

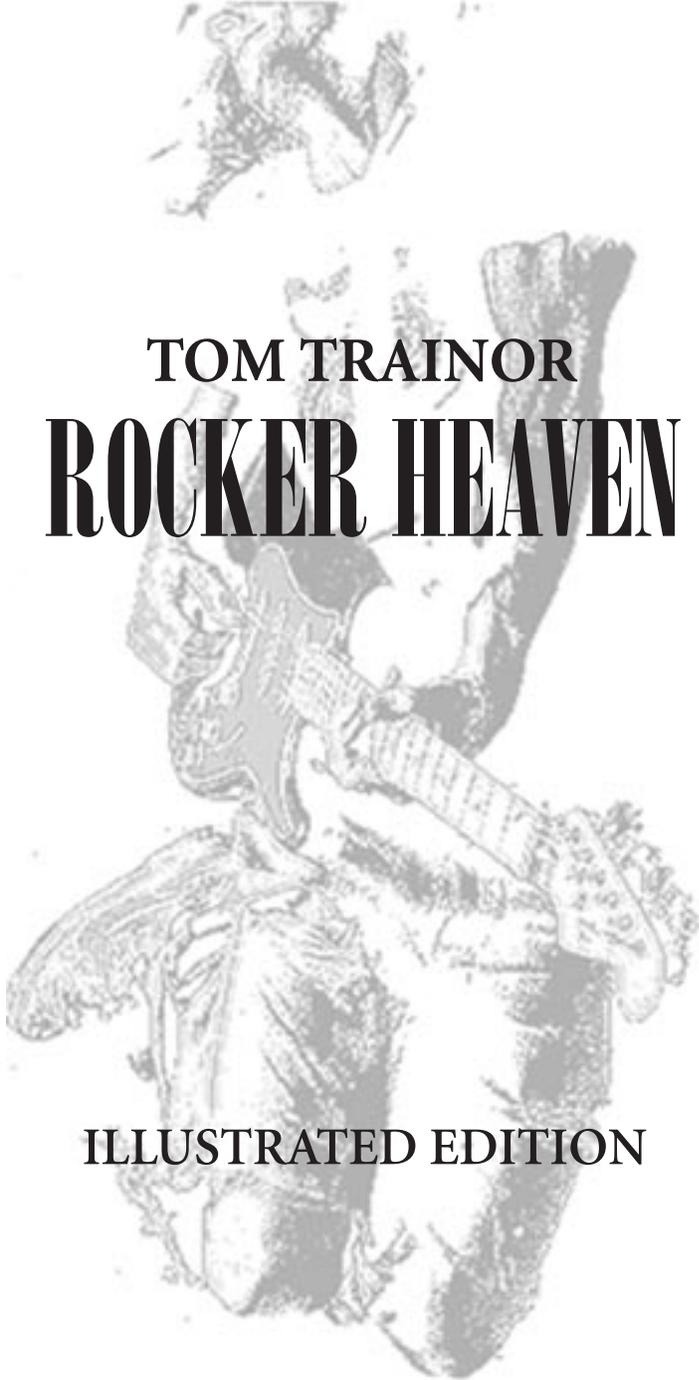
ROCKER HEAVEN



TOM TRAINOR



thewaryeye.com/press



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ROCKER HEAVEN

ILLUSTRATED EDITION

thewaryeye.com/press

Dedicated to Brian, Katy, Betsy, Liza, Zephyr and all her brood without whose constant enthusiasm, humor and patience this work would never have ensued.

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Time but plays everyman for a fool

ALLIED FOR LIFE

...HEATHROW AIRPORT

...OUTSIDE LONDON

...SOMETIME IN THE TOO NEAR FUTURE

“Uut oof me way, yoo roody sod!”

“Nice mouth!”

“Stuuff it!”

Big girl, whole gang load of them push past everybody else – *CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK* – clad in hefty metal and rough soled biker boots.

“Hey! Watch who you’re shovin!”

“Shoove yoo, yoo poof!”

“Shove you back Sally!”

Wrong move – *CLANK CLANK* – gang load jumps the sorry bloke.

“Fuuk ’im uup! Fuuk ’im uup uugly!”

They do as they’re told, these girls, with studded belts and steely toe plates, while the crowd around backs way off.

“That’s that Cissy Coombs, that’s who that is!” Someone snipes.

And the nastiest fatassed of the bunch flashes the finger, some sort of ribbed ring sheath t’poop uup yoor ruudy buum ’ole!

CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK

Heathrow has been shut down. Scheduled flights have been rerouted to Gatwick. Concourses, escalators, lounges are mobbed. Kids. Millions of kids and rude and loud, and elite Brit SAS troops stationed in tight formation in front of the Terminal 4 VIP Pavilion. Throughout the day the traffic in celebrities has been phenomenal,

jet loads of them – AK47, CRAM, Parson Nevilles and Jeb Latham, Arbie Riffendorf, Tom Scum, Child Bride, Constance Flit, Luther T. Wallop, Early Stook and the Kid Squid. Later in the afternoon, Swag, Sore Losers, the Scupper Plugs fresh out of East Auckland, Ether Bib, Liz Croft, Rob Hart and the Red Hot Cherry Busters, Seattle’s Orphic Gizzards – the list goes on. Not that the kids can catch a glimpse of a one of them. There’s this fleet of helicopters lifting the stars directly off the tarmac and up over the crowd toward the stadium. Still, every whine of a jet engine, every whip of a rotor blade sparks this surge of excitement, this movement. Kids gain a few feet. Red berets step back. It’s a standoff, but hey, they’re here, they’re part of it, and no way these diehard rockers can get within striking distance of Wembley.

Besides the day’s not over with, not yet. It’s near midnight and Chipper Stirbee’s due in direct from Melbourne. He’s on last and he’s late, as usual.

Enough of a delay for Cissy Coombs and her girls to make headway. The stout ones up front storm the VIP gate. They’re in no mood for no, no sir, no pardon me please, no step aside otherwise, No Admittance Beyond This Point Without Proper Clearance, no skirts to hike as they hurdle the crush barriers. Girls look stylish in slick black leather zip suits, punker hairdos, Cissy’s is plum purple brushed up center and shaved along the sides, and she’s got flared nostrils and pierced nipples on a pair of exposed double D’s, and chains rankling anyone who dares step in her way as she marches straight through the metal detector – *CRANK CRANK CRANK CRANK CRANK* – gets everybody going.

Troops listen up.

Not that these biker babes have a gripe with the boys in fatigues, fact a rumble or a tumble with the likes of some broad shouldered British specials would be A-OK with them, no, it’s Chipper Stirbee they’re after, and if the Army’s going to bar the doors, then the girls’ll stomp through the plate glass shattering windows, thank you. Cissy Coombs and her sisters hop outside onto the darkened tarmac.

Troops pursue, hands on their holsters, although the damage has been done, scores of teenage travelers pour rapidly through the breach behind Cissy’s gang to get a closer look.

Her timing couldn’t be better. In the shadows is a Leeds Executive Supersonic gliding to a stop, a hundred feet from the charging beauties.

CHIPPER!

Crowd calls.

CHIPPER!

Rampaging kids being perfect cover for a paramilitary maneuver.

CHIPPER! CHIPPER!

Which could be a warning, which could be a greeting, at near hysteric decibels.

CHIP- CHIP- CHIPPER!

Like a shrieking mulch machine... while a compact yellow and red sea rescue craft hovers overhead, and sensing trouble groundside switches on its high intensity beam.

There's the slightest *whirrrr* as the cabin door of the executive jet slides open and a ramp descends. A pair of bright blue eyes peers out, curious, cautious – and a pair of black velvet ears – perked!!

Chipper?

A flash of the telltale platinum blond hair. A whip of a spiny black tail.

It's... the crowd grows closer, yes it is, it's...

CHIPPER! CHIPPER!

Cry goes shriller still! Blue eyes blink... black ears twitch... “Don't much like the looks of the welcomin pahty. How about you gihl?”

There's this audible gulp. Hers, his, who knows? They're both abruptly whisked back inside the jet, instead a detachment of QuotLinkInc Security types in uniform blue blazers with buzz cuts clamors down the ramp.

QuotLinks off the plane survey the crowded terrain. Right away they figure Cissy's not friendly, could be the needle tips, could be the mean sucker curl to her lips. Whatever. She's advancing and the elite paratrooper unit is lagging behind. Hence the best defensive posture for the private security squad is to close into a wedge formation around Chipper, who's toting his classic 56 Fenderbender in a gig bag. Two types on the edge cradle assault weapons. The rest are armed with double-handled batons. The one on point has his eyes aimed directly at Cissy. And a rigid black tail brings up the rear!

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP – rescue chopper is attempting to set down in between the opposing forces.

Cissy Coombs doesn't flinch, doesn't slow her pace.

Kids in the crowd do. Something about automatics and an improvised air show, they freeze in place. Gives the paratroopers the opportunity to squeeze through, reestablish a line – *hup hup*, might is right, plight makes for such a sight, it's flee, flip or fight when the scene suddenly goes silent.

Everybody's watching.

Only sound is the tread of Cissy's heavy boots, and the *WHUPWHUP* of the helicopter settling in closer.

Is there an ugly incident in the making?

What the kids inside the terminal can't see they don't know, so most join the trek out toward Wembley, site of Chipper's next earthy appearance where close to

2,000,000 of them have jammed inside the stadium, while outside and spilling into adjacent neighborhoods, ten times their number have assembled, along with a full division of regular Army infantry.

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP – back at Heathrow the helicopter descends – but that doesn’t deter Cissy. With a hoist of her ribbed midfinger, she signals her squad into action. Confusion’s the game as the girls start in scrimmaging. Looks like a snatch pass, pat on the ass, a long sweep to a wild receiver, a flame headed wonder running backwards open mouthed and hooting, “Who’s here got the balls?”

Not the QuotLink Inc Security Corps, they doffed theirs for generous severance packages eons ago, which might explain why they misjudge the play, like entirely. They close into a shell while two of Cissy’s tiny tight ends sneak along the wings. A dive, a tackle, and the girls take down the heavy artillery. Call it foul but two-fisted batons are useless when your enemy’s on your back kicking and scratching. Seems these QuotLink lifers weren’t trained for resistible wenches with finger spikes and spindly spurs that tickle. So when Cissy who’s been saving her loveliest linebackers does a final rush forward, that is, hits full force head and shoulders and piles on rugby style, game’s over, security detachment falls without firing a shot.

Paratroopers do a double take. Hesitate.

And if an armed bodyguard is no match for these babes, what chance does a lone rockstar or his pet Lab who’s part Dobie have of surviving?

Plenty. Dog’s gone a few rounds in her life and Chipper’s still scrappy.

“Remembah the pahkin lot ovah at Hack’s Bah that rainy Satuhday night Betsy?”

Remember? How could she forget, lug wrenches and a dozen Kanooks in mud up to their ankles, after Chipper has to go and say something disparaging about his quarter-French ancestry.

“Fihst to draw blood in a brawl’s suhe to win.” Some comfort that is as the two go back-to-back, face off the force encircling hem. “Go fah a throat and I’ll try and knock some sense into one of theih pretty little heads.”

Betsy bares her incisors, scopes for one her size or smaller.

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP – rescue craft is whipping up dust as Cissy’s gang closes in tighter and tighter.

“Tough lookin bunch of bruisahs.”

Betsy and he twist around, looking for a break in the ranks, which is at least two deep with more of the sisters moving in from the midfield.

“Spot a hole gihl, scuhry through it. I can take cahe of myself.”

-rr-right! Betsy slinks low to the ground.

Chipper starts bouncing up and down, short hops, warming himself up – boy is

Maine State Champion jumpy, can leap five, ten, fifteen feet at the slightest female provocation.

“Stook’em!” Cissy commands and the girls advance – *CLANKCLANK CLANKCLANKCLANK*.

“Looks like this is it Betsy baby!”

Chipper must have springs on his heels as he leaps – *h’yigh hoop* – straight up in a high fly vault over the front line offensive. Perfect form. Arms, legs stretched, head ducked and ready to roll when he lands other side – *whoof* – but what’s this? Something soft? Yes, a punker heavyweight on her back and unzipped. Chipper lands full flop on top a cushion of belly and breasts, but *-ee y’ouch!* – something sticks, a pair of nipple pins in the palms of his hands. It’s Cissy Coombs leering lustily up at him.

“Help yoorself flybooy!”

Though Chipper’s, “Nope, and I thank you kindly fah the offah ma’am,” as he scrambles off her, “theah’s this somethin else I’ve just got to be doin – *BETSY?*”

Betsy’s spotted a hole in the line and gone squirreling through it – Cissy’s girls tumbling all over themselves trying to block her.

“Whoa, theah you ah. Figuhred I’d lost you fah suhe this round.”

Fat chance of that chum. So what’s our game plan?

True. One play, no matter how spectacular, isn’t going to finish this quarter, not as Cissy calls for a time out to regroup. But with the clock still ticking she’s got to act quickly, so she fans her force across the field and comes running on the offensive.

Chipper starts in bouncing again. Betsy hunkers low. “Ahright, stay cool, they say theah’s always a way out of anythin, long as you don’t panic.”

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP

“H’yep, always is! Lock on my hip pocket gihl, let’s grab the elevatah.”

-rr grab the what?

WHUP -UP -UP

Cissy’s team comes charging, so... so... so Chipper goes for another soaring leap, vertical, the goal this heat being the skids of the small rescue craft fluttering some forty feet above him – *WHUPWHUPWHUP* – which might be slightly out of reach for someone not in training, but go for the gold Chipper – right about now!

Though just as Betsy readies to hitch a ride on his back pockets, someone stomps down hard on her tail – *cur-ripes!*

“Uut oof me way, yoo stuupid muutt!”

It’s Cissy Coombs, offside, she nabs at Chipper’s heels as he goes launching upward, arm over arm paddling, feet thrashing, up, up – *WHUPWHUP* – reaching – *WHUPWHUP* – until one hand... one hand overlaps... overlaps metal flange! Maine

boy's made it! A new varsity record for broad jumping! Yes! His fingers grasp for the portal...

"Say mate, could you use a hand aboot new?" Pilot reaches over the spare seat.

Chipper's got his elbows in... his gig bag secure on his shoulder... "Crowbah'd be bettah!" While the rest of him's left dangling dangerously, and the helicopter's listing way to starboard... not to mention the pooch marooned below...

"Ball-peen hammer do?"

Because this fist full of knuckles is clutched on one foot and yanking, with all her weight. "Whatevah, othahwise I'm a gonah fah suhe!"

Instead his boot bops off, and he's mercifully free of Cissy as he does a final pull-up into the cockpit.

CHIPPER! CHIPPER!

Except Cissy's still clinging to the skids and a chain of her sisters has the chopper anchored to the ground.

TIP- TIP- TIPPER!

It's a mighty tug-o-war between woman and machine, with a black dog in between – Betsy's busily chewing the ankle of a crucial ground link – pilot's above trying manfully to lift when – *FWOOSH!* – an airbus locked on a glide path zooms in low.

"Mayday! Mayday! – Heathrow Tower, this is Skyhook XS90, South Bay 11, requestin emergency clearance fir take off, copy?"

Right, but how are you going to shake Cissy and her girls loose? They've got superhuman strength and not a lot of give – *KRANK KRANK KRANK* – pilot pulls up on his stick, as any normal guy would, and slowly, rotor shifting, straining, he's... he's... he's beginning to broach – *SNAP!* – rivets pop! Skid gives! Rips clean clear off the fuselage, with Cissy and her gang taking a plunge... while the helicopter does a gyro, which is *WHUP WHUPS* spiral up, then *WHIP WHAM* downward slam.

"Pissah maneuvah theah fella, pissah!"

"Go fir the thrills, do you?"

WHOOO -HOOP -HOOP

"Hope this burd hodd's steady – name's Scott Burlap, n you've got ta be noon other than Chipper Stirbee."

"None othah." Chipper offers a hand.

"Pleasure's mine."

"Appreciate the lift."

"Do wha ah can do. So tell me, how'd you git yirsell inta a scrap wi a bunch a Sheffield razorheads?"

"Sheffield razahheads?"

“Heard tell it’s the style thir ta git a sharp blade incised front ta back righ inta yir scalp.”

“Whoa! Didn’t run into one of those.”

“N needles inserted into the tips a’yir nipples.”

“H’yep, can attest to that.”

“So wha say we haul ou’ta hir? Had enough ruckus fir one ev’nin?”

“Can’t just yet Scotty, we’ve got to drop back down theah, way stealthy like, go in fah a quick rescue.”

“Tha’s a quick what?” *WHUPWHUP*

Chipper does a downward motion with his thumb.

“Might be ev’ry bit the nutcase you a, r warse, but it canna be done.” Helicopter is riding at a noticeable tilt. “Though ah do admire a bloke who’d go back ta save his mates.”

“My who?”

“Yir mates, yir security escort doon thir on the ground.”

“Hell with them, those ah QuotLinks.”

“Qua-whats?”

“QuotLinks Scotty, QuotLinks.”

Who still lie littered across the field.

“Those suckahs can suhvide on theih own anywheah, anytime, believe me. It’s my gal Betsy I’m wohryin about.”

“Ah see, thirsa wuman involved. Thasa dif’reent story.”

“Best damn hound dog in Aroostook County, except I can’t see hide noh haih of huh down theah anywheah.”

WHUP -PUP -PUP

Hide or hair of her is about all that’s left of her. Betsy’s got the wind knocked out, lying flat on the ground with thousand pound butchbullies dumped on top, and she’s *grr-rrum*-muttering mad about it too. Worst predicament she’s been in since she got her front half stuck deep in that mama woodchuck’s hole a few soggy springs ago. She tries a yelp – *elp!* To no avail. Squaws could give a squat. Which gets Betsy’s dander up, something about solidarity and sisterhood as she begins spinning her heels in reverse – *grr-grrr-grrrrrrr* – got to kick up some dust, got to bust out of there – and up top Cissy’s girls sense something, sense the sassy brat beneath them is about to blast backassed out from under them, and she does, in a flash, and lands scat scratch on her tailbone while the heap load of sisters collapses through a crack in the asphalt. Might not be the most dignified exit for a prize pup, but a lass packed fast in a morass has hardly any other way she can go.

-FWHUP -FWHUP -FWHUP – Scotty’s lowering within range, although the helicopter’s vibrating dangerously.

“Theah she is! That’s huh doubled up ovah on the edge of the runway!”

Scotty sights her.

“Betsy baby, hold on!” Chipper hangs out the open portal. “HELP IS ON THE WAY!”

Sure-rr, and anyway Betsy’s busy, leg up and licking at her war wounds. But if Betsy’s sanguine, Cissy isn’t. Gang girl sees opportunity.

“Coo’moon, puut soome muuscle into it sistoors! We’ve goot t’dig oor way uut oof this bloomin ’ole!”

CLUMP CLUMP CLUMP CLUMP CLUMP CLUMP

WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP

Scotty takes the chopper in low. “Any closer n ah could round up!”

“HEAH YOU GO GIHL!” Chipper tosses a rope ladder. “CATCH THIS!”

-rr *right*, that’s catch what in the dark outside where – oh I see it, a stick in the air. Piece of cake!

A stick with some strings attached however, as the ladder stops short just as Betsy makes her famous leap – makes her famous leap and misses! Betsy, blue ribbon best and misses!

-rr rough, because now she’s going to have to do laps around the warm-up track while the rescue craft circles.

“Whir yoo oof to in suuch a huurry, I want t’knoow?” Cissy’s fast, fat or no, hustlin close behind her.

-rrooh!

“Take yoo doown single handed, I will.”

-rr -ROW!

And do they ever! *Mano a mano*, nip you and nasty, with big mama on top, though only momentarily, Betsy going for the soft underbelly of the beast – but what’s this, an arm block? No matter, wrist’s not that bad to gnaw on either.

“Yoo bitch!”

That’s a given sist-rr, as Betsy digs in. First leather, next flesh, then crunch until Betsy hits bone.

“And a diirty rooser as well.”

-rr right, because clean’s clearly a losing battle with your kind.

Cissy tumbles free, stands on her hind twos. She uncinches her waist chain, which granting the gal’s girth is quite lengthy. She twirls it over her head – **CLANK CLANK CLANK** – lasso western style.

Betsy shrinks to the ground – **WHUPWHUP** above her.

“Yoo’r gooin to end uup minced buutcher’s meat!”

-rr wrong, as Betsy springs for Cissy’s kneecaps, which is why thigh highs though

not as chic as the wellies afford the female biped so much better protection – brings Cissy buckling down to doggy dog level.

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP circles in closer.

Cissy scrapes the mud off her face and scowls, all sour and spikes and not a thing nice... -*rrr*

And that's an -*rrr* back at you while they square off, Betsy crouching low, Cissy lower yet, Betsy more, until the fatass can't get down any further and is forced to spring first, digs into the raised nap on Betsy's neck – *whelp* – like needle points – *ow! -ow! -ow!*

“Yoo'r doone foor it noow.”

Maybe. Betsy does a rollover...

“Yoo roody looser!”

...plays dead, then when Cissy lets up a bit Betsy lunges for her throat – contact sports routinely requiring the stitches – and round and round they go at it, fur flying, flesh tearing, two black coated wenches in heat.

WHUPWHUPWHUP “BETSY!” *WHUPWHUPWHUP*

Just in time too because Cissy's girls are about to step up – *CLANK CLANK CLANK* – since there's no such thing as innocent bystanders in an unfair fight.

“BABYDOLL!”

What? Betsy pokes her head out of the scuffle.

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP “I'M RIGHT HEAH ABOVE YOU GIHL!”

Truly, and miraculous to say so, the helicopter is hovering close by, though not at a terribly reassuring tilt.

“Hold huh steady Scotty, steady!”

Salvation must be whatever's within grasp that last second because...

“READY BETSY?”

...Betsy's ears up and ready to spring.

Chipper tosses the rope ladder.

Maybe she missed the first throw, but a frisbee retriever of her class isn't about to miss the second. She's a six foot stretch from snout to hind paw, and with a leap – *rrr-rompf!* – she latches onto it!

“AHRIGHT NOW! AHRIGHT! HOLD ON!”

Chipper's hauling, Scotty's lifting, Betsy's climbing rung over rung, chomp over front paw -*hep -heft*, chomp again, paw...

“Hold on tight!” He hollers as he reels her in the final few feet. “Climb right on ovah me gihl!”

Which she does – *tromp tromp* – she might not be a chimpanzee, but -*huff* then -*puff* she's not about to miss this one last link on the great climb out of the slime and upwards towards mankind.



...Betsy's ears up and ready to spring

“You’h ahmost home, ahmost... ahmost...” – one last rung when there’s some sort of a tug on the bottom of the line, so forceful that Chipper’s arm is nearly wrenched out of its socket and Betsy has to spring for it, paws off and raw pup propulsion, through the hatch and slam dunk against the back of the spare seat.

“Hey theah babydoll, it’s you, right heah in my evah lovin ahms!”

She’s all licking and kissing...

“Missed you too!”

...and slipping and sliding...

“Watch youh step!”

...and trying to balance on delicately clipped toe tips while the helicopter banks steeply to race away from the action – *WHUPWHUP WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP*.

“Scotty, this heah’s Betsy, my all time favohrite hound dog.”

“Pleased ta meet you.”

Betsy gets a good scrub on the noggin, for which she is *grr*-rateful, besides she’s always been fond of handsome young Scotsmen.

“We go’ta ge’tout of hir. Ah don’need a citation fir bein an operational hazard.”

“Let’s head.”

“Buckle up mates, we could be in fir some rough seas ahead.”

WHUPWHUPWHUP

Which is about when Betsy feels the breeze – *rr* like where’s the doors, or more to the point fellas, where’s the floo-*rr*? Betsy’s never flown in a bubble cab with sky high open seating. Makes her wonder if the bash on the ground wouldn’t have been a whole lot safer, some terra firma and none of this rolla coasta, because if dogs were designed for flight, they’d sprout wings and feathers, -*rr* right? And rocket farts for starters?

“Yoo think yoo’r free oof me, doo yoo?” Cissy Coombs shakes her sheathed finger at the heavens. “Think again yoo clowns, I’ll stalk yoo to the ends oof the earth I will!” *CLANK CLANK*

Cissy and her girl gang mount their armor-plated motorbikes and join the trek with the youngsters blocking the roadway out of Heathrow toward Wembley, though Cissy’ll get through – *ROOM-ROOM-ROOOOOM!* – you bet she will.

“Lay back Eminenze, vay back.”

“-gack...”

“Vay vay back. Make yourzelv comvortable.”

“-gack... -gack...”

“Now open vide. Vider. I can’t vix notzink iv I can’t zee notzink.”

“-gaaack...”

CHIPPER!

“GACK!”

“Vatch vitz ze vingerz, vill you, iz ze only zpare zet I’ve gotz!”

CHIPPER! CHIPPER!

“THAT NOISE! THAT INSIDIOUS NOISE!” His Eminence clamps tight.

“Zo vhat’z in a noize?’ Azked ze high ruffed Roozter...”

“No, not another of your barnyard fables, I couldn’t bear it.”

“Juzt zome idle jitjat, getz your mind ov your eggz un painz.”

“Spare me the sympathy and try hurrying this procedure along. I have more important things I must be doing.”

“Yez vell, iz not eazy zcrewink ziz up eitzer.”

Seems his Eminence has developed a steady drip about the lip and his most trustworthy practitioner Queezac, has had to be summoned. Only flat surface available is the floor of the Executive Liaison’s private sky box, situated high atop the home team bleachers at Wembley, so Queezac’s asquat His Eminence’s chest, has his shoulders pinned to the floor...

“-ga -ga -ga-ga”

...one large claw of a hand crammed down his throat and twisting.

“-gag -gag -gag -gag”

“Zorry, zorry, iz ziz tricky adrenal regulator vavle I’ve gotz to tighten up, un ov courze I didn’t tzink to pack my torque vrenj.”

“-gog -gog”

While it could be that his Eminence’s bright white new dentures have shifted alarmingly out of alignment, there is a suspicion he has sprung a leak – anything’s possible with hydraulic assists as stressed as his.

“-gog”

“Zteady Eminenze. I vaz never muj ov a dentizt.”

“-goh”

“Un I grow tzumbz under prezzure.”

CHIPPER! CHIPPER!

“GAAAAK! -GAAAAK!”

“Zo vhat’z in a noize?’ He azked, zat cocky eyed Roozter. ‘Vor a noize only annoyz ’til iz over, zen you can zcoot under ze coverz un go back to beink your normal miserable zelv.’”

“DON’T TRIFLE WITH ME *YOUHUMPBACKGROTESQUE!*”

“Zorry Eminenze, zorry. I vorgotz my plaze... az uzual.”

“All the years of planning, all the effort, the billions in investment, everything we

at QuotLink Inc have worked to accomplish unexpectedly pressed to the verge of collapse!”

“No time to getz ziz jawbone ov yourz out ov vwack neitzer. It’z ze ztrezz, ze ztrezz vill muck upz ze bezt machinery every time.”

“Entirely on account of that dredged-up rockstar...”

CHIPPER! CHIPPER! CHIP-CHIP-

“...AND THOSE FILTHY ITINERANT TEENAGERS – LISTEN TO THEM! Riff raff off the streets with nothing better to do than stand around outside the gates of this stadium and brazenly chant his name over and over.”

“Iz juzt ziz ztage zey go tzrough, zeze kidz today, bevore zey zettle down to ze zeriouz buzinezz ov havink babiez on ze dole.”

“They are a threat to world order and prosperity.”

“Zat too.”

CHIPPER! CHIPPER!

“THAT NAME! THAT NAME!”

“Pleaze Eminenze. Relax. He’z not vortz ze vorry.”

“Your fate’s not tied to that infantile prankster as closely as mine.”

“Ziz iz true. Now open up, vay up. Yez, zat’z good – tzough I muzt zay you takez ziz job you gotz muj too zeriouzly. Even zoze titan tycoonz in ze zky overhead, zey lay down nightz zo ze rezt ov uz can getz zome zleep.”

“Easy for you to say, you’re not fully vested.”

“Lotz ov good zat bloated ztock iz goink to do you after ze buzt, bezidez ve’re all goink to loze to invlation in ze end anyway. You zave un you zave until ze day you guzzle zat lazt drop you gotz ztazhed in ze bottle – hold it rightz zere...”

“-gaa... gaa...”

“...I’m zmack dabz on topz ov it – yezzzzz!”

“ACHE!”

“Zere ve go, let me getz my vingerz out ov ze vay – now znap zat trap ov yourz zhut un ve’ll zee.”

CLAMP!

“Yez ziree bob! Tight az a pair ov alligator jawz!”

-pthut!

“Zat’z it. Zpitz it out...”

-pthut! -pthut! -pthut-pthut-pthut-pthut!

“...zat’z it, zpitz it all over my zleeve – all over me!”

Spit it is and dripping out of His Eminence’s mouth worse than ever.

“Jezuz! All zat vork un notzink to zhow vor it! You must’ve blown a gazket in ze zump pump, boy-o-boy zat’ll be a job un a halv.”

“How bad is that?”

“Ve’re talkink major zurgery un a painvul recovery in a zuper-zenzitive zpot – at leazt a veek vlat on your vace.”

“I haven’t the time for any of that!”

“Zen ze bezt I can do iz a qvick vix vitzout benevit ov anezthetic, try un apply zome pump greaze I keep in my bag vor zuj emergenzies.”

“Whatever is required, but I insist on returning to work immediately.”

“OK, drop trou-...”

“Do what?”

“Juzt bend over. Let me zee if I can adjuzt zat zticky nozzle by hand.”

“I-... I-... I-...”

“You’re ze vone who’z inziztink on no zurgery – downzpout’z ze only janz I’ve got to reach it.”

“This is outrageous!”

“Zo go un complain to ze vokez in engineerink, ziz iz juzt a qvicky roadside repair – zo bend over an zpread zem – vide!”

AAAAAA -HH!

Queezac barely has his beak inside along with a flashlight.

“AAH! AAH! AAH!”

“Vider vider... zay ah...”

“AAAAAAH!”

“Your Eminence.” A QuotLink Inc QSS intelligence officer in pressed blacks clicks to attention as he enters the door to the sky box.

“What th-... HOW DARE YOU BURST IN HERE UNANNOUNCED!”

“Beg pardon Sir! But you insisted we inform you the moment we received confirmation that Chipper Stirb-...”

“NEVER – *chirpychapclapyourtrap* – EVER MENTION THAT NAME IN MY PRESENCE!”

“Beg pardon Sir! Sir, the subject of concern has landed at Heathrow.”

“Finally!”

“Yes Sir!”

“Boy-yo-boy, vill you getz a load ov ziz! Everyzink down here iz copper vitz lead zolder, I mean iz ziz Cold Var vintage or vhat? No PZV nor zuper light veight tevlon, un manual zet zcrewz, no electronic controlz at all.”

“Will you get on with it!”

“Yez yez, but zeze ruzty old pipez you’ve gotz buried in ze bazement aren’t goink to lazt muj longer.”

“Are you absolutely certain?”

“Who knowz notzink for zertain, but if you vant I can poke around zome while I’m down here, do a curzory inzpektion.”

“I was not talking to you Queezac! I was questioning the lieutenant!”

“Affirmative! Sir!” The QSS officer salutes.

“Talk to anybody you vantz, but ziz fix iz only temporary at bezt.”

“Will you simply stick to business.”

“Yes sir!”

“Not you! Him!”

The QSS officer stands at rigid attention, eyes perfectly forward.

“We must proceed according to plan without any further delays.”

“Sir!”

“Let me remind you that our tactical options are severely limited by our need for absolute secrecy.”

“Sir?”

“Should this mob become aware of our plan, they shall most certainly riot, and with the entire area rife with camera crews – the episode could leave us exposed to billions of home viewers. Hence, we must be circumspect in our actions, none of your hooded assassins this time around, no SQWAT squads, we must appear outwardly friendly and endeavor at all costs to take him alive.”

“Yes Sir!”

“We should begin by sealing off the landing pad in the car park from the reach of the rioters.”

“Right, ve don’t vant no pezky vitnezzez ve’d have to deal vitz later.”

“Tend to your own dirty business Queezac! – *UH! UH! UH!*”

“Hold ztill Eminenze, zere’z alvayz ze pozziblity ov a rupture in ze zirculatory hozez.”

“We have already deployed our crack units to the backstage area Your Eminence, and we expect Army reinforcements for the outer perimeters of the stadium within the next quarter hour.”

“Excellent, even though history has shown that a resort to armed force upon the general population takes generations to gloss over.”

“We seemingly have no alternative. Sir.”

“Zuj vondervul newz! Jipper Ztirbee, zave in our clutjez at lazt!”

“*THAT NAME!*”

“Zorry. Iz juzt I get zo exzited whenever I tzink about zeeink him up cloze un toujink him, oh yez, toujink him in perzon.”

“You can pack your wares for now Queezac. We shall finish with this procedure later.”

“Zat’z inadvizable, bezidez I’m up to my elbowz in ziz zhit already.”

CHIPPER! CHIPPER!

“*YAK YAK! YAK YAK!*”

“Zere you go again!”

CHIP- CHIP- CHIPPER!

“YAKITY YAK YAK!”

“You getz yourselv all exzited over notzink! Your adreneline zhootz vay upz! Un zuddenly ze vlood in ze bazement’z a deluge!”

“EXCITED OVER NOTHING? AN UPRISING IN THE STREETS NECESSITATING A FULL-SCALE INTERVENTION BY THE BRITISH ARMY IS NOTHING?”

“Zo maybe notz notzink, but notzink vortz burztink a gazket ove-...”

“IN THE MIDST OF THE LARGEST BENEFIT CONCERT EVER CONCEIVED, BROADCAST LIVE AS WE SPEAK ACROSS FIVE CONTINENTS?” His Eminence is more than leaking, he’s seething.

“Lotz ov over expozure, ziz iz true, but ztill...”

“THE ENTIRE DEBACLE SPONSORED BY QUOTLINK INC, WITH MY NAME WRIT LARGE ALL OVER IT – AND YOU SAY I HAVE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, YOUIMPUDENTMEDICALIMPOSTER!”

“...un lotz ov itjy aggravation too...”

“Sir! If I may spea-...”

“AGGRAVATION!” His Eminence spouts.

“Vow, zat’z zome geyzer!”

He spouts and he spouts, about the mouth and out the down spout too.

“My cripez! Ze main von’t budge!”

“Aah aaah...”

“Guezz ve juzt gotz to go vitz ze vlow...”

“...aaaaaaaaah...”

“...un mop everytzink upz later.”

“...uh...”

Except sudden fluid loss causes the Executive Liaison to lapse into shock. His tongue stops moving, his eyes glaze over.

“You must do something to stanch the flow doctor!”

“I’m tryink, I’m tryink.”

“Might I suggest a tourniquet.”

“Zat vould pop hiz old eyeballz clear outz ov zeir zocketz – un zinze vhen did you ezpionage typez become medical exzpertz?”

“The situation is obviously dire.”

“Yez vell, I zuppoze I could cork him vone vitz my big toe? You agree vitz me, zat ve muzt rezort to suj an invazive prozedure, yez?”

The QSS lieutenant is non-committal.

“Zen ztand back my lovely lieutenant, here goez!” **WHACK!**

“AAACK!”

“Bullzeye!”

“YOU YOU YOU...”

“Zorry Eminenze, muzt’ve hit a zenzitive zpot, yez?”

“...YOU ...YOU SO ENJOY HUMILIATING ME, DON’T YOU? *YOUNGROVELING DEVIANTDRUDGE!*”

“Ze lieutenant here, he agreed.”

“Sir. If I may speak candidly.”

“WHAT IS IT, *YOU MEALY MAGGOT MOTTLED MOLE?*”

“Ye-yes Sir! I regret the untimely interruption...”

“Ze untimely eruption.”

“...but I must inform you that while the subject of concern has indeed arrived, there has been a slight altercation at the airport.”

“Back door plumbink vaz never my zpecialty, no ziree bob, vhat could be more dizguztink zan crawlink tzrough zomebody elze’z drain pipez.”

“And?”

“He has escaped. Sir.”

“*ESCAPED!*” His Eminence spits, spits all over the QuotLink specialist in his full dress blacks.

“Vhat vaz zat? Zaliva or more hydraulic vluid?”

The lieutenant doesn’t blink, doesn’t wipe. “Regrettably, the security contingent we had assigned him in Melbourne was overwhelmed at Heathrow by a heav-...”

“*OVERWHELMED?*” His Eminence swills about the mouth.

“...by a heavily armed group of terrorists... terrorist feminists.”

“*TERRORIST WHAT?*” The Liaison launches another globular lob.

“Feminists Your Eminence!” The QSS officer is forced to wipe a direct hit to the eye.

“Jezuz, iz hydraulic. Meanz I’ve gotz to go poke my head in zere again!”

“Impossible. Feminism in all its disreputable guises – *AAAAK!* – has been dormant for decades.”

“Ziz iz muj more zeriouz zan I had azzumed. Vhere’z my flazhlight – iz not like I can zee vhat I’m doink in ze dark.”

“Not this particular gang.” The specialist begs to differ. “They have been staging raids out of their base camp in Sheffield into the Midlands and East Anglia with increased frequency, engaging in various covert activities, most recently in the vicinity of Thetford...”

“Let’z zee, vitj valve iz it? I zhould have labeled zem. I tzink zat vone adjutz z filter function, un zoze two are kidneyz inz un outputz, but vhere iz zat ztinkink little zump pump I vantz to know.”

“Thetford, what would revolutionary feminists be doing in Thetford?”

“Organizing local housewives into skeet shooting cells and overland biking brigades.”

“Biking brigades?”

“What’z vitz all ziz zhit! I’m a zurgeon, not a pipevitter.”

“Motorbike brigades, to be more precise, and they have been quite successful, notably among single working mothers left alone with all the bills to pay, the noses to wipe and no husbands to wag a finger at...”

“Remindz me ov ziz z mug azz guy zittink next to me at ziz medical convention. He leanz over un he whizperz, ‘I’ve gotz myzelv a tzrivink little proctology practize.’ Zo I repliez. ‘About ze only zink I can tzink ov vorze zan a proctology practize would be a tzrivink proctology practize.’”

“Although the incident tonight at Heathrow is purportedly their first excursion this far southward, cleverly exploiting the confusion occasioned by this ersatz rock concert to infiltrate London.”

“Cut to the quick of it lieutenant, what are their specific demands?”

“Takez a zpezial talent to be a good proctologizt,’ he confidez. Un I had to agree vitz him on zat point.”

“They seem concerned primarily with high retail prices and claim that consumer debt is the modern day equivalent to slavery. Their agenda is nothing less than the destruction of the credit card and the overthrow of the established male banking order with its replacement by an absolute cash-and-carry matriarchy.”

“*SOMUCHDIMWITTEDSPECULATIVENONSENSE!*”

“Tzink I’ll ztick to zurgery myzself,’ I zayz to him, ‘but oh zoze lawzuitz, zoze vill be ze debt ov me yet.’”

“What do these women want with- with-...”

“Jipper Ztirbee, spitz it out!”

“...him, ransom?”

“Perhaps.”

“No one would pay a penny to ransom that reprobate!”

“He is a symbol of the times Your Eminence.”

“Of the times. Of all that man has degenerated into since the social demise of the 60s.”

“Precisely, and the publicity they-...”

“*Meddlesomemobofmuffdivers!* Publicity? Well if publicity is what they want in exchange for his remains, we shall give them publicity in abundance – what’s one more wild animal act thrown into this circus? Initiate negotiations immediately.”

“Sir.”

“Their presence could provide us with the perfect cover – no one would blame

us. Why we were attempting to provide protection against this very sort of contingency. Any harm that might come to him would in turn weaken their cause.”

“To the contrary Your Eminence, we at QSS would advise restraint in negotiating with such groups, because giving into one seemingly innocuous demand from an organization this determined will only encourage more demands. Why if they had succeeded in capturing him, I tremble at the thought of what they might-...”

“*IF?* Did I hear you correctly, did you say *IF?*” His Eminence sputters and spills, spills over his lower lip again and down his chin.

“Yipez!” Accompanied by spastic contractions. “He’z zhiftink into zpin cycle.”

“Ye- yes Your Eminence, he was able to escape their ambush at the last second, in what I must say was a quite remarkable feat of daring-do...”

“WHY ARE YOU WASTING MY TIME DISCUSSING THIS CONSPIRATORIAL DRIVEL, YOU SPINELESS WHIPSHITEFFETE INTELLECTUAL FOP...”

“Vill you qvit vitz ze zcreamink vor Chrizzakez, un me vitz my head ztuck inzide ziz gytratink ztink hole!”

“...WHEN ALL I NEED KNOW IS WHERE HE IS AT THIS PRECISE MOMENT!”

“Sir! We at QSS can only conjecture...”

“CONJECTURE!”

“He’z dilatink dangerouzly! Meanz he’z gettink ready to blow!”

“We have reliable information that after some acrobatics at the airport, he boarded a small helicopter, a common sea rescue and salvage model, which is more than likely making its way here toward Wembley... sir...”

“I sense a hesitation in your voice.”

“The a- the a- helicopter is reported to be flying rather erratically.”

“I had assumed that our own corporate security fleet was ferrying the celebrities to and from Heathrow.”

“This over-zealous pilot from some small towing and salvage company unexpectedly intervened in the ground dispute.”

“Walk me through this one more time if you will, step-by-step. You are telling me that Chi- *pp- pp-*...”

“Jipper Ztirbee!”

“...yes ...is aboard some small commercial helicopter which you cannot identify with precision and that in addition you are uncertain whether or not he is presently on course to Wembley. Is that a fair representation of the facts as you understand them?”

“Presumably. Yes Sir.”

“Yez zir notzink – Hiz Eminenze iz about to unleazh a torrential tantrum!”

“WHILE THE ENTIRE WORLD AWAITS HIS ARRIVAL, WHILE A MARAUDING HORDE

STORMS TOWARD THE GATES OF THIS STADIUM, WHILE THE FATE OF QUOTLINK INC HANGS IN THE BALANCE...” The Liaison is standing on top of the lieutenant’s toes and showering him with invective. “...MY FATE IN PARTICULAR – AND YOU CANNOT STATE WITH ANY DEGREE OF RELIABILITY WHEN HE WILL BE ARRIVING HERE AT WEMBLEY?”

“We- we- we- we know he is heading in a general north, northeasterly direction.” The QSS officer is drenched to the skin. “And we postulate that he would never willingly disappoint his fans, therefore we can assume with some degree of certainty that he will be arriving here at Wembley sometime in the very near future...”

“I gotz to popz myzelv outz ov here un quick!”

“*YOU PRATTLING IN SUBORDINATE TIT!*” And with that said, the Liaison lets flow a waterfall of phlegm, or some such greasily green and gritty that flushes the unsuspecting QSS officer over the handrail from this uppermost balcony of the stadium and down a backbreaking cascade of bleachers into a pulp of plasma on the field below where groundskeepers at the ready with a pressure vac suck up his rheumy remains.

“Jezuz!” Queezac stares over the rail. “I guezz ve’ve zeen ze lazt ov him.”

“YOU DARE QUESTION ME OR MY MOTIVES?”

“Zertainly not.”

“THERE ARE MANY MANY MORE WHERE HE CAME FROM.”

“Ziz iz true, but he had suj nize dimplez.”

“AND THERE ARE MORE OF THOSE WHERE HE CAME FROM!”

“Yez vell, but none ov me, no ziree-bob, I’m vone ov a kind, yezzir, I’m a real original. Bezidez ve go back Eminenze, you un me, to anotzer time, to anotzer age, remember vhen ve firzt met in ze men’z room ov ze Hotel Grand Ziozity in Belgrade at ze end ov ze Greatezt Var in memory, vhen ze Zerb Reziztanze vaz burztink tzrough ze doorz to get at ze collaboratorz hidink in ze bazement un ve had to ezcape down ze zewer togetzer?”

“*Murkydunkin the drink!* Somethings in life we can fortunately forget.”

“Yez vell vell...”

“Are you about finished with your work on the undercarriage?”

“Almozt Eminenze, I juzt gotz to noze back in zere, zee exzactly vhat it iz I’m dickerink vitz.”

“THEN GET TO IT!”

“Yez yez, but you’ve gotz to ztay calm, take a deep breatz – un zouldn’t ve be talkink about zometzink extra in ze vay ov hazard pay?”

“GET!”

“I’ll juzt be a zecond – incomink!”

“UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU!”

“Zo zorry.”

“YOUDECREPITCRAYFISH!”

And truly Queezac bears a resemblance to a crustaceon, though more an upright snapping turtle, stubs for legs and for arms, large frontal molars better adapted to gouge or to tear than to chew, and a powerful vertebral shell to protect from any backside attacks.

“Then what do you inferiors understand of real power, the power to finance empires or reduce them to rubble with a midnight raid on their currency – uu uuuuuu...”

“Vhoopz, juzt zcrewed ziz pinjcap in upzide down, zat’z all.”

“...the power to buy and sell the future of millions, for billions...”

“Vone zmall tveek un you’re goink to breeze zo muj eazier.”

“...under the cover of international competition for global market share, with minimal government interference... -UUUCK!”

“Zat about doez it, zurprizink yez? A qvickie in un out vaz all it took.”

“QUEEZAC!”

“Vhat can I zay, everytzink’z tvisted up nize un tight ze vay you like it, no dribz, no drabz, no zpitz, no zpaz, zo I guezz I’ll go vash my handz ov ziz miserable mezz un be on my vay, boy-yo-boy vill I ever be, gotz to ready mine zurgery vor our unzuzpected guezt, Jipper Ztirb-...”

“SOMEDAY QUEEZAC!”

“Don’t go gettink yourselv upzet now. Remember iz all ztrezz. You’ve gotz to avoid ztrezz. Bezidez ziz vaz juzt a qvick vix, zat’z it, no extended varrantiez on partz or labor.”

“SOMEDAY!”

“Here ve go, I can hear it comink. Virzt he ztartz in vitz ze tzreatz, no tzank-you notez vrom you, no dearezt doc, I appreciatez how you gotz me up un runnink vitzout too muj pain un zuvverink.”

“YOUMUCKCOATEDMOLLUSK! YOUCLUBFOOTEDCRAB!”

“Next comez ze inzultz, no patz on ze back vor hiz loyal old var buddy, no ziree bob, Queezac’z juzt zome longtime convenienze ztore kickbag.”

“WHY IS IT I ALWAYS HAVE TO COUNT ON YOU IN A CRUNCH?”

“Yez vell, zat’z a compliment ov zortz, izn’t it, I mean a little zometzink to keep me comink back vor more abuze.”

His Eminence stands erect, the six foot plus of him, buckles his trousers. Queezac cringes. For this is no ordinary mortal, no, this is QuotLink Inc’s Executive Liaison for the Entire Northern Hemispheric Region, a master of high finance, though schooled in the law, an alternate member of QuotLink Inc’s very Council of

Elders and their official representative at this evening's extravaganza. As such he is tailored impeccably in a double breasted gray silk suit of Italian design, a QL monogrammed silk shirt, silver engraved QL cufflinks, silver threads of hair, long and sparse and combed from one side across and woven into the other side, thereby to partially conceal a pointy bald crown, though this tonsorial contrivance of last resort serves instead to accentuate his skeletal features, his pale gray skin, his thin lips and slight jaw. Power lieth not in appearances however, which the Executive Liaison wields with utmost ease, a wave of his hand usually sufficing – yet of late he has been bedeviled by this dribble about the chin and an occasional drab down his pant leg.

“Nothing Queezac, I tell you nothing shall be permitted to slip out of my control, not this time.” His Eminence dribbles and drabs some.

“Zat’z ze zpirit, ztick it to zem.”

“I shall rain down terror if I must.”

“Vell, you’re goink to need a vull revill bevore you attempt zat trick.”

“And destroy them utterly!”

“Like ze Vizeazz Old Vizard who had zcalez like a Lizard.”

“No, no no, I shall not tolerate another of your ridicu-...”

“He ztirred up a Blizzard, zat Nazty Old Gizzard, un paid Holy Hell when it Vizzled.”

“Fizzled? That doesn’t rhyme – FIZZLED DOESN’T RHYME WITH GIZZARD! *YOUSPITERIVENGARGOYLE!* PROOF THAT YOU MAKE THESE STORIES UP ON THE SPOT, SIMPLY TO IRRITATE ME!”

That said, His Eminence plants a heel on the backside – *NO -OOF -OW* – hide of the creature, heel to toe to toe, heel, Queezac rolled up in his shell, kickball off the glass walls of the skybox – *OW-OOP-OH-OOF-OFF...*

Meanwhile QuotLink Inc’s Corporate Security Corps, bolstered by newly arrived British regulars with water canon on half-tracks, tightens their formation outside the stadium where an updated estimate of three million teenage fans have now gathered to await the arrival of Chipper Stirbee, rock ‘n’ roll’s last living legend, and the source of acute irritation to the Executive Liaison – *OOF-OW-OFF-OLF* – nobody whom anybody sane, savvy or sober would ever want to fuck with.

CHIPPER!

A cry of anticipation arises from the crowd, and how is it they know so instinctively, those inside the walls as well as the many more stranded outside and

overflowing onto the North Circular, blocking traffic on the M1 clear to Northampton?

They know they know, and their cries reach to the furthest heavens.

CHIPPER!

Startles the giant QuotLink Inc blimp in the sky awake and sets a light display in motion — QUOT • LINK • INC • • PRE • SENTS • • CHIP • PER • STIR • BEE • • RE • U • NITED • WITH • • THE • LOOSE • NUKES • • AN • AL • LIED • FOR • LIFE • • BEN • E • FIT • CON • CERT — scrolling amidst the stars.

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP

“Nifty little machine you’ve got heah Scotty. Reminds me of the mountain buggies we use fah trail blazin back home in Nohthuhn Maine.”

“Seahorse 2004, designed fir search n rescue operations, which is wha ah do fir a livin, except on a night like this when they need ev’ry bloke they can find ta do double-duty. But she’s a sturdy burd. Ah’ve fished workmen off a’drillin rigs wi the North Sea blowin like a Bangkok pro.”

“Must come in mighty handy fah prowlin around town nights too.”

“Right you’a mate. Comfirtable, but compact, buil’ta maneuver in n ou’ta tight situations.”

“That what you do best, maneuvah in and out of tight situations?”

“I’ve had mi share a’up n downer, spare time a’course.”

“Bet. Bet you do. Hahd not to scohe with this contraption.”

-hmmph! Betsy had mistook the young Scotsman for a gentleman.

“Ah cou’tell you a few stories. You say you fly?”

Fly! This guy’s feet never touch ground.

“Well soht of. Couhse my mountain buggy can’t lift off oah land as easy as youhs, hell no, get aihbohne in mine and you’ve got youhhsself a heap of trouble. H’yep. I’ve taken some nasty spills tryin to hop a gully off a mowed-down pine ridge with no propellah, no wings, just a sawed-off truck frame and fough tihes, engine, steehrin wheel, gas drum fah a seat, sometimes lights, sometimes no lights, no brakes, no nothin – flooh the suckah and go, switch off the engine and roll right up on some gal’s window, oah pop it in geah and get away fast if theah’s a dude inside theah with huh – head cross country, nobody’d evah know fah suhe it was you, just a fast pass and leave huh blinkin.”

“Sounds like a fuckin good playtime craft ta me.”

“You could say that, and cheap. Definitely low tech. Spahe pahts rustin in the yahd. Nothin like what you’ve got heah, no way, plus youhs flies. Why a fella could just kick back, crank up the tunes and take in the view.” Chipper settles into his

seat, adjusts the harness holding him in, rustles Betsy who's perched on his lap, albeit precariously.

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP -CH WHUPWHUP

"You got a rattle in the reah?"

"Somethin could'av broke loose in the rukkus, but nothin on the panel's flashin at me. Looks like we'a a'right fir new."

"So how about veerhin off couhse, see some London aftah dahk?"

"Strikes me the prime order a'the day is get yu ta Wembley, as soon as."

"Ohdahs. Have I had some ohdahs in my life, mahchin ohdahs, couht ohdahs – by the way, ah theah any rules against smokin aboahd this rig?"

"Thir's a'ways goin ta be rules."

"No rule that can't be bent some, right?"

"Wha can I say ta a celebrity like yursell?"

"Tell him to step out and hike like anybody else – heah, have a toke of this shit."

"Woul knock yu back if ah wisna flyin."

"Best homegrown evah."

-o moan...

"This is men's business Betsy, doesn't concahn you – stuff's totally ohganic, no pesticides, no chemical fahtilizahs, just loose moose shit and muddy Maine rivah watah, and sun, lots of hot sun whole summah long – have a sample? Couple of puffs'll set youh mind on cruise control."

"Got ta keep misell straight Chipper."

"Hey, man's bohn to fly high, play the dahedevil on the sly – I'll blow a little youh way. H'yep. That'll get you goin."

"Hodd- hodd-..."

"Told you so."

WHUP WHUP WHUP -UP

"...hodd on mates!"

As the helicopter swings way wide, wide high loop-the-loop in the sky.

"*Whoo-ee!* Guess I arrived just in time fah the aih show!"

"Somethin's naw right!"

"What, theah's mah to come?"

WHOOF WHOOF

Cab starts in rotating.

WHOOF WHOOF WHOOF

Scotty rears back on his stick... back... rears back, back on his stick... "Fuckin grab on ta somethin. Ah'm tellin yu, wi'r headin inta a dive!"

Not to worry, Betsy has her claws dug in deep, into Chipper's thighs.

"Damn! This is bettah than a Foughth of July cahnival ride!"

WHOOF WHOOF WHOOF WHOOF WHOOF

-row -row -row

“Ride’em cowboy!”

Scotty’s holding... holding back...

“You’ve got to buck huh ’til you bust huh!”

“Appreciate the advice, ah really do, but ah think – naw that ah’m sure – but... but she migh’be kickin back inta shape...”

Helicopter levels off. Doesn’t stall, not at all.

WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP

“Awesome.”

“Borin would’av bin better.”

“Heah, I’ll blow some mah smoke youh way, steady youh nehves.”

“Must be somethin ou’ta balance.” And without warning Scotty goes into another spin...

WHOOP WHOOP

...round they go again, round and out at a tangent toward the center of London – see the sights: Buckingham Palace on your left, upside down, Parliament over there, floating along in its own reflection, and directly ahead – *whoa! whoa!* – the Tower of London looming square up at you.

“You suhe you’h not paht of some show-off stunt team Scotty?”

“Wish ah was Chipper, then ah would know what ah wis doin!”

Chipper doesn’t mind, he’s high on his homegrown and simply along for the ride, though Betsy’s all wide eyed and restless, tongue hung out.

“I vote we flooh this suckah and soah...”

“Somethin’s def’nit’ly naw right!”

“...see how high we can fly – cause you know we’ve only got so much time in this life befah somethin unexpected comes chahgin!”

WHUPWHUPWHUP -CH WHUP -CH -CH WHUPWHUP

Could be the cabin clouded up with prime smoke, or the *chunk chunk* sound coming from back near the tail rudder.

“OK alright, I need footage gentlemen, I need filler – *snap snap* – replays, interviews, commentary from the field, whatever you can put your hands on. And let’s check for volunteers to go on stage because after Sore Losers we are fresh out of talent – and Lou, my friend, what’s that program clock there on the wall telling us – *snap snap?*”

“Time. Time is 23:07:26, that’s 11:07 PM and 26 seconds.”

“Which means we have fifty two minutes and thirty four seconds left before the

Grand Finale.”

“Cub, a man has got to have faith in the future, not everything in life can be timed to the sec-...”

“From here on in we’re running on Chipper Stirbee time, right?”

“Chipper has never missed a performance, never in his entire career, and he’d never disappoint the band, c’mon, reuniting the Loose Nukes is a dream come true for him. He’s been looking forward to this night for decades, and his fans, he loves his fans...”

“And he’s never shown up on time for one goddamn thing in his life!”

“Punctual, no, I grant you Chipper Stirbee is not punctual, but what he brings to the occasion is well worth the wait, it’s part of his persona, his celebrity, it builds anticipation, the crowd grows wild with excitement.”

“We don’t need a crowd as edgy as this growing wild with excitement.”

“Cut the guy some slack Cub, he opened in San Francisco yesterday at dawn, set down for an appearance in Melbourne at noon and he’s about to wrap it up for us here tonight at midnight, or... slightly thereafter.”

“Can’t be slightly thereafter, that’s what I’m telling you – filler, I need filler gentlemen – a production like this is too big for adolescent antics – we need broadcast footage, something to fill gaps in airtime, let’s go, let’s go – *snap snap* – any of you characters into impromptu? How about commercials, anything in the queue, something we haven’t played fifty times over already?”

“We have plenty of public service announcements left.” One of the programmers down front shouts back.

“Stick with the payload first, OK? But line up whatever else you can find because we’re definitely going to be winging it from here on in, right Lou – *snap snap* – that right Lou? You still with us?”

“Right, right right, I’m right here.” In body if not in mind, for Lou is Louis B. Starcrave, the Loose Nukes’ long-time manager, and he has been through it, years of it, good times and worse, dating all the way back to the late 60s when Chipper and the guys were lugging their own equipment around and playing basement clubs on the Lower East Side of New York City, when they cut *Getta Girl*, the hit that rocketed them to fame if not fortune, and Lou was there when they crashed and burned sixteen months later. It was Lou who kept the flame alive over time, collected the pennies in royalties and rediscovered Chipper buried alive in the deep Maine woods sixteen months ago to the day, today, tonight, midnight, with the whole world watching, and edgy, the kids amassed outside the stadium no more edgy than he, squirming around in his swivel chair, but goddamn it Lou Starcrave has earned the right to squirm around in his swivel chair.

“23:10:11 – *snap snap* – Chipper should be landing by now, but surprise

surprise, let's take a look at the monitors in the auto park. See. Nobody's landing on that pad they cordoned off, which means the Loose Nukes haven't been reunited yet, no way, they're just standing around waiting like we are."

"I understand, honestly I do."

"Then there's me and the guys to consider, we've been working round the clock for three days now, patching together hundreds of sites worldwide so we can broadcast this tricky live five continent simulcast you creative folks dreamed up, thousands of the world's celebrities marching shoulder-to-shoulder in solidarity and lip-syncing this freeing Grand Finale for what is it... what's the in cause for tonight's benefit?"

"The environment?"

"The environment, like one song's going to solve that in a *SNAP!*"

"Bringing so many world leaders together in a show of unity on this issue is a giant step forward Cub, maybe not the end-all, of course not, but a beginning, a new initiative, a commitment among concerned people everywhere in unison with their cultural heroes, their spiritual leaders, a commitment that until tonight would have been considered impossible, I mean even you have to admit that one of the few, if not the only celebrity on the planet who could pull this feat off is Chipper Stirbee."

"Please. Hype is lost on a guy like me. Why? Because I've sat in this chair too long, I've seen too much, close-up. It's you creative guys that thrive on illusion. Reality's not virtual for me, it's real, it's right here in front of me every night, I'm front line all the time."

"I understand, yours is the newsman's perspective, you see the blood and the guts, history in the making, but-..."

"Stop. I've got a job to do, me and my crew have been up for 72 hours."

"I sit here amazed with what you fellows can do, and make it seem as easy as a left-handed pass."

"AND TIMED TO A MILLISECOND LOU, TIMED TO A MILLISECOND – *snap snap snap snap* – DO YOU HEAR ME?"

He hears, his ears are ringing, Cub rising slightly from his seat and shouting into his ear. How can he not hear?

"TIME, I NEED TO KNOW THE TIME! *SNAP! SNAP!*"

"11:14:58." Someone down front shouts out while someone else closer by shoves a cola in front of him, which Cub chugs, one big gulp because Cub McCluff's a sugar user, along with caffeine – Copa Colas by the cartons, man thrives on his liquid lube jobs, and coffee too, sick black with ten-packs of sugar – *synap synap* – Cub's body chemistry in constant alert mode, hyper-active from infancy through to middling age, Type-A type, heart attack type, and a chain smoker to boot, non-

filtered Slug Rites, a lung full of which sits him back down on his swivel chair with a crunch.

While Lou swallows, chokes actually, restricted about the thorax because he is another type altogether, a phlegmatic B type, gloomy with an acid vat for a stomach and no sweet tooth. Man hardly eats at all. Thin, intense, with dark circles under his eyes, Lou's been through it too, and he's going through it again tonight, caught between Chipper and a clock. Poor fellow's nearly bent over double with anxiety in his swivel chair, and besides that he is smoking, which a man in his condition shouldn't be doing, Cub's cigarettes, which a man in his condition shouldn't be doing.

"So tell me, calmly, quietly, concisely, just so I know, just so I can plan – about how much longer do you figure this boy of yours will be delayed?"

"I-*hi*, I don't know, half an hour?" Truth is Lou hasn't a clue. Chipper doesn't clear his plans in advance with him, nor with anybody, and like what plans does Chipper have anyway, another toke before nightfall and he'll be off to another lights out adventure.

"Half an hour – GET REAL!" And Cub rises slightly out of his seat.

"Alright, maybe an hour."

"TRY TWO HOURS, FOUR, DAYBREAK IF HE FEELS LIKE IT, THAT'S AFTER A SEX AND DRUG BINGE WITH A BUSLOAD OF UNDERAGED CHEERLEADERS!"

No no, not that again, banging on Lou's brain. Decades pass and people can't forget, photographs, the lurid worst grainy kind, naked on front pages of hometown newspapers coast-to-coast, and nothing he could think to say could make a difference. 'Hell, he's only a teenager himself,' he'd argue, but who in a courtroom cares to listen when the law is aligned against you and consent's not the issue...

"LOU – *SNAP* – YOU'RE OUT OF IT!"

"Wha- wha- where am I?"

"SAME PLANET YOUR BUDDY COMES FROM, THAT'S WHERE!" Cub's standing over him, Cub's bearing down on him.

"Cub," a techie shouts, "Sore Losers finishing up their set."

"OK alright, no need to panic – *snap snap* – we need filler gentlemen, we need filler – *snap snap* – FILLER, WE NEED FILLER!"

Techies on their consoles scramble. Lou breathes deep, breathes a mouthful of smoke deep deep.

"AND WILL SOMEBODY EXPLAIN TO ME WHAT IS IT I'M LOOKING AT ON STAGE RIGHT NOW?"

"Crew moving equipment."

"THAT'S WHAT WE'RE BROADCASTING ON LIVE SATELLITE AT \$20 MIL A MINUTE?"

“I’ve got a couple of interviews with the fans almost lined up.”

“ALMOST’S NOT GOOD ENOUGH!”

There’s a rustle around the control truck.

“WHERE ARE ALL THOSE DIGITAL READICAMS WE PAID THE BIG BUCKS FOR?” As Cub leans over his desk and peers into the layered array of seventy some monitors flashing before his eyes.

There are stationery line-fed cameras placed strategically on platforms all over the stadium, but the production tonight depends on thirty readicams, palm-sized ultra-HD remotes with infrared feeds that a slew of free-lance crews are using to cover every angle of the performance, on-stage, backstage, roaming through the crowd and outside the stadium too.

Techies are all over their consoles trying to trace some of these dudes. “Must be out back Cub. You ordered everything we could spare to head for the parking lot to cover Chipper’s landing, remember?”

“REMEMBER SHIT, THAT’S WHAT I PAY YOU GUYS FOR!” Cub is pounding a fist on his desk and bellowing. “I NEED FILLER GENTLEMEN, SOMETHING LIVELY, SOMETHING SNAPPY – *SNAP! SNAP!*”

Someone slips Cub another cola.

One of the stationery cameras panning the stage picks up a rustle of a skirt in the wings, curled auburn hair.

“Hold on, that’s Molly Dawkens!”

“WHERE?”

“A-3.”

Sure enough. The auburn hair. Must be Molly Dawkens. One of the Loose Nuke originals. Famous for doing those gruff throated back-up vocals and the guys too.

“OK, alright gentlemen, heads up, looks like we’ve finally caught something worthwhile. Zoom in on her – *snap snap* – closer, get a readicam on her – closer, closer – get a readicam right up on that pouty mug of hers and fast before we lose her – *SNAP SNAP SNAP SNAP* – FAST FASTER – ANY OF YOU MORONS EVER DONE A LIVE ROCK CONCERT BEFORE?”

The roar gets the young guys with the remotes running here, there like a fire brigade, while Cub McCluff slumps back in his swivel chair, crushes the cola can in one tight squeeze and tosses it over his shoulder, sprawling big bear of a man, thick dark beard and patient neither with himself nor with anybody else in the control truck parked center field at Wembley. But then Cub can’t afford to be easy, he’s QuotNet’s premier location man. Has two convoys of Boeing 1107 wide-bodies loaded with crew, cameras, and sound equipment that can leapfrog him anywhere around the globe on less than an hour’s notice. Last few weeks he’s had to cover the President’s disastrous tour of Far East Asia, next the World Series back again in

Toronto, and right as he's coming off another major oil spill in Prince William Sound, QuotNet orders him to London to manage the largest benefit concert ever staged, a forty two camera set-up at Wembley with slightly smaller scale productions at companion stadiums in Melbourne and San Francisco, and broadcast into an estimated five billion living rooms – an alignment of thirty seven satellites in the largest celestial network ever assembled for a live worldwide telecast – a resounding first in video tech history – but it isn't happening if Cub McCluff and his crew aren't there to witness it, loyal hard-drinking rib-thick buddies, everyone of them, and if Cub cracks the whip above their heads, they hunker over their consoles and they row the harder, each command punctuated with a couple of sharp finger snaps – *snap snap* – “Broadcast!”

And sure enough it's close-up on Molly Dawkens, peering out from behind a curtain, the green-eyed beauty who drove the early Loose Nukes to rift and to ruin, but who can still belt it out back-up and raise catcalls from the stalwart young gents in the rear of the hall.

But a glimpse is all you get. Molly's a restless spirit and so easily distracted. She turns her pretty head and wanders off out of sight line.

“WHAT'VE WE GOT NEXT IN THE QUEUE – *SNAP SNAP?*”

“I've got footage of the early Loose Nukes in the archives.”

“WE'RE MAKING HISTORY FREDDY, NOT REPLAYING IT!”

“Check out the zoom Cub, we've caught Will Cook off guard.”

Sure enough there's Will Cook on a monitor, Loose Nuke keyboardist and tunesmith who in partnership with Chipper gave the world some of its all time greatest rock 'n' roll hits, that's back in the 60s, but who's best known today for eluding all close contact, with a camera, with a reporter, with any warm-bodied human or less than which is why he's perched alone way high up above center stage on his own specially raised platform and banging out some sort of song for his own amusement. You can hear him, but you cannot see him.

“OK, alright. Cue on the zoom...”

Zoomocrane™ rises up slowly, imperceptibly, rotates – a 360° remote attached to the tip of a forty foot boom that runs along a track in front of the stage – sucker rears up and catches Will Cook mid-act.

“...that's three, that's two and broadcast – *snap snap!*”

Head bobbing up and around, earphones plugged into a jack, man's in a trance behind stands stacked with keyboards, Kurzweils and Korgs, synthesizers and samplers, all controlled by an antique Mac – when he abruptly comes eye-to-eye with the nosy remote – he flips, damn near goes careening backwards off his stool!

“Hooked him – *snappity snap snap!*”

Though the last laugh's on Cub, Will Cook recoils, roils and rolls out what's got

to be the longest tongue in the business, flaps it smack at the intruding lens in a come-lick-me manner.

“Yuk! Ready on commercial?”

“Stand by on commercial!”

“Ready and counting three, two and *snap snap* cut!”

It’s a panoramic view of a picnic scene from Northern California. Sheep grazing on hilltops, giant redwoods in the gullies, mud slides and washed out highways, a youngish Silicon Valley couple out for a romantic afternoon on a fault line, basket, blanket, Napa Valley wine, and she’s tapping something on her user-friendly laptop. She smiles. He peers over her shoulder. It’s “*I love you.*” squiggling on the liquid green gelatin screen, but wait, hold on the kiss... there’s another message emerging – “*Eat me!*” the machine advises – and they do, they both chomp delectably away at the keyboard for it’s Dexter Rob’s most ingenious invention yet, the wafer thin, completely biodegradable portable computer, one that’s entirely edible, smack down to the crispy rye CPU, and available in four additional energy packed whole grain flavors from the local wheeler-dealer nearest you.

Although nothing, not television history nor rambling rockstars nor teenagers barraging the arena, none of it ruffles HRH the Queen, nary in the least, Her Ageless Majesty in attendance and taking the parade in stride, one of the remote cameras permanently encamped at the foot of the Royal Box She shares with Her grandsons, the randy Windsor heirs, Wills and Harry, and their newly arrived half-brother Izzy. For all eyes, those of the young, those of the wary, wait in anticipation of Chipper Stirbee’s imminent arrival and the historic Loose Nuke reunion, and after that the Grand Finale which will bring together a thousand of the world’s truly rich and famous, whether in person or electronically, rock stars and movie stars, religious leaders, the Pope Himself standing by in Rome, Imams and Rabbis and shaved-headed Tibetan monks, preachers and politicians, presidents, sovereigns, rogue generals-for-life, greatness and glitter gathering by satellite – all on screen live and timed to a millisecond – this night of nights at midnight (or slightly thereafter) on the giant stage at Wembley – **AL • LIED • FOR • LIFE • • BEN • E • FIT • CON • CERT** – the most spectacular event ever, with proceeds (minus production and management costs) dedicated to restoring the environment and to eradicating hunger and poverty among humankind forever, along with noisome peasant uprisings and pesky sexually transmitted diseases – the entire undertaking brought to you via QuotNet, a wholly owned subsidiary of QuotLink Inc, the only network licensed to broadcast without political interference into every nation, every city, every hamlet and hut on the face of the planet.