

"Me. Me here. The chap standing three inches from your nose."

"Oh, you."

"Yes. I presume you've had one too many."

"What makes you think that? you suspicious looking stranger you."

"Let's call it intuition, shall we?"

"Call what intuition?"

"Anything you want."

"Sounds fair to me."

"By the way, why do you have a cold pancake on your head and a stick of salami stuck down your underpants."

"That's not salami, you erroneous errand boy."

"Oh. Apologies I do do."

"And so you should."

"But the pancake?"

"I lost my hat."

"Oh. But tell me, there must be some reason for to explain this incredible consumption of alcohol?"

"Thirst. And I have shares in several breweries."

"But tell me laddie, what's really your problem?"

"Oh, another pint of Larger—thanks very much."

"No no, now now. I mean, why do you appear so glum for the seeing?"

"Yes. Another Larger—thanks very much."

"Waiter, another pint of your best," the stranger will call to a nearby stack of chairs. "Now, what can I do to cheer you up? I hate to see a fellow so woebegone."

"I wish you'd be gone!"

"Beg pardon, just trying to help."

"And who the hell might you be any way?"

"I might, " the other will begin, "be Napoleon Bony Part."

"But you're not." Peter is going to presume.

"No."

"Then who are you?"

"Allow me to introduce myself: Fred Bloggs, Bank Manager Extraordinaire."

"What's extraordinary about it?"

"I don't have a bank."

"Oh."

"And you, my sorry looking young pup. How might you be addressed?"

"With a bow and curtsy."

"From the same person?"

"At the same time!"

"And tell me, do you always speak with your mouth open?"

"Only when I use words."

"And are you using words now?"

"Yes."

"Ah, that would explain why I can see your tonsils."

"But I had my tonsils removed when I was seven."

"I know. I have them here in this jar of vinegar."

"Oh, so you do."

"Anyway, as I was saying, I do so hate for to see a fellow down in the dumps."

"Well, don't go there then."

"I fear you misunderstand. I am speaking of your sombre mooood."

"You're being very roood. But in any case, my dear total stranger, there is nothing you can do. I'm a lost soul. Lost in the eternal boredom of life."

"Seeketh the Lord and thou shalt find a way," the stranger will say, clipping on his portable dog collar, which once belonged to a petulant poodle he knew.

"I'm an atheist."

"There's no such thing. I don't believe in them."

"Mmmm. Where's my beer anyway?"

"Waiter, bring this laddie some refreshment," he will call out to a nearby hat stand. "But tell me, for why do you find life so dull?" In the meantime, Peter will have fallen asleep, and will be revived by the smell of horseradish sauce wafting up his nostrils.

"Where's that smell coming from?"

"Your nose. I was asking you..."

"Oh yes. Well, if you must know, I find life dull because I know everything there is to know." Actually, there will be still three things he knows nothing of, though he will only be aware of two of them, and the third will not even be aware of itself.

"Ah..."

"Yes. I'm the brightest human person ever to have blinked eyes and swam water."

"Ah..."

"I've studied ever subject known to man, dog and duck-billed platypus."

"Ah..."

"I've learned every learnable dit."

"Ah..."

"I've read every readable mit."

"Ah..."

"I've memorised every memorisable kit."

"Ah..."

"I've touched upon every touchable tit."

"Ah..."

"In short, I know all there is to know."

"Ah . . . Ah . . . Chooo." The other will finally sneeze, sending snot flying across the table and onto Peter's shirt.

"Oh, goodness me, I do beg pardon. I'm so sorry. I'm dreadfully, dreadfully sorry," the dirty, filthy, disgusting stranger will apologise.

"That's okay," Peter will reply, spitting in the face of his companion and pissing on his leg. "Think nothing of it."

Chapter Threeish

The Theory of Energy Drift in a Hyperspatial Continuum

Later that afternoon, Peter will be sitting in a luke-warm bath, in a completely unfortunate state of partial sobriety. For the last ten minutes he will have pondered one of the two things he knows nothing of: The Theory of Energy Drift in a Hyperspatial Continuum. Taking a sip from a generous glass of cactus juice laced with the concentrated sweat from a bat's armpit, he will suddenly leap forth and cry:

"Eureka! Eureka! I've found it!" To which his mother will reply:

"Yes, but do you know what to do with it?"

"Mother, you don't understand. Listen," and so saying he will tie her to a nearby chair, lest she should wonder off. "I've figured out The Theory of Energy Drift in a Hyperspatial Continuum .I knew I could. I just never had the time."

"Tell me all about it," she will yawn.

"It's quite simple," he will begin. "It goes like this: Nick nack noo, vidi vidi voo. Slip slap sloo, yidi nidi knooo." Of course, this is not what he will really say, but what it sounds like to his mother, Hilda, named after the famous novelist W. H. Smith.

"Oh," shall she utter. "I see." Needless to say she will not see, and will have understood only three words in the entire forty-five minute explanation; those being: "a", "in", and "for." Hilda will not be the brightest person in the universe, in fact her intelligence will be scoffed at by a lowly earth worm talking to an elongated slug:

Earthworm: Did you hear that?

Elongated slug: Yep. She didn't understand a word of it! I've seen more brains in a chunk of coal.

Whereupon they both shall be squashed beneath the trotter of a passing pig.

So what is it Peter actually will have said? It will have begun:

"% \$\$\$ @ !*! (^).\" And ended: \"***? ? ?++#!#!.\" The Theory of Energy Drift in a Hyperspatial Continuum is complicated in the extreme, and will be understood by only two people in the universe—one of those being God. It might be added that the theory also proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that there is indeed no God.

So it will go

Chapter Thirty-Seven

The Job

The following day Peter will once again be wearing a bar—or perhaps the bar will be wearing him. With several gallons of alcohol already passed through his system, Peter will be in no condition to—well, no condition at all, actually.

Very suddenly, all at once, without pause, in a single abrupt action, happening very quickly, the portable priest will appear again. This time he will be wearing a pope costume and smoking a pipe.

"Go away," Peter will admonish immediately, and the other, acquiescently, will depart as ordered, only to return fifteen seconds later disguised further, wearing a pipe and smoking a pope costume. He will sit himself down at the table and this time Peter, weary of the games I play with him, will remain silent. Each time the pretend papal person inhales, a puff of smoke will exude from his sleeves.

"How are you feeling today?" Peter will glance over at the portable pope, sigh, pick his nose, emptying it of three ping pong balls and an ornate bedside lamp, and turn back to his beer. "Just what I thought, and that is for why I have brought something to cheer you up. Here." Peter will turn to the viable vicar who will be offering a large vanilla ice cream.

"What am I supposed to do with that?"

"What ever your saddened heart desires." Now Peter is going to have an idea, and what he does with that frigid flavoured food I can divulge no more than to mention that, as a result, it will begin to melt rapidly -and cause peculiar sensations for which Fred Bloggs will be eternally grateful.

"I see you don't care for ice cream."

"It's you I don't care for. Now bugger off." And with that the bugger will bugger off. Guess what? Yes, the very next day both will meet once again in Peter's tailor-made bar. This time though the part-time pulpit worker will be disguised as a nun—and a very convincing one too. Scratching his beard and smoking a pipe, the nearly nun will open a newspaper, spread it upon the table and leaf through its pages. Meanwhile, Peter will glance up, recognise the prudish priest and smile a gentle smile to himself.

"Ah, there we are. Look at this here." Peter though will not bother to look. Unperturbed, the nuclear nun will explain: "It is an advertisement. A job advertisement, no less. When in seeing it, I thought immediately of you, my lad."

"Really," Peter shall say, without a hint of interest in what will already have been an uninteresting voice.

"Yes, for you see I am not really a nun."

"Golly gosh."

"I am he whom you have met yesterday and the day before."

"The bank manager?"

"Yes."

"The portable priest?"

"Yes."

"Oh, it's you three again is it?"

"Yes. And now that I have revealed the real identity, which I am, I may perhaps remove this disguised disguise."

"Go ahead." And with that said Fred will remove his nuns habit to reveal, beneath, certain stains which could be construed as suspicious-looking evidence of a dirty habit.

"I'm sorry," he will dribble, embarrassed. "I forgot to wash it off this morning."

"You're truly a disgusting degenerate of despicable disposition."

"Anyway, when my eyes came upon this ad' here, I knew at once it would be something of possible definite interest to you." There will be a moment's silence, which sounds like a jet plane crashing into a large tub of peach flavoured yoghurt. "Yes, for you see, in all your studies I am sure you have learned nothing even vaguely connected with this. It is, for you, something of total newness." And so Peter's interest will be kindled, and he will take a brief gander.

"What is it?"

"Listen: 'Wanted. Hired Assassin. No experience necessary. Apply Murder and Mutilation Co.'"

"Yes, that really sounds like something I could sink my teeth into."

"Try it my lad. And be happy."

Chapter Five
Another Chapter

And this is where our story really begins.

Peter will return home with the seed of possibility germinating in his wickedly superhuman and greenhouse-like mind. Hilda will provide Peter with nutritious vegetable pulp and several slices of dead animal. "Slurp sludge," sayeth the digestive juices.

"I'll do it," sayeth our wonder boy. Reaching into his pocket he will find a slip of paper given him by the bearded nun, who could quite possibly be his second cousin on his father's side. He will read it through, hoping perhaps that something will make him change his mind. 'Wanted. Hired Assassin. No experience necessary.' Peter is going to pick up the telephone.

"Hello," a certain bearded voice will say.

"Hello," Peter will reply. "I'm calling about the job you advertised in the paper."

"Oh, yes. You're interested in it are you?"

"Rather."

"Have you done this kind of thing before?"

"Well, actually, nah, I haven't—but it does say nah experience necessary."

"Does it?"

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Once."

"That sounds like enough to me. Come on down then laddie. Say, three o'clock. We'll see what we can do. Do you have our address?"

"Nah."

"It's Sixteen, Nowhere Avenue."

"Is that downtown Nowhere?"

"Yes."

"Very well then. 'Till later."

"Oh, by the way, your name is what?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Yes, my name is What. Alan What," he will lie slyly.

"Fine. See you later then Peter." Click will go the line. It will be later and Peter will find himself slightly late for his appointment. In his haste he will not notice the 'Please Mind The Step' sign outside the door. Fortunately he will not notice the step either. The company's headquarters will be situated in a green garden shed in the middle of a council allotment.

"Hello," he will say to the boyish looking man at the reception: a table just outside the door. "I have an appointment for a job at three o' clock."

"You want the boss then. Follow me."

Inside the hut, Peter will meet a fellow who looks strangely familiar. Well, at least his beard does.

"Hi," Peter will say. "Have I seen that beard before?"

"Maybe you have. I got it second hand."

"It's not real then?"

"Oh yes, it's real. The man who sold me it guaranteed as much."

"I see." Of course, though Peter will not realise it, this bearded fellow is no other than the famous Fred Bloggs, whose disguise will, on this occasion, fool even the unfoolable Peter Pringle. Either that or I'm getting my characters mixed up.

"So, you're thinking of getting into the Hired Assassin game are you you."

"Yes."

"Good laddie. Good."

"I'm prepared to do anything."

"That's what I like to hear. But, you know, there are certain things you may find distasteful."

"Like what?"

"Killing."

"Yuk."

"Do you think you can handle it?"

"I don't know. I didn't know there'd be anything like that."

"Mind you, it's not all bad. After a while killing can even be fun—and what you do with the dead body during those private moments afterwards, is no bodies business but yours. Know what I mean? You see there are all kinds of advantages."

"What others?"

"A short work week."

"How short?"

"Five minutes. Sometimes less."

"That short?"

"Yes."

"And the pay?"

"A billion pounds a second."

"That much?"

"Yes. This is very business lucrative."

"Okay. I'll give it a try."

"Right then. To have you aboard, good." The bearded personage will begin leafing through a black book. "This evening. Your first job will be with a 'Miss Take'. She's staying at The Hotel Fancy, on Cul-de-Sac Avenue. Eight p.m. Shall I write it down?"

"Nah. I have a good memory," he will say modestly. And it will be true. He will know the name of every living China-type person, though still be unable to eat with chopsticks. He is going to count higher than any other person ever counted, yet on occasion get mixed up between the letters thirteen and fifteen. Yes, even our wonder boy Peter will only be human.

**Chapter One and a Quarter Plus a Little Bit Too Small
to Bother About**
Love at First Bite

Several hours later the dreadful time of eight p.m. will arrive. All of a sudden, there it will be. Almost without warning. Just like that. Boing: Eight o'clock. No, excuse me if you please. Hoop-la: Eight. There. Without question. As eight as eight can be. Not seven fifty-nine. Not eight oh one. Completely eight o'clock. One minute it will not be, and then it will. One hundred percent, without a shadow of a doubt.

On into the Hotel Fancy Peter Pringle will go, feeling 10% more than quite nervous.

"I'm hurry, must late," Peter will almost think, feeling the bulk of a seven inch Swiss Navy knife against his leg.

The elevator will begin its ascent—moving in a downward direction. "How should I do it?" he will think. "What exactly is my plan?" Peter has no idea. It will be all so new to him, and it is that very newness which makes him feel so alive—though it will shortly make Miss Take feel rather dead.

Meanwhile, Miss Take, who will have spoken earlier to a certain bearded gentleman, passing himself off as the owner of the 'Call Boy Escort Agency', and offering his services for the very nominal amount of absolutely free, will accordingly be expecting a lovely and sexy looking fellow to show himself—and hopefully even more. She will be anticipating an evening of sexual acrobatics. Instead she will get Peter Pringle, who is something less than a God-send to women, and who cannot even do a hand stand.

With Miss Take's Hotel room door before Peter's eyes, and slightly after his left elbow, he will knock, realising

at once that his plan must be no plan. Somehow though, he must get into the room.

"Knockie knockie," and the door will open.

"Oh, hello. You must be from the agency." The words will come from lips which surely must have launched a thousand rubber dingys, her voice sounding like the music of ten thousand breaking bottles in a darkened tunnel made from strips of rhino hide. Her beauty will be like a herd of angels reflected in a pool of sparkling spring water.

"Er . . . Oh . . . Mmm . . . Ah . . ." Peter will be spellbound by her all, gazing into those deep green eyes which will be something like the sediment at the bottom of a bowl of rich pea soup. Miss Take will be a better breed of person, having completed her studies at a French Finishing School, coming in ninth from a class of seven.

"Come on in," she will say, not surprised by his speechlessness, though amazed by his lack of trousers. He will not be as cute as she expected, but—if she closes her eyes—he might do.

"You, you, you know about the agency?" will he mumble.

"Why of course."

"Oh hell," Peter will think. "There must have been a leak. The police are probably on their way right now." And he will glance nervously down the corridor.

"Oh. So you know about the agency, do you?"

"What do you think? I called them myself."

"Yourself?" Peter, on the edge of panic, will be repeating repeating rather a lot lot.

"Yes."

"Yes?"

"Please, do come in." For a moment Peter is going to be confused, but then his superior brain comes to the rescue and he will figure it all out.

"Of course," shall he think. "She wants to commit suicide but is too chicken, and so she's hired an assassin

to do it for her. It all makes sense now." At least it will to him.

"Take a seat."

"Where?"

"Anywhere." He will take it into the kitchen.

"A drink?"

"Yes, please."

"What would you like?"

"Oh, anything wet." She will give our amateur assassin a glass of distilled Panda piss.

"Is that wet enough?"

"Mmm, lovely."

Peter will begin to examine his victim. She will appear to be in her early twenties or late eighties, blond, slim though full-breasted. In other words perfect, with a capital T. Peter will begin to feel arousal in bottom of his shoes.

"Why on earth should she want to have herself killed? She must have 36-24-36 good reasons to live."

Miss Take, noticing the inspection, will give a smile, fully aware of her effect on men. Miss Take will, in fact, be the second most beautiful woman in the universe; the first being a puddle of purple female slime on the planet Toodle Pip, worshipped by male things on almost every inhabited world.

"A penny for your thoughts?" she will ask, with Peter sitting at the dining room table.

"Okay," and she will hand him a penny.

"I was just wondering why you called the agency."

"Quite simple really: I had nothing to do this evening."

"Nogthing ta do thijs eveniong?" he will think to himself, in badly spelled thoughts. "What kind of reason is that to have yourself assassinated? She must be mad."

"Is that all?" he will ask, knowing that what he must do he must do shortly.

"Should there be more? Anyway, I thought it might be fun."

"Fun?!" shall the clever one thinketh. "She must be completely wacko. Round the bend and up the garden path. Over the mountain and through the dale. Down at the bottom of the deep blue sea. Fun? She must be twisted round an apple tree with worms in her ears. Up the creek without a paddle. A regular fruit and nut case. Daft as a brush. Loony tunes. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Fun? To have yourself killed? Well it's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. Most peculiar. Very very strange indeed." And then a moment later thinks, "I wonder if it is fun?"

Peter will feel a warm flush, a cold slush and a tepid splash as he begins to contemplate the full implications of the task. Sitting, aware of the heavy object bulging in his pocket—and the knife too for that matter—he will at last have an idea.

"Shall we have supper first, before we do it? "

"'It?'" she will smile.

"Yes."

"Why don't we do 'it' during supper. Under a table. That could be fun."

"I'd rather not. I think we should come back here afterwards to do it."

"But why? I want it to be special."

"It will be. Don't worry."

"What does she mean by special? Maybe she wants me to kill her in a strange outlandish way. Ugh, that's depraved that is. With a blunt hack saw, maybe. Or with the yolk of an ostrich egg poured down her nose. Or tied to an inflatable dingy with a slow puncture and flushed down the toilet. What about a deadly dose of sawdust pushed into her ears, or squashed beneath the feet of one hundred charging tortoises. How about nailed to a plank of wood and used in the foundation of a children's orphanage. Urgh, she's really perverted, she is. She gone to the dogs... Fed to a

pack of savage poodles. Chopped up and used as fertiliser in her mother's garden. Thrown from a low building, picked up and thrown again until every bit is broken. Thrown from a high building, caught at the bottom in a net and then thrown from a low building. Freeze-dried and fed to goldfish. Crushed beneath the ten ton wheels of an oversized tricycle. Sucked to death by a lipless squid who has nothing better to do... Yak, she really is weird. "And so the restaurant will be full of people eating. Miss Take, the second most beautiful female in existence, and Peter, the greatest thinker since thinking was thought up, will be shown to a table by all that is left of a once-satisfactory waiter from Madrid. He will begin to salivate at the sight of so perfect a body as the one before him.

"Mama mia," he will think in Italian, having once spent a fortnight in Venice with his wife and thousands of local people he never really got to know. "Muchos bella. Is nice. Is very nice. I want eat it. Is cute as hell." And then he will see Miss Take. "And she not bad too."

"Would you like give order now?" he will ask.

"Yes. Stand to attention you foreign person you!" Peter will bellow, and he and Miss Take will laugh their heads off. Fortunately, a practising surgeon will be sitting at the next table, and, knowing practice makes perfect, he will attempt to sew them back on using a "pearl one knit two" kind of stitch.

"Heads back in place the chit chat will continue."

"Who said that?"

"Who said that?"

"Who said what?"

"Who said, 'Who said that?'"

"Who said, 'Who said, 'Who said that?'"

"Who said, 'Who said, 'Who said, 'Who said that?'"

"Who said, 'Who said, 'Who said, 'Who said, 'Who said that?'"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I."

"Who said, 'I don't know.'"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I."

"Tell me Miss Take, do you have a first name?"

"Yes."

"I thought as much. Yes, I surely did."

"There is no fooling you."

"Who?"

"You."

"Oh. Me."

"Yes."

"What?"

"There is no fooling you."

"That's true"

It is easy, dear readers, to know genius by the number of foolish things one of such standing may say in any given day, and by the fact that everybody else thinks he is a total idiot; for you see, where as you and I may speak together and in an intelligent way, the genius is often concerned with things complex and often sloppy in nature, and can spare only a fraction of his attention to the conversation in hand. And so it will be with Peter, for although he seems to be attentive to Miss Take, the larger part of his mighty mind will be thinking of complicated algorithmic food combination which will be listed in the "Carte de Jour." In other words, he will be trying to decide what he should eat, and, of course, why. His mind is more powerful than that though, and he will, at the very same time, decide that he will first make love to Miss Take, and then kill her. That way she will die with a smile on her face. Actually she would die laughing, though Peter, still almost a virgin, will not know this. Of course this brain of his shall be capable of more, and indeed he will, during all this, be also conscious of the constant growth of his toe nails and their actual size to the nearest foot.

That is not all, such shall be the power of those grey cells, for you see, Peter, simultaneously, will make intricate calculations which will, at there conclusion, lead to more intricate calculations which may perhaps prove to him, once and for all, that intricate calculations are very intricate indeed. And so there you have it: Peter Pringle, the only human-type person alive able to conduct multiple brain activities at the same time and still tap his foot to a little-known Waltz written by a dwarf from East Berlin. The strange thing is, Peter, though he will have tried on many occasions, will find it impossible to pat his head with one hand whilst rubbing his stomach with the other.

"I've got a first name too."

"I am happy for you."

"I suppose I should introduce myself. My name's Peter Pringle. My friends call me Peter."

"What about your enemies?"

"They call me Peter too. What about you?"

"Oh, I will call you Peter as well."

Peter will excuse himself, make way to the toilet, lock himself in a cubicle and begin to play with his weapon, all the time thinking of how it must soon penetrate Miss Take and, of course, why. After a while he will take out the knife as well.

"She's too cute to die," he will think, "but die she must," and the unblunt knife will be replaced in his pocket. It will have been deblunted with great care and he will almost cut off his manhood.

Back at the table, Peter Pringle—the most intelligent human since intelligence was invented—and Miss Take—more juicy than a dozen oranges in an atomic powered blender—shall begin the eating experience.

"Chomp chomp chomp."

"Slurp slurp."

Back chez elle.

Peter will dilly-dally over cocktails and hen's feet, with a deep sickness and heaviness of heart growing inside. Peter will see two rosy nipples jutting through the fabric of Miss Take's Duffle coat, and sigh sadly.

"How can I do it? How can I destroy such loveliness?" And Peter will see the distorted features of failure for the first time in his life.

"Miss Take."

"Yes?"

"I can't do it."

"What?"

"Kill you. I just can't. Sorry." He will take out his double-breasted Swiss Navy knife and toss it onto the couch beside her. For a moment or seven she will think it a blague, but there will be no humour on his face and only shame in his eyes; sadness in his head and a sense of failure up his bum.

"I am not sure I understand" she will say, forgetting the question mark at the end.

"Didn't you forget this?" and of course he will hold up a cardboard cut out of the very piece of punctuation she will have required.

"Yes. Hand me it." Hand "Now then, where was I? Oh yes: I am not sure I understand?"

"I cannot kill you in cold blood, that's all."

"All what?"

"All of it."

"But why should you want to kill me?"

"It's not me. It's you!" And with the passage of time the ridiculous and almost deadly mix-up will be unmixed.

"Goodness gracious me," Miss Take will finally say.

"Golly gosh."

"Ooh la la."

"Holy shit."

"That really was a close one. And all along I thought you were a Call Boy."

"Please."

"What?"

"Don't call me a boy."

"Very well. But why on earth should you want to be a hit man?"

"I don't really, it's just that I seem to know all there is to know, and perhaps more, and I wanted to have a new experience."

"That is silly."

"I know. I told you, I know everything there is to know, and perhaps more! The thing is, there was this bearded nun I met in a bar; a strange fellow, and somehow he managed to convince me it would be a good idea."

Meanwhile the bearded nun will be sitting somewhere else, weeping quietly to the sounds of a scratched Elvis Presley record.

Back with our hero and our heroine:

"Was that as good for you as it was for my imagination?" one of the naked two will ask.

"Yes," the other is going to say, and the whole business will begin all over again. Fifteen times shall it be done during the night, spontaneous combustion finally bringing a halt to the game.

In the silence they will lie, watching the dawn creep up like a rabid dog appearing over the crest of a hill.

"Miss Take."

"Mmm?"

"Why should someone as lovely as you call an escort agency?"

"Why not? At least when you pay for something you can do what the hell you want with it. Toss it aside when you have finished." Peter's heart will sink as he realises the true nature of the part he plays: A toy. A disposable body. A temporary distraction.

"You know," she will go on, "it is not easy being as good looking as I am. I sometimes wish it were otherwise. People feel intimidated by my beauty. It scares them off."

"Are you telling me you don't know any men?"

"No, I know lots; but they are the outside type, concerned with the way they look, never taking time to see what lies within."

"What does lie within?"

"Jelly."

Chapter Four

The Sixteenth Coming

Hilda will be wandering about the house, bumping into walls, tripping over furnishings and generally being lost. Since the incredible success of the Smellogram and the resulting accumulation of vaster than vast wealth, Peter, not knowing what exactly to do with all that money, will have bought a new house for them both and a Rolls Royce for the cat. The house is really a mansion, and the Rolls Royce a jet plane. Hilda will have spent the last two days searching for the bathroom, which is, unfortunately, hidden behind a door.

Peter will be listening to Mozart through the worlds most expensive and powerful Ghetto-Blaster, which will in fact blast three ghettos later that day. As the music plays he will amuse himself by memorising every note of the score (Mozart 2, Peter 3), analysing and making numerous improvement. Such is the phenomenal brain power of Peter Pringle.

It will be early evening, just after late afternoon, and the telephone will toll out good will to all men.

"Hello?"

"Hello."

"Hello?"

"Hello."

"Hello?"

"Hello?"

"Hello."

"Hello."

"Who is it?"

"Miss Take." Peter will immediately feel the urge to remove his trousers, to wear a paper party hat and worship a plastic statue of the Pope.

"Miss Take. How are you?"

"Fine. I was wondering if you would like to come over this evening."

"Come over what?"

"Me."

"I'd love to."

"Shall we say seven?"

"Yes, let's."

"Seven," she will say.

"Seven," he will say. Hang up. Just then Hilda will enter.

"Peter," she will begin, flabbergasted, "what are you doing?"

"Ah?"

"What are you doing with your trousers down, wearing a paper party hat and worshipping a plastic statue of the Pope?"

Later:

KNOck knoCK.

"Who is there?"

"Peter Pringle."

"Friend or foe?"

"Friend." The door will swing open on cheap hinges made in a country famous for cheap hinges.

"Hello peter. quite nice out, eh?"

"Ah ah, Miss Take, watch you P's and Q's."

"I will try."

Inside:

"What would you like first, a drink? Or wild, perverted, juicy and sticky sex using a variety of objects and plumbing equipment?"

"The decision is somewhat hard."

"So I see. It's almost bursting out of your trousers."

"Yes, so give me a blow job my darling." To his surprise, Miss Take will begin something which involves using a vacuum-cleaner, and requires a good deal of co-ordination on her part, and stamina on his.. This will not

be exactly the blow job he will have had in mind, though her expertise, utilising the nozzle's suction power to its limits, will soon have unforeseen and quite astounding effects.

"You won't believe this," begins.

"Yes?" questions.

"Just as I reached orgasm, the most incredible thing happened."

"I know, most of it went on my face." (I might mention at this juncture that those of you who have enjoyed this erotic vacuum cleaner scene can look forward to another later in the tale, when Miss Take this time will get her comeuppance—in a manner of speaking).

"Nah, not that. Another that."

"What, my darling? Pray do tell."

"It was peculiar, abnormal, bizarre, curious, extraordinary, freakish."

"Was it odd, offbeat, outlandish, queer, weird, funny?"

"Yes, yes."

"Was it existentialistic?"

"Yes, yes."

"Was it almost beyond belief?"

"Yes, yes."

"Does it have something to do with impossible conversation?"

"Yes, yes. Do you know what happened?"

"I haven't a clue."

"Well, listen: I know it sounds wild, but, during that brief moment of ecstasy, I actually communicated with the vacuum cleaner. It must mean something, but at the moment I'm not sure what."

And so it will be that Peter discovers Machine Language, the secret tongue common to all powered devices. He will not though, at this moment, have discovered his discovery, but when he does he will have, but now he hasn't

so he doesn't. The incredible implications, still far from being apparent, lay before him like a handful of winning lottery tickets hidden inside a box of Cornflakes with the label torn off.

Chapter Eighty-Two

Treason

Time will have passed by now, and, as often happens in books, our protagonist will have fallen in love. Life does indeed emulate fiction. With reluctance, for want of a better word, Miss Take will herself conclude that she too is in love, though not with Peter. No, she will have fallen, nay tumbled, for the much bearded and thoroughly disguised Fred Bloggs, who will have been masquerading, in her presence, as a Canadian lumberjack with a chip on his shoulder, and calling himself Harry.

Peter, ignorant of all this, will be on his way to visit Miss Take. Upon arrival she will invite Peter into her. He is blinded by love and will fail to notice the poster sized photograph of Fred Bloggs pinned to the wall above her bed.

"You had better be going now, Peter."

"So soon."

"You came too soon—so now you have to go."

"Very well." Peter, dejected, will dress and leave without saying, "All hands on deck," though he will think it at least twice. The lift will arrive, a bearded fellow will exit and Peter, not noticing who he is, will enter. The doors will silently close, like two halves of a ham sandwich, and on the way down he will wonder why Miss Take will never allow him to stay later than half past ten. Even at home his mother lets him stay up until eleven. I just is not fair.

During his late night visits, Fred Bloggs alias Harry, wearing plaid underpants to complete his lumberjack disguise, will often ask, after sex and sometimes during, such things as, "Well tell me about Peter," or, "Peter, what kind of guy is he?" and "What kind of things doesn't he like?" Miss Take will have no inkling of the plot in

which she is so inextricably entangled. One day this is what will happen: Miss Take and Fred Bloggs, having just finished certain activities which brought their bodies into close proximity, will set to wiping off some of the marmalade which oozed into places that should really be marmalade free.

"Did you see Peter today," the bearded one will ask.

"No, he did not come."

"Oh."

"Don't you mind me seeing another man?" she will ask coyly. "Sleeping with him and making strange noises with him."

"No, why should I? He gives you something to do in the afternoon."

As these words are spoken, Peter Pringle will be travelling in an upwards direction, thanks to a kindly lift, about to pay a surprise visit on his true love.

Letting himself in with a skeleton key he found in a grave yard, his eyes will fall upon Miss Take in bed with a lumberjack. On close inspection he will note that, nay, 'tis not a lumberjack, but the bearded nun Fred Bloggs. Peter's presence will have gone unnoticed, and he will slip out, his lightening mind setting to work, the thunder of his agony rumbling through his body like the call of seven elephants fighting for a slice of cheese, only to see it eaten by a overly stretched mouse wearing a kilt. He will run down the emergency staircase, the passage of each step like the lost notes of a once fine idea, until, at the bottom, in the basement, the only thing left will be a chocolate pudding and a squashed banana. He will survey the room for a quiet spot where he can rest and contemplate, and sitting at last inside a laundry basket with the lid closed, will set to work. The speed of Peter's mind, such as it is, will mean though that the whole problem will already have been solved during his run down the stairs of the hotel, and so it will be with a certain feeling of

foolishness that he will sit there, inside that basket, twiddling his thumbs. This, my friends, is what he will have figured out:

Point: Miss Take, the girl he loves, is in bed with someone else.

Point: That someone is Fred Bloggs.

Point: Fred Bloggs is the self same personage who will have suggested he become a hit man. 'Hired Assassin Wanted. No experience necessary.'

Point: Miss Take will have been his target.

"It all adds up," he will think. "It can mean only one thing: The newspaper advertisement was fake. There must be nah such company as 'Murder and Mutilation Co'. Such an advertisement is probably illegal anyway, I should have figured that one out ages ago. Nah company is allowed to advertise for help without indicating the rate of pay. Fred Bloggs arranged it all brilliantly. Miss Take would have been expecting someone from the escort agency and I was sent instead. It could have been her final date. Fred Bloggs, for reasons still unknown, wants to see Miss Take dead. The plan is incredible in its conception." And Peter Pringle will have no idea how I thought it all up.

As if to dispel any remaining doubts, Peter will remember with whom he will have spoken at the Murder and Mutilation Co Headquarters. A woman. A bearded woman. "It must have been Fred Bloggs himself," he will realise. "That man is an absolute master of disguise. Why, he seems able to fool even me at least half of the time. I suppose he must have only rented that garden shed for the day in order to make sure the plan went according to plan."

With terror Peter will become aware of the danger Miss Take is presently in, but will have found a pair of female panties at the bottom of the laundry, and will finish sniffing them before going to her rescue.

As Peter leaps from the basket, he will realise that he is travelling at the speed of sound. This will be made

apparent by the fact that, as he goes, a tuneless song shall he sing, and the sound will be with him the whole way. In his haste to reach Miss Take, he will have forgotten to remove the pair of soiled panties from his left nostril, and it is in this peculiar state that he will burst into her hotel room.

Miss Take will have no idea that she is living the last five minutes of her life. Fred Bloggs, an accommodating Canadian lumberjack, will be providing stimulation to parts of her body normally left well alone. With his chopper inserted in her arm pit, they will be having a lovely time, though Fred, on seeing Peter's abrupt arrival, will soon find other things to occupy his mind. Secretly hidden beneath the bed: a sharp knife; and Fred will reach out, fumbling blindly, trying to find it. This will be harder than first it would seem, for, you see, they will actually be laying on the couch in the living room. Finally, with his arm stretched out an incredible twelve meters, Fred Bloggs, master of evil, protector of wrong, will clasp his hand around the knife, which will, unfortunately, be blade side up, and several of his fingers will be removed. He will look down upon the form of Miss Take, still oblivious to Peters presence, still in the mists of sexual ecstasy, and bring the knife down to her throat. She will look up, see the knife, see Fred Bloggs with a strange light of desperation painted in his eyes, see a wild beast of a man in the doorway with a pair of panties hanging from his nose.

"Get away from him!" Peter will call, surging forward only to trip over an untied shoe lace and fall flat on his face. This may sound simple and unimportant, but no. You see the shoe lace is Miss Takes and the face Fred Bloggs'. And so, in one fuddled swoop, Peter will save the life of his beloved.

"What the hell is going on?!" she will demand. Peter will try to explain, and, during the ensuing argument, Fred Bloggs will regain consciousness and sneak away.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Gratitude

Much later, realising the truth, Miss Take will take Peter to her bed in order to thank him.

"Thank you," she will say.

"You're welcome," he will reply, get up and go home.

Chapter Fifty-Five and a Half

But What If He Shaves?

Much later, another day in fact, sipping coffee, they will begin to examine the entire sequence of events.

"But why should he want me dead?" Miss Take will wonder.

"And who is he?" There is going to be a few moments of silence, after which Peter will offer, "When we learn these things you will be safe; until then beware of all bearded men."

"But what if he shaves?"

"Then beware of all shaved men too."

Chapter Nine

Christmas Island

Peter's private 747-and-a-bit jet liner will begin its decent. Just ahead, and a little below, basking in the tropical sunlight, lies Christmas Island, stretched out like a map, which, like all maps, is impossible to refold in the correct manner. For this reason they will not even try.

Christmas Island, where, years before, Thor Hiya Darling had set out on a raft made of match boxes, heading in the general direction of Edinburgh, attempting to prove that the indigenous natives of that tiny speck of sun bleached land were the original settlers in Bonny Scotland; but was, finally, able to ascertain nothing more than that, beyond any reasonable doubt, match boxes do not a sea craft make.

Peter is pilot and Miss Take not. Just before takeoff he will have read the owner's manual, and managed at once to master most of the controls. There will be a few knobs and buttons, for sure, that he is, as yet, unsure of, but by and large etc. etc.

Tipping the nose towards the run-way, a strange tapping noise will begin.

"You hear that?"

"Yes."

"Sounds like the fan belt's loose."

"You are so clever, darling."

"I know."

Peter Pringle will make a perfect crash landing. Later, Miss Take will be heard to ask, "Was it supposed to be so bumpy?"

"It's not supposed to be. I think the run-way needs resurfacing."

"But what about the wheels? Shouldn't you have put them down before we landed?"

"No, the tires wear out too quick if you do that every time."

"Oh."

And so it will be that Peter and Miss Take begin two weeks of R and R. Rhubarb and Rice, however, have a very limited appeal, and so it will be with extreme relief that they leave the island. Before that though, something will happen. Something serious, and—dare we hope?—interesting. Above a turquoise and shimmering sea, a bird will hang in the air, as if suspended on an invisible length of knotted string with its ends fraying more and more by the minute.

Peter will stare up at the cloudless sky, watching the bird move effortlessly, soaring to hidden heights and plunging playfully back towards the earth, spitting at it every time it grows close.

He will be dressed in blue slacks, hand made, expensively cut though cheaply sewn together, and a yellow T-shirt two sizes larger than a T-shirt five sizes too large. Miss Take will sport a tight skirt three sizes smaller than a skirt six sizes too small, flattering to her derriere though troublesome for the circulation. Her own T-shirt will fit perfectly, but shall be, perhaps unfortunately, some where at the bottom of her suitcase for which the key is lost, and instead she will suffer the discomfort of a white blouse whose tightness and transparency leave nothing to the imagination. All perfectly normal, one would suppose, but no. No I say, for you see Peter and Miss Take will be swimming at the time.

Later, spread out on the beach like soft margarine on golden brown toast, which has been in the microwave several times already and will finally be nibbled at by an indiscreet Italian on holiday, who will remark that it tastes like old boot leather, where upon it shall be snatched from his insignificant grasp by a shoeless beggar

boy who will later wear it on his left foot, trip, fall beneath the wheels of a passing bus and die a sudden death. So there they shall lay, warmed by the sun and all that kind of stuff.

Chapter Two and a Bit
The Complications Begin.

Now this is where things get complicated. Several things must happen at once: Firstly, wish a jolly good day to the person sitting closest to you, (if you are in a room alone, then greet the wall to which you are most affectionately attached; if you are outside, blow an elegant kiss to what ever takes your fancy; if you are in none of these situations, simply cross your legs and say three hail Mary's). Now then, as the selected salutation is imparted, (not after mind, but during) you must begin to solve this complicated mathematical puzzle: If a short person takes three hours to paint a house 20 meters by 10 by 9, which has no windows and no door, how do the people get inside? As you work on that, attempt to dance an impossible jig with your hands in your pockets; eat, sleep and cry all at the same time; make an indecent proposal to the spouse of your best friend; cut your toe nails. And then, and only then, may we continue with the story.

Chapter Eleventeen

Danger

Now we must slip back in time. Several hundred years tumble by, like the torn leaves of a forgotten book lifted by the wind and scattered to the corners of the world, one segment of which shall be found by a naked cannibal who decides that the words may be eaten just like people, and that though they don't taste as good, they make a hell of a lot more sense.

We find ourselves in the company of Thomas Savery. The year: 1698. He is busy inventing the steam engine. Watch as he throws down a heavy spanner in anger, as it clangs upon the floor and bounces away. Watch and be amazed, for you see the heavy spanner will not be invented for another eleven years.

"I give up. I bloody well give up," and he skulks off towards the house, grumbling and swearing as he goes.

"What is it dear?" his wife. "Can I help?"

"Not unless you can invent the very first bloody steam engine."

"First what?"

"Steam engine. Bloody steam engine."

"Mmm. Bloody steamy engine."

"Yes."

"And what does it do, this 'bloody steamy engine'?"

"Why it, it, it.."

"Mmm?"

"It makes bloody steam, what do you think."

"I see. Well dear, show me your work. Maybe it requires a little female know-how."

"It's not a cake I'm baking."

"Then we shan't eat it when it's done, shall we dear?"

"No, I don't suppose we shall. Follow me then, if you want to see it." And off they go to the garage, where, many

years later, a car will be kept. For now though there is no such thing as a car, and the garage, forced to endure a meaningless and solitary existence, endures a meaningless and solitary existence.

"There it is," and he points to a pile of rubble on the floor.

"It looks very nice dear."

"Well I've had it. I give up. Someone else will have to invent the bloody steam engine."

"But the history books. What about the history books?"

Thomas Savery goes off to the local library, where several pints of ale shall be borrowed and put to good use, thereby avoiding his wife's questioning question and saving me the trouble of thinking up an answer.

On his return his wife is waiting for him at the door.

"I've done it!" she cries, and see how her tonsils wiggle and waggle. "I've done it!"

"Well wipe it up then, before someone sees it. Really!"

"No, I mean the thing. I've invented the 'bloody steam engine', and what's more, I've found a use for it. Come see." Inside the depressed garage Thomas Savery sees something which takes him aback, rolls him on the floor and squirts liquid putty in his face. Indeed his wife has invented the steam engine. Either that or it's a cheap Korean copy imported by a disreputable company headed by a Mr. Dick Puller and sold in stores not overly concerned with quality.

"I'm speechless," he does not say, for you see he is indeed speechless.

"And look, look what it does. If you put an egg in this thing here, and place it there, turn on the engine, in just a few minutes it is poached perfectly."

"What about the toast?" Thomas asks.

"I'm still working on that."

And so it came to pass that the first bloody steam engine led to the second bloody steam engine, and so on. Machine had been made. Progress began to progress, and before very long it would be all over the place.

Trillions of seconds later:

Just back from the beach, Peter will sit himself down and watch Miss Take bake a cake whilst balancing on a high wire. He will be in awe. As he watches, his thoughts will go back to that incredible orgasm almost two months ago, when Miss Take will have demonstrated the extreme delights of extreme suction; and when, so it seemed, he will have some how felt low level communication with the vacuum-cleaner. He will smile inwardly to himself, but then that smile shall suddenly melt as the implications begin to be realised.

It is an open plan house: Peter will plan to keep it open. So deep shall he be in that pit of total thought that he will scarcely notice the fact that he is being swallowed alive by the plush coach in which he sits. It will be a very strange sight indeed, as he sinks deeper and deeper into the soft yet deadly embrace of fine furnishings. Soon only the upper most part of his torso shall be visible.

"Peter!" Miss Take will cry, seeing his predicament—and thinking he should cover it up at once. Startled, he will realise what is happening, and, after a complex calculation, realise he has only twenty-four seconds left to live. Unfortunately the calculation will have taken five seconds, and so he will, in reality, have only nineteen seconds left. Fortunately, Peter will have planned for such an eventuality, and for many years now kept a secret store of unused time in his pocket. Unfortunately it will be, at this point, out of reach. Fortunately there is a benign force at work, who will see no real harm come to his main character. Unfortunately Miss Take is the main character.

So what will happen? I hear you ask. Will Peter die an ignominious death, swallowed by a couch? Will Miss Take come to the rescue? Watch and see.

"Help!" Peter will call, and his companion will come running over to his aid. Now this is where a silly bit comes in: Miss Take, in her eagerness to offer assistance, will stumble over an untied shoe lace and fall into the super soft couch beside Peter. Again this falling over an untied shoelace is easier said than done, for you see she will have been barefoot from the waist up.

The two will sink further and further into the hereafter. There is one good thing which is going to come of this terrible incident. Yes, Peter will have already found one dollar fifty in loose change in the depths of the couch. If he does manage to get out of this alive, he will be that much richer for the ordeal.

What an end: To be swallowed whole by a comfy couch. To be cheated by a Chesterfield. To be set to by a settee. To be chaise longued to death. Miss Take will scream and shout, blaspheme and repent, dilly and dally—not at the same time, but with the same gusto—whilst Peter, seemingly resigned to his fate, will seem resigned to his fate.

Meanwhile, two eyes will watch through powerful binoculars. Miss Take will loose herself to sheer panic.

Peter, now visible only from the neck up, will wear a mask of calm which conceals the completeness of his concentration.

"Take off that damn mask," Miss Take will call out, but her words will be swallowed by the electric atmosphere of fear, which runs on three 'EverReady' batteries. Enthralled by the prospect of her own female death, she will fail to notice something very strange beginning to happen: A near by vacuum-cleaner, fat bodied and goofy looking, though thinking itself slim-line and beautiful, will move from the cubby hole, which it thinks of as home, and toddle over towards the couch. Its long nozzle will

stretch out ahead and find hold in Peter's left nostril. The vacuum-cleaner is going to blow, and as a result Peter's entire body will inflate, the warm air causing him, bubble like, to rise from the clutches of the deadly couch and float upwards towards the ceiling. The vacuum-cleaner will then remove itself from Peter's nose cavity, whereupon all that extra air will move in an outwards direction with such force that Peter, propelled forward, will disappear out of the open window and land head first in a near by bucket of turtle soup. Next, the benevolent cleaning device will turn its hose on Miss Take, inflating her in a likewise manner, though by means of a different orifice. Thus inflated, she will follow the course of her lover. Splash. Turtle soup.

"Wow, that was a close one." Peter Pringle will breath, extracting himself from the soup.

"Yes, but how?....How? What happened?"

"Simple. Actually, it's more complicated and almost as annoying as finding twelve China men in a police line up, knowing that one of them has stolen your favourite poster of Tony Curtis; but with a brain like mine..."

"Yes, but what happened?"

"I communicated with the vacuum, that's all."

"Like when...?"

"Yes, only this time our conversation was deeply profound. You know, the life of a vacuum can sometimes be.."

"There's one thing I don't understand."

"What?"

"When it helped you escape, it..."

"He."

"He?"

"Yes. The vacuum-cleaner is male."

"Oh. Anyway, when he helped you, the nozzle went up your nose. But when he helped me, it went up my..."

"Well even vacuums have to have some fun, eh?"

This however is not the end of the action segment. Read on and wonder how so such much excitement can be contained in so few pages.

"Plan A failed, sir."

"What happened?" a voice will crackle over the three-way radio.

"I'm not sure. There was this vacuum-cleaner, and . . . and..."

"Well?"

"I'm not sure, sir."

"Very well. Commence 'Plan B'." The voice will be distant, disguised by the static hiss, yet will sound distinctly bearded.

"Yes sir," the fellow will say. He is going to be hidden in the shadows of thick bush on the side of a hill, overlooking Peter Pringle's house. Wearing battle fatigue to blend into the background, his camouflage will be further enhanced by a plaster of Paris mould, placed over his head, shaped like a daffodil growing on a mountain peak too often exposed to the harsh rays of the sun. He will place the radio back in his ruck-sack and quickly fumble through the pockets of his army jacket. There will be at least forty-seven of these pockets, and several important minutes will be wasted in searching through them. At last a solitary cigarette will be located. A solitary cigarette made by Bison and Sledges, a company know internationally for its attention to detail. Each and every cigarette contains tobacco—or your money back.

The soldier type person will place the paper tube of dried leaf in his mouth, remember that he needs a match, and recommence the desperate rummage through pocket after pocket. Each one checked, he shall recheck. Rechecked, rerechecked. Rerechecked, rererechecked.

"Oh God," and he is going to shake his head angrily. "This is all I need." Quickly he will peer briefly through his binoculars, see Peter helping Miss Take out of the

bucket of Turtle soup, and once again resume his desperate rifling through pockets, in dire need of that elusive match. Reluctantly he will admit that he has none. Holding his head in his hands he will sit back, desolate.

"What can I do?" Having once been a Boy Scout the answer will soon present itself. "Help a lady across the road! No, that's not it. Tie knots in a piece of rope! No, no, that's not it either. Now what was it we did to make fire? What was it? Ah yes, rub two old men together. No, that was in the bike gang, and anyway, there are no old men here. Boy Scouts, Boy Scouts...What did we do?" Unable to remember he will try rubbing two sticks together. After many famous hours, a small fire shall burn.

"Now then, what did I do with the cigarette?...."

To cut a long story short, the fatigued fatigued chappie, of uncertain nationality and dubious breeding, will finally manage to make fire burn and light up his cigarette. From then onwards his task will be a piece of cake.

"Now where did I put that piece of cake?"

He will begin blowing smoke rings up into the sky. Some distance away, inside a helicopter, the deaf and often hungry pilot will see the so long awaited signal.

"Smoke rings ahoy!" he will shout, in sign language, to two men sitting behind, who are also deaf.

"No need to shout!" one will reply, also in sign language. "Are you ready, Ted?" he will gesture to his companion.

"Sure am." And with that the two deaf sky divers will leap from the craft, leaving the deaf pilot alone, nervous for the mission to conclude, and thinking about home, where his deaf wife will surely be waiting, showing hand signs of worry.

"Oh no. Ted! I've got my parachute but forgot the rip cord!" Fred will cry out in horror, which is difficult to do in sign language.

"You stupid fool you," the other will gesticulate wildly. But then he too will notice something unfortunate: "Oh no. Fred, I've got my rip cord but forgot the parachute!"

"We're doomed."

"Doomed."

"Doomed."

"Doomed."

The two men will tumble faster and faster towards earth, passing a sign which reads: "Danger: Low Flying Clouds" as they go. Fortunately the ground will at last break their fall.

"Phew, that was a close one."

"Yes, I saw my whole life flash before my eyes."

"That wasn't your life, that was mine."

"Oh, that figures. I thought I didn't recognise most of the people."

"Quick, we have no time to dilly-dally."

"Then what do you suggest?"

"Let's dally and dilly instead."

"What, now?"

"No."

"Okay."

They will soon make rendezvous with the third man of their party, who will, strangely, be sitting as we left him, smoking and blowing rings.

"Ah, you've arrived," he will say. Ted and Fred, both being deaf, will not hear him, and, also being short-sighted, will not see him either. Indeed they will trample him into the earth, thinking they walk on a particularly soft piece of ground.

"Where is he?" Ted will ask.

"Yes, where?" Fred will insist.

"What the hell you doing?" The other, from beneath their feet, will wonder why they are so keen to wave their

hands about so energetically, and also why they are treading on his nose.

"I'm sure this is the rendezvous place" Fred will sign.

"Look. We seem to be standing on someone," Ted will point and sign at the same time.

"Oh yes." They will both get off. "Are you the one we're supposed to meet?" The one they are supposed to meet will lay there, suffering from semi-consciousness.

"I don't think he can speak sign language," Ted will suggest.

"No, it doesn't look like he can."

"What shall we do?"

"Kill him."

"What with?"

"His teeth."

"How?"

"We'll make him eat poison."

And that will be that. You see these fellows are going to be mean. And when I say mean, I mean mean.

"Look, down there. There's a house."

"That must be the place."

Ted and Fred will begin the rapid decent of the rapidly descending hill. "I do not understand it. How could the couch try to kill us like that?" Miss Take.

"It must have been hypnotised." Our boy wonder.

"I suppose. It's the only thing that makes any sense. But why? And who would do such a thing."

"The bearded nun, Fred Bloggs. Who else?"

"He must still want me dead." Miss Take will gasp in terror. It will sound like the plumbing in Kings Cross Station during the rush hour of a hot July afternoon.

"And it looks like he will go to any lengths to see it done."

The gardens will be enormous, running almost seven hundred meters up the hill side, and five hundred back down

again, for it is always quicker going down. From the house the terraced lawns stretch on, down to the beach. Ted and Fred, leaping over the perimeter wall, will fail to notice a lawn mower, left by an unconscientious care-taker the day before, and will go both tumbling down, shouting and swearing with their flapping hands as they fall.

"Oh no." Peter will stop suddenly in his tracks.

"What?"

"There are two men at the top of the garden, behind the house. And they have guns."

"How do you know."

"The lawn mower just told me." He will, by now, be fluently fluent in Machine Language, and have perfected his powers of thought transmission and reception—or so he will claim.

"Oh no. What shall we do?"

"Follow me."

Into the house they shall flee, through the living room and into the bed room.

"Really Peter, this is no time for sex."

"I know that ."

"What then?"

"Here, behind this picture." Together they are going to remove a heavy priceless portrait of a heavy and priceless portrait from the wall, revealing the portrait of a large safe. They will remove that too, finding a large safe which is not a portrait.

"What is in there?"

"I don't know, but the man who sold me the island said if I ever had any problems I should check inside the safe."

"Did he also tell you the combination."

"Oh Jesus, I don't think he did."

"Oh Jesus."

"Oh yes, yes he did. Now I remember."

"Great! Do you remember what it was?"

"No."

"Oh Jesus."

"Just a minute though, 55-62-84 says something to me."

"What does it say?"

"It says, 'Too bad I'm the wrong number.'"

"Oh Jesus."

"Oh Jesus."

"How could you?"

"I don't know. I've never forgotten anything before. Or at least, if I did I don't remember it." They will stand there looking at each other, looking at the safe, looking back at each other.

"The two men are just passing the garden shed."

"How do you know?"

"The rubbish compactor just told me."

"Lucky you discovered Machine Language," she will say brightly, and then, remembering, her voice will falter, "Not that it will save us though."

"Just a minute, you just gave me an incredible idea."

"What?"

"Isn't a safe a machine?"

"I do not know, is it?"

"I don't know, is it?"

"I do not know, is it?"

"Let's look it up in the dictionary." Together they rush over to the dressing table where, just by chance, the twelve volume Concise Oxford English Dictionary will lie, conveniently at their disposal.

"How do you spell it?" Miss Take will ask.

"I.T."

"No, machine."

"I don't know. Look it up and see."

"Okay." The search for that all important word will begin, Miss Take starting at A for Abacus, and Peter, having a hunch that the word just might begin with the letter M, commencing naturally at Z for Zebra.

"The men are coming down the garden path."

"How do you know?"

"The snow blower just told me."

"Snow blower? On a tropical island?"

"Yes."

"Why on earth should.."

"To keep the ice cutter company, of course."

"Oh yes."

"Any luck finding the word?"

"What word?"

"Machine."

"Oh no, not yet. I am up to C for Seasonal."

"Keep looking." All of a sudden though, Peter will see before his very eyes a word which not only looks and smells like machine, but sounds like machine as well.

"I've got it."

"Well give it back."

"No, the word."

"Which word?"

"Machine. I've found it."

"What does it say?"

"Listen: 'An engine: a vehicle:-' Oh nah, that's nah good. A safe is nothing like.."

"Read some more."

"Ok: ' One who can do only as he is told: a contrivance by which a God might descend upon the stage: a supernatural agent employed in carrying on the action of a poem:-' It's nah good."

"Read on."

"' An organised system: a political party organisation: anything noisy and covered in oil:'"

"Like chips frying in a pan."

"Yes. 'An instrument for the conversion of motion: a safe: any artificial means or contrivance: the..."

"Peter! Peter! What was that you just said?"

"'Any artificial means or..."

"No before that!"

"'An instrument for the conversion of motion'."

"No, after that!"

"'A safe'. A safe!"

"So a safe is a machine." Miss Take will conclude.

"Yes."

"But what good does that do us? Why on earth did you want to know that?"

"Er . . . er . . . "

"You have forgotten!"

"Well, nah, not exactly. I have simply misplaced the remembrance."

"Well find it!"

"Oh yes, now I know. See? Now I know."

"Well?"

"Well if the safe is a machine, I'll be able to communicate with it. Perhaps it will tell me its combination."

"But why the hell didn't you just ask the thing, instead of making us look it up in all those big books?"

"How could I? Suppose it had turned out not to be a machine—I would have looked really foolish now, wouldn't I, talking to a brainless hunk of metal."

"You have a point there."

"You've noticed have you? It's not just a point, it's a prick."

"The safe."

"Oh yes." Peter will return to the other side of the room. "Dear safe," he will begin, "please tell me your combination." A moments silence.

"Did it answer?"

"Yes, but unfortunately a safe is one of the lowest forms of machine life. It's greatly lacking in intelligence and cannot count above two."

"Jesus."

"I'll try something else." And turning back to the wall: "Dear safe, will you open up your nice little door

for me?" And with less than half a moment passed, the door will swing open. "Now let's see if there is something in here that can help us, because those men are in the house."

"How do you know?"

"The dishwasher told me."

"Oh."

"Now let's see. 'If you ever need any help, look in the safe', the fellow told me." Peter will babble away as he peers into the dark, dusty cavity. "Ah, I can see something." He will reach in. "It's a piece of paper with words on it."

"Well wipe them off."

"I can't. They're inked."

"Well read them then."

"It says: 'Trouble? Call the Good Samaritans. 656 789-10'"

"Oh Jesus." Miss Take will cry.

"Oh God."

"We are finished."

"Just a minute, the television in the living room just told me something rather interesting. It seems the two killers are deaf."

"So?"

"I have a plan. It might sound crazy, but I think it will work."

"What? Hurry, they are coming. I can hear their footsteps."

"They're both deaf, so we'll make as much noise as we can and hide behind the sound."

"What???"

"Shout!" He will shout. "Scream!" he will scream. "Yell!" he will yell. "We'll hide behind the noise. They'll never find us there. They're deaf remember!" The two will begin to make as much din as possible. More decibels will fill the room than there is really place for. All of a

sudden the two killers will appear, both clutching machine guns, their belts bulging with live fire crackers.

"Where the hell are they?" Fred will gesticulate. "We've searched every room."

"I don't know. They're not in here though, that's for sure." They will leave.

Meanwhile Peter Pringle and Miss Take will be hiding behind such calls as: "Go away you poo poo people. Go scrunge your Groodles. Nya nya nya nya nya. Get lost you red-hot dingo dealers. You won't find us you hairy bulge buffers. Take a hike you slimy sausage collectors." And, "Go fuck a poodle you sons-of-bitches."

The two baddies will leave, to continue their search out of doors. It will, of course, be all to no avail, but they will at least have the good fortune to stumble upon a couple of poodles.

"What shall we do now?" Miss Take will ask what they shall do now.

"We'd better make ourselves scarce. Come on." Out of the bedroom they will slip, quietly to the back door.

"The coast seems to be clear." And indeed it does: the fog has lifted and they can see all the way past the beach to the peninsula several hop, skip and jumps away. "Follow me." Out they will go, up along the edge of the garden, climbing the slope of the lawn towards the wild terrain beyond. Soon, their breathing laboured, they will disappear into the under-growth.

"Where are we going?"

"I saw a map of the island just before we came here. There's supposed to be a small cave up near the crest of this hill. We should be safe there for a while." The way will be difficult, but fortunately signs marked "Secret Cave" will be posted on every eleventh tree.

"There it is!" Peter will say, pointing towards the dark opening almost hidden behind thick bush.

"How do you know it's the right cave?"

"I don't. We'll just have to hope for the best."

The entrance will be less than one meter high. Inside the roof will climb sharply upwards, reaching a high height at its highest point. There will be the faint smell of damp mould, bat droppings and freshly-spun cotton. It will be pitch black.

"Do you have a light?"

"Peter, this is no time to smoke cigarettes."

"It's not for a cigarette, silly."

"What then?"

"A pipe."

"Oh, well in that case, here," and she will hand him an empty box of matches. By the light of smouldering tobacco they will soon see that the cave is indeed a cave, though will still be unsure if it is the right one. The chamber will be small, claustrophobic, going inwards only as far as the back wall. Laying on their stomachs, peering through the branches of tropical plants, they will find themselves in a position to observe the house, have sex and twiddle their thumbs.

All of a sudden:

"Ooh, ah, ah ooooooh."

"That was good," Peter will say.

"Yes. I was always fond of twiddling my thumbs. But look. The two killers." Miss Take will point towards the house.

"What are they doing?"

"It looks like they're sitting at the picnic table drinking tea."

"Don't be stupid."

"Oh, you are right, it's coffee."

"Well, if they're still here, I don't know where." Fred will say with his hands. There will be no reply for you see he will, at the time, have them in his pockets.

"The helicopter should be here soon." Ted will say looking at his watch. "It's almost zero hour."

"That early?"

"Yes, and I bet 'you know who' will have something to say, when he finds out we couldn't find them."

"Who?"

"'You know who.'"

"No I don't."

"Yes you do."

"No I don't, and you'd better tell me."

"What if I don't."

"Then you'll be in big trouble with 'you know who' when I tell him."

"Who?"

"You know who: 'You know who.'"

"No I don't." And it will go on like that for a while.

"Look, the helicopter's coming." Like a great black prehistoric beast it will approach, swooping down from the sky, roaring like the shadow of death with a severe case of indigestion.

"Maybe we'd better send up a flare."

"Perhaps we'd better send up a flare."

"That's what I just said."

"No, you said 'maybe', I said 'perhaps'."

"What's the difference?"

"The spelling."

The helicopter will set its metallic feet on solid earth, and the two deaf people will run to meet the one deaf people, who will be busy throwing switches and catching buttons. The door is going to swing open, and they will greet one another with hand shakes and nose twitches.

"How dyd eet go?" the unhearing pilot will sign.

"Your spelling is getting worser." Ted will admonish.

"And!?! your: grammar; (is) terrible," Fred will proclaim.

"And your punctuashon is realy badd," the pilot will inform.

"Et vous êtes tous des idiots," a strange French fellow, who should be in a different book altogether, will conclude. The three deaf idiots, though, will not, of course, hear his words, and shall, as a consequence, go on believing that they are, in fact, very intelligent.*

"Well?" the pilot will ask again. "What happened?"

"Oh, we couldn't..." Fred will begin.

"...find them." Ted will finish.

"Oh, no," the pilot will sigh, which is also difficult to do in sign language, and requires years of practice. "'You know who' will blow his top."

"Who?" Fred and Ted will ask in unison. Meanwhile Peter Pringle and Miss Take will watch the helicopter as it lifts off from terra firma, which will, by then, be much more terra, but a good deal less firma. For thirty minutes or two it will circle about the island, flying low, with Ted and Fred sitting in the open door way, their legs and teeth dangling, both spying through the same pair of stretched binoculars.

"I think they're going now," Peter will say.

"No, I think it's just a trap."

"But look, they're flying away."

"I do not care, I still think its a trap."

"Why?"

"I am not sure. It's almost as if someone is putting the words in my mouth and forcing me to say them," Miss Take will confess.

"It must be the writer, what's his name..?"

"Keith something or other. Wobblescotch."

"Waddinpump."

"Yes, that's it: Waddinfluncken. Keith Waddinfluncken."

"So he makes you say things you don't want to say?"

*This sentence has more commas than any other living sentence of similar size.

" He makes me say things I do not even want to think!"
Miss Take will admit shyly.

"Does he make you think things you don't want to say,
as well?"

"Yes."

"The bastard."

"He is a fucking jerko, and I have had enough of it.
Never again, never, never, never again will he force me to
contemplate something against my will."

"But I'm so stupid," she will think, "maybe that nice
writer guy who I love and love and love to pieces should
give me a few more of his really good and fantastic ideas.
I mean, he is such a nice guy."

"Anyway, it looks like they're gone for good."

"What shall we do then?" Miss Take will bring us back
to the original subject.

"We'll go bring some provisions from the house and
stay up here until tomorrow. If there's still nah sign of
them by then, well take the motor yacht and head for the
main land."

"But it's almost a three day journey."

"In that case we'll go by night."

"You are so clever."

Chapter Eleven B

A Drop of Hope

With some degree of haste they shall return to the house, return to the cave, return to the house to get something they will have forgotten, and then return to the cave again. Amongst the essentials they will have collected will be several bottles of wine, several more bottles of wine, and several other bottles of wine.

"Shall we drink some wine?" Peter will ask.

"As you please." Peter will remove the cork with something long and pointed and twisty, which he will keep about his person at all times for such eventualities.

"Glug glug glug."

"Glug."

There will be an early afternoon sun hanging in the sky, which is most peculiar for it is already late evening.

"Glug. You know what I've noticed?" Peter will say in a serious state of inebriation, which will cause his tonsils to clang together loudly like church bells on a Sunday morning when the sky is cloudy and rain expected.

"What ma chérie?"

"That the wine to be drunk greatly exceeds the wine not to be drunk."

"Oh."

"Glug. You know what else I've noticed?"

"What, dearest."

"It's funny, but whenever you're drunk, it doesn't matter where you're going, it always seems downhill."

"Oh."

"Glug. Do you know what else I noticed?"

"What, honey-suckle?"

"How happy I am."

"How happy are you?"

"I'm so happy I could...."*

"Oh."

"You know, if happiness could, glug, get much better, they'd put a tax on it."

"Oh."

"Glug. You know what else I've noticed?".

"What, my supersonic hero?"

"Glug. Glug. Glug."

The Titanic Mind at Work

And so the long tropical day will begin to close its eyes and darkness shall descend on that tiny island. Outward they shall gaze, sitting now just outside the cave, enjoying the cool of early evening, watching the twilight growing more twi by the minute. Peace will begin to breathe its scented breath, and all that kind of hog wash.

Our wonder boy, sitting with his back against the outside wall of the cave, and with nothing else to do for the moment, will begin to use his titanic brain like it will have never been used before. In the lucubrate hours that follow, Peter Pringle will invent some of his greatest inventions. Here are just a few of them: The non-functional flash light—for blind people.

A hockey puck that will never wear out.

New video game: Computer yo-yo. A certain key must be pressed at just the right moment in order for the yo-yo to return up the string. For the advanced player another key must be pressed for the yo-yo to go back down again. Guaranteed hours of fun.

Bendy cheese which can be eaten whilst travelling around corners.

Churches with permanently bolted doors—for atheists who believe in God.

*This is where you can make up your own joke; but it has to be a good one. Chapter Ninety-Sixteen

Traffic lights that always stay green—for faster circulation.

Wagless doogle pieces.

Fluorescent attachment for wagless doogle pieces.

Inkless pens—for people who don't want to write.

A new board game: "Blame It On Your Best Friend", in which players confess their most guilt ridden secrets, and promptly blame them on one of the other players.

The smokeless cigarette for non-smokers

The "Fumble Free Ball"—with guaranteed catchability. As if all that is not enough, he will also make the following amazing conclusions: All mental illness is imaginary.

Ninety-nine percent of all diseases are caused by iddy-biddy little things that are hard to see and even harder to smell.

Death only happens to the living.

Chapter Nine and a Quarter

Seaward Bound—and Gagged

The next morning, at the crack of nine o'clock, there will be festivities in the streets, people rejoicing, singing and dancing. Of course, this will be somewhere far from Christmas Island, where nothing much will be happening.

"Yawn. It's morning, Miss Take."

"Oh, what is happening?"

"Nothing much." (I told you so).

As the day slips by nothing will disturb the calm, save a few earthquakes, a tidal wave and half a dozen monsoons.

"I do not think the bad guys are coming back," Miss Take will decide.

"Nor do I. It's almost three o'clock—we should get going." On board the small boat they will begin storing food, clothing and three bags of dog's hair.

Soon they will be out in the middle of the Pacific, with no land in sight.

"It is going to be a long, hard journey," Miss Take will venture.

"Shorter than you think."

"Why, what has happened?"

"There's a hole in the boat."

"Oh God!"

"We're taking water."

"Well give it back!" Miss Take will insist.

"Come down and help me bail out."

"But the splashing:- it will ruin my hair-do."

"Okay. I'll do it by myself. You just sit down and take it easy."

"Very well, my darling."

Down in the lower cabin the deck will indeed have a hole in it, and the sea will be seeping in like nobody's business. Peter will begin trying to bail out with a plastic bucket, which, unfortunately, will also have a hole in it. His labour will be in vain.

"It's nah good," Peter will call, climbing the stairs. "The baddies must've sabotaged it. She's going down."

"But what can we do? Are we really doomed? Is this really the end?"

"Me thinks not, Miss Take. Look, there are well over thirty pages yet to go."

"Oh yes. That is true. But how will he get us out of this one?" By now the boat will be lying very low in the water. Only a few moments remain before she must surely sink.

"I have a feeling that, as usual, he will leave that job up to me. He's not very bright, you see."

"Well what are you going to do? We will be fish food! What will you do? We are running out of time. Fish food! Do something! Fish food!!" Miss Take will become hysterical!

"You're becoming hysterical." (I told you). "Just calm down. Never fear. It so happens that I have a packet of instant powdered life boat. Just add water. I invented it this morning while I was putting on my socks."

"But Peter, you are not wearing socks! "

"OH GOD. We'll be fish food. Fish food!"

"Fish food!"

"Fish food!"

The boat will slip further into the unmerciful arms of the sea, which on this particular day will be a good deal wetter than usual.

"Can you swim, Miss Take?"

"Yes, but it's thousands of miles to the nearest land."

"I know, but maybe if we tread water for a while we might be rescued by a passing ship."

"Maybe pigs will fly," Miss Take will tell him, dryly.

"But look! What's that? Above!!" Peter Pringle is going to point skyward.

"It cannot be."

"It is. A flock of flying pigs!"

Suddenly the boat will disappear from beneath their feet, and they shall find themselves up to their necks in water.

"It must be pretty deep here," Miss Take will begin. "My feet are not even touching the bottom."

"Yes, in some places the Pacific Ocean is for expert swimmers only. Or so I've heard."

"I can believe that."

"I just noticed: it's rather a nice day. Not a cloud in the sky."

"Mmm. So it is."

"You know, there are worse places to be than out in the Pacific with the sun shining down and pigs flying overhead."

"Indeed. Very true."

It may seem odd to you, dear reader, that Peter Pringle will choose to chit-chat through what could quite possibly be the last few minutes of his life, but you see, he will be a very odd fellow.

Meanwhile, somewhere else: "Cap'n—I can see somethin' on the horizon," the First Mate on board H.M.S. Foolhardy will announce, as he peers through two empty toilet roll tubes stuck together with cello-tape.

"What do you mean?" the Cap'n will ask.

"I mean, I can see somethin' on the horizon."

"Well why didn't you say that in the first place? What is it?"

"I'm not sure sir, but it might be the sky."

"Well keep a keen eye on it. Let me know if it moves."

"Yes sir."

Meanwhile: "Look, this is how you do the front crawl. It's quite easy really." Peter will demonstrate.

"It's too hard."

"Oh, poor you," Peter will commiserate.

"Come closer, I have an idea. Here, that's it. Oooh, ahh. Ooooh." Peter will fornicate.

"Peter! Peter! Look! Look, it's huge! I can't believe it!"

"I know," Peter will say proudly.

"No, not that! The ship! Look, there is a ship coming. We are saved."

Meanwhile: "Captain," a call will come from the aft deck on the starboard side of the funny flat bit near the bow. "There are two bodies in the sea."

"In the what?" the Captain will call back.

"Sea, sir. That wet stuff all around us."

"Two bodies you say?"

"Yes sir."

"Aha. And about time too," he will say enigmatically. "A man and a woman is it?"

"Yes sir."

"Excellent." He will rub his hands together and masticate with his teeth. "First mate," the Captain will turn to the man at his side, who continues to gaze through the toilet roll tubes "Are you or are you not for this shift lookout."

"Yes I are, sir."

"Then why did you fail to notice two bodies adrift in the sea?" The Captain will be rather angry by now, and his ears will begin to twitch.

"I'm still watching the horizon, sir."

"Oh yes. Good show. Did it move yet?"

"Not really sir, but it wobbled a bit."

"Carry on."

The Captain will lean over the rail of the bridge and shout down to the vigilant crew man, "What is the exact position of the two bodies?"

"They seem to be kind of spread-eagled in the water and he's putting his.."

"No, no. I mean, where are they exactly?"

"Thirty-nine degrees, south south-east and a little bit to the left."

"Excellent. Throw them a rope as we approach." This will be done, but unfortunately the stupid sailor will forget to keep hold of the other end. With orders to stop all engines, H.M.S. Foolhardy will skid to a halt.

"First Mate, go down there and supervise. Either that fellow's a damn fool, or he isn't. Throw them another rope."

"We have no more rope sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean we have no more rope sir. "

"Why didn't you say that in the first place? In that case, throw them something else."

"Like what, sir?"

"Anything you want. Something appropriate." Now this is where it gets very silly, for you see the First Mate will decide that the best thing to throw is a party. Not until the early hours of the morning, when nearly everybody will have gone home, will someone finally remember to rescue the two bodies in the sea.

And so it will be that Peter Pringle and Miss Take shall be saved from certain death. Unfortunately, as they make their way to a lower deck, Peter will slip, fall down the staircase, break his neck and die almost at once.

Chapter One Hundred

Another Chapter

Well, when I say die almost at once, what I really mean is, he will recover from the fall completely, there will be no further complications as a result of it, and he shall live to a ripe old age. Then he will die almost at once.

"These are the finest rooms on board sir," the First Officer will tell them. "Courtesy of the Captain."

"Well that's most kind. Perhaps I could thank him later."

"The Captain is rarely seen. He is most shy."

"Oh. In that case, please do me the service of passing on our gratitude."

"Peter, you are starting to sound like someone in a book."

"I know. It's that damn writer again. He's starting to get on my nerves." Peter, somewhat vexed, will turn back to the officer. "I wonder, where might we be bound?"

"The port of Manzanillo, Mexico. We should arrive tomorrow."

Offered then the finest suite available, and with the intoxicating calm of carefree journeying—not to mention the duty-free booze—running through their veins, they shall fall into a deceptive feeling of security, unaware that things are not as they would seem.

Chapter I'm Sick of Thinking Up These Stupid Numbers

Well Rested

Well rested, relaxed, they shall stand on deck watching the sun slip behind the horizon.

CLUNK!

"What was that?" Miss Take will ask, moving closer to the one who was, just a moment ago, further away.

"It must be night falling. It's so quiet out here, I bet you could even hear a pin drop."

"Let's try it. Do you have a pin?"

"It just so happens that I do. How convenient."

"Hold it up and drop it onto the deck then."

"Okay." Holding the pin between thumb and four finger, in a rather dainty manner much cognate of the limp-wristed pose effected by homosexuals the world over, Peter will do as the female one bid. The pin will be let loose, but as they stand, ears twitching, elbows knocking and thighs quivering, long seconds shall pass and no sound of the pin hitting the floor will be heard. Almost one minute will pass.

KLANG!

"There!"

"But it took so long to hit the deck," Miss Take will be puzzled.

"That must be because we were crossing the Equator."

"What difference does that make?"

"Well the pin had to wait and see which way was down."

"Oh. And which way was down?"

"That way." Peter will point.

"You are so clever."

"I know." There will follow a few minutes silence as the two watch stars appear in that black sheet of sky. It will be a nice time, for they will be holding hands and feeling happy, but for us it will prove less interesting.

Allow me then to offer a slight diversion, whilst we wait for something to happen.

I once knew a fellow called Pat
who lived in a three story hat.
Out playing one day,
the hat blew away,
now he's looking for new accommodation and if you can help him out please give me a call and I'll let him know.
"Just a minute," Peter will cry, feeling the sudden chill of terror creep down his spine and into his trousers where it will begin to do naughty things to his private parts.
"Did I just say we crossed the Equator?"

"I think so. At least, I know one of us did, and I do not think it was me."

"So it was me then."

"Yes. Why?"

"Because I just realised, if we were heading for Manzanillo, Mexico, we wouldn't be crossing of the Equator."

"Gosh."

"And what's more, when we arrived on board, the First Mate told us we should arrive the very next day."

"So?"

"That was over a week ago."

"What can it all mean?"

"It means we're late!"

"I think you are right."

"Listen, let's go find the Captain—he must be the one behind all this."

Chapter Forty-Ten

The Chapter Without a Name

And so they shall make haste to the Captains private cabin, situated in the basement of the ship. "Shall we knock?" Miss Take will ask.

"No, we'll ring the bell."

"There isn't one."

"We'll knock then."

A voice from within might say, "Come in." Then again it might say, "Go away."

Those of you who think the 'go away' bit is true, read section A.

Those of you who think the 'come in' bit is more likely to be the one, skip ahead to the next chapter.

Section A.

"He said go away," Miss Take will whisper. "What shall we do?"

"I suppose we'd better go away." This they will do.

The very next day they might arrive in port, and realise that they will have allowed their imaginations to run away with them. Then again they might not.

Those of you who think the 'arrive in port ' bit is good, read section B.

Those of you who think this is most unlikely, read section C instead.

Section B

At nine a.m. the next day H.M.S., Foolhardy will arrive in the port of Manzanillo. Miss Take and Peter Pringle will realise that they will have allowed their

imaginations to run away with them, will laugh at the whole thing, and live happily ever after. The End.

Section C

Two days later, still at sea, the ship will explode and all lives will be misplaced.

The End.

Chapter Two
Confrontation

Peter will open the door only to find another door behind it.

"Wow, this is getting crazy," Miss Take will say, as Peter opens yet the second door.

"Come in, come in," the voice will repeat. Sitting, facing the window, with his back to them both, will be the Captain, or at least someone who thinks he is Captain and has convinced the entire crew of it as well. He will spin himself around in a luxurious revolving chair, unfortunately pushing too hard and so revealing his visage for only a brief moment, coming to a halt once again facing the window. That second though will have been long enough: both will have seen that evil smile with its lips and everything; the bearded face; the deranged eyes. "Fred Bloggs. Turn this way, you hell-hound you." This time he will turn slowly. "The portable priest himself," Peter will add sarcastically.

"The loveable lumberjack," Miss Take will say, remembering all the things he will have made her do, and all the trees they will have felled to do them. "Well shepherds fuck sheep....." she will remember he will have said.

"How nice to see you both again."

"Yes, let's have tea," Peter will be feeling so sarcastic it will hurt. "I've been wondering when you'd show your ugly face again."

"Just a minute now," he will interject. "I don't like the way this is going." And so saying, will remove a Yellow Rubber Ducky from a draw in his desk, twist its neck and give it a squeeze. Peter will open the door only to find another door behind.

"Wow, this is getting crazy," Miss Take will say as Peter opens yet the second door.

"Come in, come in," the voice will repeat. Sitting, facing them, will be Fred Bloggs, the vicious vicar. "Sit yourselves down and open not your mouths." Flabbergasted they shall do as he bids. Two guards will appear, one carrying a bazooka, the other, a water pistol.

"I presume you both realise that you are, in effect, in a state of kidnapping. Well," he will continue without pause, "I have some good news and some bad news."

"What's the good?" Peter will play along.

"We're having steak for supper."

"What's the bad?"

"You're not having any!"

There will be a pregnant silence. After some time a little moment of quiet will be born.

"Isn't he cute," one of the guards will decide. "Googagoogagee."

"I suppose you've both been wondering..."

"Yes?"

"Wondering why.."

"Yes?"

"Wondering why I.."

"Yes."

"Who the hell keeps saying 'yes'?" Everyone will look around the room, but no one will own up. "Come on now, who is it?" Fred Bloggs will insist. Everyone will start to fidget, first slightly, the movement of a finger, the stroking of hair, but gradually it will get out of hand: people will be rubbing themselves all over, licking their lips, dancing jigs and hooling the hoop.

"Who the hell was it?" Fred Bloggs will shout at the bottom of his voice. "Answer me now." Slowly, hesitantly, the guard with the water pistol will hold up his hand.

"It was you? Why? Why interrupt me so many times?"

"I want to make a name for myself in this book."

"What is your name?"

"I don't know, I didn't make it yet."

"Well get a move on. Now then, as I was saying: I expect you have been wondering.."

"Yes?"

"All right, that's it, who was it this time?"

"It was me." Peter will say.

"Why?"

"Because."

"Ah?"

"Because, because, because," he will chant in a most childish manner.

"Peter," Miss Take will rebut, "do not be so childish."

"Sowry."

"Now, you must have both been wondering..." he will pause, waiting for the interruption that will never come. "You must have both been wondering what the hell is going on."

"No," Peter will say, shaking his head in a casual way.

"No," Miss Take will agree, shaking her head likewise.

"No," the two guards will concur, shaking their legs.

"Oh."

This is where everyone hangs around wondering what to do next. No one will know. Fred Bloggs will be mad as hell. He will be just bursting to tell Peter and Miss Take all about his fiendish plan, and how nicely it is working out, and the terrible inhuman things he still has to do, but unfortunately Peter and Miss Take are just bursting not to know. Unable to think of anything better, he will finally say, "Well that's good, because I'm tired right now, and I don't feel like talking any way. Right then. Guards, take them back to their cabin, and lock the door." And then, turning back to Peter, "I'll deal with you both tomorrow," and he will smile an evil smile.

Chapter One Million and Eleven

Double Trouble

Peter Pringle and Miss Take will be led back to their cabin and locked away with out food. By eleven p.m. they will begin to believe that, yes, 'tis true, Fred Bloggs has indeed sent them to bed without supper, and it seems also that there will be no fairy story either.

"That fellow is an absolute cad." Miss Take will decide.

"Yes, I mean, trying to have you killed is one thing, but this is just not sporting."

"Like cricket you mean?"

"Yes, exactly like cricket."

"Sending us to bed without supper, if I understand you correctly," Miss Take will venture, "is not like cricket then."

"Precisely."

"You know I think that may turn out to be one of the great truths of this century."

"I'm sure it will."

Indeed, some many years later, the Encyclopaedia Americana will have this to say:

PRINGLE, Peter, teller of truths, inventor of inventions and diviner of water. His most famous quote pertained to the nature of sport when brought in conjunction with the abstinence of nutritious consummation in respect to the positive amelioration of the eternal essence, or soul, of man.

Both Peter Pringle and Miss Take will sit gazing into space, each lost in their own world of personal meditation, of quiet contemplation.

"I suppose he is finally going to kill me then," Miss Take will hazard a guess.

"It looks like it. And I don't fancy my chances either. Any way, if you die, I'm not sure I even want to go on living."

"You're so sweet."

"I know. What I still don't understand though, is why he's been trying to kill you all this time."

"I have no idea." Silence. "I suppose we will be dead by lunch time tomorrow."

"The rat. First we have to go to bed without supper, then he kills us before lunch. I hope he at least gives us breakfast in the morning. I'd hate to die on an empty stomach."

"Mmm. How will he do the dreaded act do you think?"

"Knowing Fred Bloggs, I'd say he has some devilish plan in mind; something so degrading, so perverse, that you or I could not think of it in a million years. Something like removing our brains with a rubber hose, putting them in a food blender and then feeding them to my great uncle and your mother's Corgi on their wedding night. Or tying us to the top of an atomic bomb and dropping it from a second story window in the middle of Peking. Or swisseling our swissles and grinding our groos."

"Yes," Miss Take will agree. "Or crushing our shins with a shin crushing device that does not work too well."

"How about robbing us of our scrunge pieces, feeding them to a hairy mongoose, and then watching us froth ourselves to death. Anyway, whatever he plans, you can be sure it will be despicable."

"Maybe we should try and escape."

"Maybe we should try and escape."

"Yes." Miss Take will agree with both of them.

"I know, we'll dig a tunnel."

"Good idea. But what shall we use?"

"We could either scratch our way to freedom with our fingernails, or perhaps use that heavy duty pneumatic drill standing conveniently in the corner."

"Let's use the drill. I have always been fond of compressed air."

"Okay."

And so it will begin, that drilling and digging and tunnelling, and progress shall be swift.

"Could you take over a bit of the work now?" Peter will request, now perspiring to a ridiculous degree.

"But I might mess up my hair if I do."

By around midnight they will have reached the hull of the ship, and only it shall separate them from freedom. With the noise of the drill ringing about the narrow tunnel, sounding like fifteen cats with their tails on fire and acid in their eyes and no place to call home, the work will continue. After a few more minutes a circular hole will have been cut in the steel wall, and Peter will pull it out like the cork on a bottle of Beaujolais, which has been stored in a wine cellar for seventy-six years and only opened because of a misunderstanding between the best friend of a dwarf and the sister of a cousin who bought the wine in the first place. With the piece removed, they will see before them a solid wall of water which is the Pacific Ocean—or at least a bit of it.

"What now?"

"We'd better tunnel some more, at least until we're a short distance from the ship."

Tunnelling now through the salty water, their labour will be rather less arduous, and after a few hundred meters they shall begin to ascend, towards the surface of the sea.

Now this is where it gets silly again, for just at that moment Fred Bloggs will be doing a spot of late night fishing. He will have in mind the intention of catching the rarest of fish, that being the famous Steak and Kidney Pudding Fish, so named for its love of the Steak and Kidney Pudding. This then will be used as bait, and just before Miss Take breaks the surface, and just after Peter Pringle breaks wind, they shall find that very delicacy dangling in

the tunnel. Now remember that they went to bed without supper, and so acute will be their state of ravenousness, that they shall not question the manner in which that pudding dangles, and it will be completely devoured within seconds, hooks and all. Meanwhile Fred Bloggs shall feel the tugging on the line, and, not believing his luck, begin to reel in. What a surprise then when he sees that, no, 'tis not the famous Stake and Kidney Pudding Fish which he has caught, but the equally famous Peter Pringle and Miss Take.

"Trying to escape were you?" he will say, removing the barbs from beneath their tongues.

"So what if we were? Is there a law against it?" Peter will argue.

"On my ship, yes."

"And what's the sentence?"

"Death."

"Weren't we already sentenced to death?"

"Oh yes. Double death then."

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Mammoths are Extinct

"Why doesn't he just kill us and have done with it? it's driving me mad, all this waiting around" Peter and Miss Take will be locked in another cabin. Unfortunately, this time, there is no means of escape, for they have been bound hand foot and elbow with pink string.

"Yes, me too." Peter will agree, picking his nose with Miss Take's tongue.

"I am scared; and I do not think we can rely on that writer-fellow to give us a happy ending either."

"We may not be able to rely on him, but have at least some faith in me. Remember my mammoth brain."

"Mammoths are extinct." Miss Take will point out, once again making use of her pointer.

"That's true."

"And anyway, surely the writer is in control. Surely he has already decided our fate."

"Perhaps he thinks he's in control, but I tell you: He who creates must sooner or later learn that creation will tolerate nah shackles, that art can know nah possessor. In being we necessarily are free."

"You're starting to sound like Plato."

"Yes, his voice was just like mine—or so I've heard."

"Squeaky and annoying you mean?"

"Yes."

At last they will be overcome by sleep, and so competent are they, so well practised in this night-time event, that they shall do it with their eyes closed.

Chapter Ningle-Nangle-Noo

The Time Space Continuum

Or What to Do With Your Yellow Rubber Ducky

The next morning a guard might wake them up by jumping on them and having his evil way with them. Then again it might be an alarm clock which rings at eight-fifteen. Whichever you like best. At any rate, the final result will be the same.

Soon afterwards they will be untied and taken, under escort, to the Captains cabin, where something most unexpected awaits them:

"Good morning," Fred Bloggs will greet them. "Sit down and have breakfast." Yes, Peter and Miss Take will have trouble believing it too. "Enjoy, enjoy, for your last meal it is." They sit.

"You mean...?"

"Yes. Today is the day."

"You mean...?"

"Yes, the hour is nigh."

"You mean...?"

"Yes, the moment is near."

"You mean..?"

"Yes, the time is ripe."

"You mean...?"

"Yes. You are soon to be deaded."

"That's not what I mean."

"Now eat up. Enjoy."

They will both have splendid appetites, the prospect of being terminated not bothering either unduly. Apart from the sound of gnashing teeth, the meal will pass in silence.

"Now then, before I have you both killed, you may have one last request."

"How about a game of cards?" Peter will suggest.

"Fine. Which?"

"Snap."

"Okay."

And so they shall begin to play—all that is except the guards, who will not be able to understand the rules.

"So tell us," Peter will begin, "what's this all about?".

"Well, you've got to try and win all the cards off the other players," Fred Bloggs will explain.

"No, I mean all this killing business, SNAP!"

"Oh, you want to know now, do you laddie?" He will say this with a sarcasm rating of nine point nine on the Ridiculous Scale.

"Yes, SNAP." You may have noticed that, even if death is imminent, Peter is never the less having a great deal of success in the game of cards. Some people are just born lucky, I suppose.

"Why, " he will continue, "have you SNAP! been trying to have Miss Take killed?"

"Miss Take killed? No, no, no. You have it all wrong. What makes you think that?"

"SNAP!" Miss Take will cry.

"Well it was you," Peter will begin to explain, "who suggested I become an assassin, wasn't it?"

"'twas I," Fred will agree.

"And I was sent to SNAP! kill Miss Take?"

"You twere."

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Well what about the time I found you in SNAP! bed with my dearest SNAP! Miss Take? You had your SNAP! in her SNAP! You were about to kill her."

"What about it?."

"The couch then. Wasn't it you who had it hypnotised and instructed to devour her?"

"Wasn't it?"

"Well, SNAP! what about later, on the Island, with the two deaf guys? You were trying to get her then, weren't you?"

"To tell you something, allow me. For a genius, you sure are a fool."

"Well what the SNAP has been going on then?"

"Yes, what?" Miss Take will add, subtract and divide.

"Well firstly, yes, I did send you to be a hit man, but only so that you would later be arrested and hung by the neck, pulled by the groin and twisted by the toe-nails. And yes, I did sleep with Miss Take, but only to find out about you, to best decide how you should be killed. And the couch was instructed to kill you, not Miss Take. As for my two deaf killers, again it was you I was after. Miss Take has just happened to be tangled up in it all."

"So it was me you wanted dead all along. But why? SNAP! SNAP! SNAP!" And Peter will win the game hands down.

" Explain I will. In the year two thousand and fifty four.."

"Just a terrible minute now. Say that again?"

"In the year two thousand and fifty-four.."

"You do realise it's only two thousand and squanty zee?"

"Boy are you quick. If I might continue: thirty-three years from now, you will invent the very first 'Instant Pet'. A packet of Poodle, or Hamster, or Tropical Fish even. Just add water and the pet comes to life for a week."

"Wow. I must be even more brilliant than I'd imagined. But how do you know this?"

"These disposable 'Instant Pets' will take off in no uncertain way. The whole Pet Industry will be wiped out, and I will be ruined."

"You will own Pet Shops?"

"No, Chinese Restaurants."

"I fail to see your problem."

"There will be no more unwanted pets. No stray dogs and cats. No abandoned puppies and paroquets. My supply of fresh meat will be wiped out in one foul stroke. My Restaurant Empire will decline faster than the popularity of Mick Jagger after his lip transplant."

"Wow. Mick Jagger will have a lip transplant? But how do you know all this?"

"And so my plans to rule the world, so close to being realised, will be destroyed in one foul swoop. You dirty rat."

"But how can a chain of Chinese Restaurants lead to you ruling the world? This is all nonsense."

"Hold your tongue laddie." This he will do, between his thumb and fore-finger. "By that time the population of Chinese-type people will number seventeen quintillion. Nine and a half people out of every ten will be of that oriental orientation."

"So?"

"Don't you see? My Restaurant chain will be world wide and they will all work for me. In my employ. To do my bidding. With that massive multitude obeying my every whim, it will be a simple matter to take complete control. But you will spoil it all. And so I will come back in time, from that year to this. Came back. Have come back. Am coming back. What ever."

"How? How can you come back in time?"

"A year after the Instant Pet business, in two thousand and fifty-five, you will invent the time machine. I will steal it from your secret laboratory—the bathroom of your mother's house—before knows anyone."

"You fiendish fiend."

"Yes."

"If all you have said is true, then Miss Take has nah part in this. You can let her go."

"Yes, I can."

"Good."

"But I won't."

"Why?"

"Because I the bad guy am."

"How will you kill us?" Peter will ask.

"I'm glad asked me that you've. I've given it much thought, for you see a laddie of your calibre can not easily be done away with. Your death must be ignominious, nice to look at and, above all, permanent. The late and great Peter Pringle must die as no other laddie has died before."

"What do you mean, you meany you?"

"Listen, I think you'll like this: it will be your own genius which will prove your ultimate fall down."

"Down fall," Peter will correct.

"The plan is that into the future we will travel, to my own time, from whence I came, will come, am coming—what ever. Once there we will all meet the Peter Pringle and the Miss Take who are yet to be. Your future selves."

"But you musn't. You surely realise what will happen," Peter will plea.

"What? What will happen?" Miss Take will feel an unnatural shiver run up her spine, into her left ear, and out of her mouth.

"The good lady you must tell." Fred Bloggs will command, smiling.

"If we ever see ourselves to be, or indeed ourselves which were, the result will be something akin to an implosion of the brain, where every cell, refusing—or unable—to accept reality, will burst inwards on itself. A sudden atomic madness will ensue: Our kneecaps will tremble, our nostrils twitch, and death will follow within seconds."

"You dastardly dude," Miss Take will say, pointing at Fred Bloggs with her over worked pointer.

"By meeting ourselves we will kill ourselves. It's rather ironic." Peter will realise in a surprisingly objective manner.

"Yes, and I will have the last laugh." Fred Bloggs will conclude.

"How so?" Peter will question the conclusion.

"Just after you die, one of my guards will tell me a joke."

"That's not funny," Peter will say.

"All right. The time is really nigh now. Prepare to meet thy doom." So saying he will take out his Yellow Rubber Ducky and begin to twist its neck and manipulate its bill. Miss Take, holding Peter's hand, will watch with baited breath, her heart thumping away like a madman banging his head against a wall. Thus, Fred Bloggs, intent on his duck toyings, and Miss Take, possessed by that terrible fear, will fail to notice Peter's serene expression and the perfectly calm attitude which he wears like a comfortable jock strap. Fred will at last look up, smile his terrible smile, and squeeze the Yellow Rubber Ducky about its posterior. It will squeak and then they shall be gone. The room will be empty.

Chapter a Half

Death and all That Kind of Stuff

"Where are we?" Miss Take will ask.

"When are we would be a question more pertinent. Reached we have the year two thousand and fifty-five," Fred Bloggs will say, still holding his Yellow Rubber Ducky.

Miss Take will look to him with horror, and say, "It is true then, you mean to kill us by showing us to ourselves."

"Did you doubt me?"

"No, but I thought you might change your mind. After all," she begins, shaking her hips, and gyrating her ankles, "if you are nice to me, I will be nice to you."

"All right." They will then have sex together. Peter meanwhile will look on without seeing, nor a word shall he speak. With the sex finished Fred will say, "Now prepare to meet your end."

"But, but I just met your end. Won't you let us go? You said you would be nice."

"I lied." And he will smile that by now familiar bearded smile, which is something like the expression used by Napoleon Bonypart when he finally found the loose change he had been searching for all those years in his inside jacket pocket.

In actual fact they will have found themselves in Fred's living room, which is furnished with Egyptian mummies laid on their sides and used as tables and chairs. Fred will pick up the telephone and dial.

"I'd like to speak with Peter Pringle," he will say. "Ah, splendid. Now listen carefully: I know who pinched your time machine, and if you want it back, come to 60 A Narrow Lane at five o'clock this afternoon. Five o'clock, you hear? Yes. And send Miss Take over as well." And with that he will hang up.

"You are insane," Miss Take will say.

"Why?"

"It's already ten past six!"

"Oh, so it is." And so saying he will manipulate the yellow rubber ducky some more and suddenly nothing will happen. Fred will glance at the clock on the wall, note that it is now four-thirty, and telephone Peter Pringle. He will say the whole message all over again, only this time all the words beginning with "s" will be replaced with "fuck" and all those ending in "x" he will not say at all.

"So all is arranged. Soon you will dead both be ."

Peter will have spoken not a not a single word for quite some time, and we can all be thankful of that, for you see he has nothing funny to say. Even his thoughts are dull.

Fred Bloggs will do strange things with the Yellow Rubber Ducky, and suddenly it will be five p.m. There will be a knock on the door and the bell will ring at the same moment.

"That means outside there is either one person able to do two vastly different things at the same time, or two people doing one different thing at the same time." During all of this Fred will be rubbing his hands with glee, waiting to see Death walk through the door.

"Come in," he will say, and that bearded smile will stretch itself across his bearded face. The door will open, and there, standing before them, will be the milkman and the postman, both going innocently about their duties. Fred Bloggs will shoot them both with a spud gun and drag their dead bodies into the bathroom and give them a wash and shave.

The hour of five will have just passed. Suddenly there will be another knock on the door. Fred will call, "Come in," and the door will swing open. This time, low and behold, 'tis indeed Peter Pringle and Miss Take, à la two thousand and fifty-five. Miss Take will see herself,

herself will see herself, and both shall fall deaded to the ground. And it seems that Peter Pringle too will see himself, himself will see himself, and both shall fall likewise to the ground. Fred Bloggs will begin to laugh an insane laugh, to smile an insane smile. The only sound now will be that weird, eerie and inhuman giggling. Next, quite suddenly, the song of mirth will be replaced by a cry of terror. "Yaaaaaaaah," it will go. And then another, "Yaaaaaaaah." And one almost like it, "Waaaaaaaah." What happens? Peter will appear beside Fred Bloggs, who will scream one more time and then begin sucking his thumb, struck dumb by shock. Peter, his skin white and almost translucent, will wear a terrible death mask, manifesting like a ghost bent on revenge. He will peer into the eyes of Fred, see he is disabled by horror, and turn from him to snatch the Yellow Rubber Ducky from the table and rush over to the body of Miss Take. She is indeed dead. He will rush over to the other body of Miss Take, and she too will be lifeless. Next to it his own other body. Dead as well.

Outside, in the street, a bus will crash into a brick wall and everyone will die. At that very moment an earthquake will begin in Peru, killing thousands. A tidal wave in the Pacific will wash ashore and there will be more death in more countries than God knows what to do with. An outbreak of food poisoning at Mac Donald's, where sixteen billion are being served—at the same time—will render each and every one of them a corpse. A little boy in Yorkshire will cut his finger and say, "Ouch!"*

* The author hopes all this death and killing in this one chapter will compensate for the lack of action in the rest of the book.

Chapter Three*The Last Chapter*

Peter, still looking far from happy, will begin to fondle the Yellow Rubber Ducky. His aim is not cheap thrill nor unnatural gratification, for the Yellow Rubber Ducky is, of course, the master control of the time transfer device. With death all around, it will be of no surprise to learn that Leeds United beat Liverpool by a score of nine to one that week. The Yellow Rubber Ducky will be a cute little fellow, and so Peter will be most reluctant indeed when it comes to twisting its neck and stretching its stroodle; but twist and stretch he must.

A

long

line

of

words

will

stream

from

his

mouth. Words of woe and other such sentimentalities, for in the terror and turmoil of the moment, his brain will not function to its full capacity and he is reduced accordingly to a level akin to Einstein on one of his better days. What will have previously seemed quite clear and simple will now be confused and unsure. His plan will be like a joke with no punch line. About now he should be saying all kinds of funny stuff, that the book might finish in a hilarious way, but being funny when you are as depressed, as he will be, is like trying to make your hair grow. He has no nice one liners for us then, and even his two liners will be a thing of the past.

Twist and stretch. We must make do with that.

Dejected, he will at last squeeze the Yellow Rubber Ducky's posterior, and a squeak will squeak forth, fifth and sixth.

Suddenly there will be an empty space.

Chapter One Hundred One Hundreds

Another Final Chapter

Peter will find himself in another place and time. He is at Club Med in the West Indies, when love will be fun but sex funner. There he will pass a nice holiday and fondle lots of nice girls. He will sit back on the beach one day and finally come to a conclusion.

"Ooooh, that was a nice conclusion I just came to," he will sigh.

"Yes," a young thing with tassels will agree, still in the middle of her conclusion.

If you are thinking by now that all this is getting very silly, and that if it goes on much longer you might just fall asleep, then you should set your alarm clock right now, because otherwise you might miss the end. There will be no warning. The end will just appear, and that will be that. Don't say I didn't warn you.

Peter will know, during this period of rest and masturbation, exactly what must be done, and I must confess that the entire holiday is the result of a mere whim on my part, and has nothing to do with the plot. This is not to say that his time spent on that palmy paradise will be wasted. Quite the contrary in fact; Peter, during the best part of an afternoon, will begin a series of complex experiments in Time Relativity—and all this without even telling me. The object of the intense research is quite obtuse, for he will attempt, by means of his rubber ducky, to go beyond the natural bounds of the Universal Spatial Balance, and in doing so affect some manner of change to the time reality of the author—which is to say, me. In simple terms, he will make a pathetic bid to entrap me within the confines of a time loop. Of course this is doomed to failure. Of course this is doomed to failure. Of course this is doomed to failure. Of course this is doomed

failure. Of course this is doomed to failure. Time loops are theoretically impossible, but he can try if he wants.

Chapter Four Plus Nine

Another Another Last Chapter

"I must be going now," Peter will say to someone who has already gone. He will take one last nip of his cocktail—and we all know how painful that can be—and begin to manipulate the Yellow Rubber Ducky in ways that no Yellow Rubber Ducky should be manipulated. There will be a scream from a nearby county where civil war is breaking out—in spots. But this will go unnoticed by Peter, who is still toying with the rubber object and remembering, nostalgically, other similar joys.

Suddenly he will be gone.

Now for those of you presently sleeping, I hope your alarm clocks are about to ring, for we are now dangerously close to the conclusion. I say dangerously because the last page has been rigged with three grams of high explosives in order for the story to end with a big bang. Weary reader read on, and please do not trip over any of the words .

Suddenly he will reappear, but not where he will have been, but where he will have had been. Yes, back in time, until: Peter Pringle will find himself back on board H.M.S. Foolhardy. It will be two hours ago for people living in a time much previous to the one we were just at. Got it? Hiding in a cupboard, with the door only slightly ajar, Miss Take and the other himself will pass near by, being led to the captain's suite for their final breakfast. Now you may be wondering precisely how Peter manages, once again, to see himself in another time and not have his brain implode like a can of worms beneath the oversized foot of a passionate male elephant, as will have been the case with Miss Take. You may venture to guess that the answer lies in the enormous size of that much used brain, that perhaps he will have come to some special understanding with it, and that it has promised not to go

berserk and kill him; or that he will have entered a higher plane of consciousness, where he may view his two selves with incredible objectivity. All this of course could be right—but is not. All he will have done is to simply close both his eyes when confronted with himself, and keep them closed until himself has gone.

The other Peter and Miss Take will enter the room, followed by the guards, and the other other Peter will hear the door slam closed. Silently he will creep down the corridor, making less noise than something which is very loud. Inwards he will burst, running and crying a terrible cry. Unfortunately he will be forced to keep his eyes closed, lest he catch a glimpse of the other Peter, and will, unfortunately, trip over yet another unfastened shoe lace. Whose this one will be, I have no idea, but he will find himself flying through the air, coming to land in the arms of Fred Bloggs. Fred Bloggs will not notice that it is the other other Peter, and instead think that it is a dream come true.

"My darling," he will say, giving him a big fat wet kiss on the cheek. The other other Peter will open one eye, peep out, and see the cause of his sudden and most embarrassing erection. The other Yellow Rubber Ducky will lie on the floor, knocked from Fred's lap by a sudden urge. Meanwhile, the other other Yellow Rubber Ducky will be safely hidden in Peter's pocket. Peter will not see the other Yellow Rubber Ducky on the floor, and the whole scene will become most embarrassing—not to mention confusing.

"I love you," Fred will say, still not realising who is in his arms. The first guard will be agog. The second guard will be agog. Miss Take will be agog. The other Peter, because of the enormous size of his brain, will be two gogs. Within moments he will drop to the ground dead, victim of an imploded brain brought about by the sight of himself.

All of a sudden, and about time too, the other other Peter, still only peeping out of one eye to avoid seeing the other Peter, who even in a state of utter deadness is potentially able to render the other other Peter dead as well, will notice the other Yellow Rubber Ducky on the floor. He will reach for it with an outstretched tongue, take it, and scramble from the arms of Fred Bloggs. The other other Peter will grab Miss Take—who will be in a state of utter confusion—about the scruff of the neck, and rush from the room, along the gang-way and to the upper middle section of the lower middle upper deck.

"Quickly, we must form a group of two. I'll be the leader." Peter will say, as they rush into the darkened corner of a darkened corner.

"What is the advantage of being leader?" Miss Take will want to know, her breathing laboured.

"Well that way I can take credit for all the good bits, and blame you for the bad ones."

"I do not have any bad bits," Miss Take will insist, sticking out her ample bosom and causing the ship to lean precariously over to one side.

"That's true."

Footsteps.

"Oh God, someone is coming." Miss Take will foresee imminent recapture.

"Fear not," Peter will insinuate, for want of a worse word, and begin the delicate manipulations of the other Yellow Rubber Ducky. He will have two now, remember. They will like each other and at a later date make lots of little Yellow Rubber Duckies; except one, which will be ugly, and then turn out to be an even uglier rubber swan.

Suddenly they shall both be not there, vanished to a much better place and time. "We've escaped!" Miss Take will jump for joy, using the "Fosbury Flop", and winning a gold medal for her efforts. They will be in Bridlington on a wet and windy afternoon in nineteen eighty-nine.

"Now what the hell happened, Peter? In the cabin, I saw...I saw two of you, and I think one of them died."

"Yes, my dear. It's a long story."

"I want to know what happened, Peter."

"You'll have to buy the book."

"Awe. Well at least tell me how it ends," she will say.

The End