

(featured at the Phoenix Readings, September 1996)

On Twisted Weirdness and the Making of the Smart Bomb

Sometimes, late at night, I have dreams that Igor and I are huge monsters living in our own rival territories. We pee on the trees, draw lines in the earth with our fingers and flip each other off behind these lines. Funny thing is, I usually end up trying to tear his head off for whatever annoying thing he does within the dreamscape. Last time he pinched his face up into a huge monster “cat pee” face. I’m sick of that face. The bastard comes in while I’m cooking dinner—could be gourmet cuisine, could be Top Ramen—and he screws his face all up, and then lets out a sigh before asking me for some. I tell him to “shut up and take a bong rip,” diverting him from criticism with his marijuana placebo. Sometimes I hate him, but most of the time he’s of use to me.

“Dude quit narrating and talk to me,” Igor says with pot smoke still in his mouth.

“I didn’t say anything. Hey, what were you talking about earlier? Something on the road?” I generously attempt to focus his attention away from his fantasies of duality.

“Twisted weirdness all over the fucking road. Why don’t they clean that shit up?” I-g-o-r, pronounced “eager.” He’s always storming into our studio apartment with a proclamation for change.

“Yes. Well...,” whenever he has an audience he does this dramatic pause at the very beginning, an excellent storyteller: “I was driving home on interstate five toward our pad and I look over and see this fine chick in the car next to me. I’m thinking, ‘Hello there. Lookin’ good.’ All of a sudden she just looks over at me and Smack! Her eyes lock on mine. I can’t look away.” Another pause, this time for a bong hit.

"So I just look at her. She starts talking to me with her eyes. She tells me a bit about herself—phone number, name, where she's from—that kind of shit."

"Umm. This all sounds kind of far fetched, an Igorism if you will. Did you drop a lid again? Is this story like the night you came back from that party in the abandoned warehouse and you told me to hurry back with you because you saw the Easter Bunny, and I should meet him? Well, when we got there, it turned out to be just a banker in a white suit who had a grinning disorder." It's my job to keep Igor's stories in line before they get away from him.

"No way man. It ain't like that at all, man! That's not even a fair comparison, cause when I asked the guy if he was the E Bunny, he turned to me with that big bucked tooth grin and said in this really nice voice—almost apologetic—'C'mon buddy, I'm off duty.' "

"So this other story, if you will pardon yourself for the rude interruption..."

"I start noticing this weird twisted telepathy thing happening to all the other drivers. We're connected with a series of blue and red zigzagging lines which form a large shifting plane. I was expecting a Vulcan mind meld or some shit, but it was as if I'd said, 'hey, how's it going. So where ya from?' But the thing was, everyone was closed off. We were all trying of get information, but no one was willing to give any. It reminded me of that time I got hypnotized by that side-show guy who came to our school and made me pee my pants."

"Oh, yeah. The hypnotist didn't make you pee, he just stuck your hand in warm water and..."

Appolonia walks in at that moment and gives me a hug. "Hey Marvin. Hey Igor. How's the smart bomb coming?"

Igor pipes up with some nonsense, "Hey Marvin, what the hell are we gonna do with a third character? People are generally too stupid to get to know three people in such a short time, and since there is a male narrator and a female character, they'll know the woman because she's in the gender minority of the story's socio-political milieu, and they'll obviously know the narrator. But where the fuck do I fit in? Just tell me that you selfish bastard!"

"Wait, what?" I have no idea what Igor is alluding to here.

"Nothin' man, nothin'. Hi Appol, how's it going? Blah blah blah," Igor is in a pissy mood today.

Appolonia takes off her clothes behind the silk, upright partition. She puts on her red and blue plaid pajamas which complement the geeky, crazy-cool grandma glasses she wears. You know, the ones with the thick black rims, that Buddy Holly look? On her though, look out. Her hair is up in one of those space age deals that women with beautiful blonde hair can pull off.

"Hey, Sugar?" she asks Igor who has fallen into some sort of trance. Drool hangs from one side of his mouth as he stares blankly at Appolonia's funky pajamas.

"I think he's been sucked into your pj's," I say off-handedly with one of those grins existing somewhere between innocence and mischief.

Appolonia, with the care and precision of a surgeon, strides over to Igor and begins pushing his face experimentally. His chin moves all around in her examination. She holds her breath for the duration of the scrutiny and concludes, "Hmm. I've got it. Igor is on pause. Somehow all the attention in the room was focused on me and he probably felt frozen in time as if nothing could possibly happen for him until I was fully described." After saying her riddle she gently reaches her hand into his loose jeans and grasps his thingie, squeezing it five times while saying, "motivation, motivation, motivation..."

"Amazing!" Igor says as he snaps back into the time loop. "Excellent! So all I have to do is stare blankly and some chick will come jerk me off. I just think that's the greatest thing I've ever heard of."

There is a moment of silent communication between Appol and I where absolutely nothing is said or meant.

"You guys are weird. So you never answered my question about the smart bomb, Babushka. Have you guys finished it?" Appol often checks our progress on what could be the culminating evolutionary step of our time.

I address her question because Igor is busy smoking more pot. "Here's the thing. There seems to be a problem of semantics here. We can program the computer to build

the bomb now—we have the technology—but to do so, we would have to enter the definition of ‘intelligence’ into the computer. Anybody smart enough to engage in discourse on the nature of intelligence would necessarily have to learn that definitions aren’t natural and objective, but rather subjective. If we could only define the word, we would have our bomb.” I looked around at the possibility of failure, at the futility of all our hard work. All the test tubes, the dictionaries, the cute little lights that you can strap around your forehead, the empty bowl of smart food popcorn, not to mention the chess set, the vial of LSD...

“But you guys have all this cool stuff,” Appolonia begins a tour of our studio apartment as Igor and I follow her, worrying she’ll touch our equipment, but silently hoping she will. She could bring it to life, make it work better than we ever imagined it could. She shows us the beakers, the little television set where we play Mario Karts on our Super Nintendo, the deck of cards, and the ...

“There’s a problem here,” Igor states a hypothesis, “these people won’t know what a smart bomb is. We must plainly state the premise which launched this idea: the level of intelligence on the planet remains constant, and the population is growing. Now, the smart bomb will eliminate those individuals who lack intelligence, or smarts. In conclusion...”

“Wait, I have an idea,” she’s on a rampage; I can see it in her coiled posture. “I heard somewhere that the biggest idiots possible are the people who think they’re smart, but are really foolish.”

Igor looks worriedly at me until I squint back at him and shake my head.

“What?” Appolonia asks, thinking we’re messing with her.

“Igor just thinks you mean us,” I, the voice of reason, explain.

“Mean us, what?” She pursues.

“Umm. Hmm. What were we talking about? What people did you mean earlier, Igor?”

“Fuck it!” Igor says taking another hit, drawing in half his breath with the green marijuana, and then the other half

from the blue sky which has seeped indoors.

"No, Appolonia. That sounds good. Let's go with that definition. Go ahead and enter it into our super computer," I say, rushing my words.

"Super computer, my ass. You guys have a Commodore 64. I had that when I was seven years old," she scolds us. We look around uncomfortably as if she were talking to somebody else, anybody. The computer whirrs in the background adding a very mechanistic quality to the room...

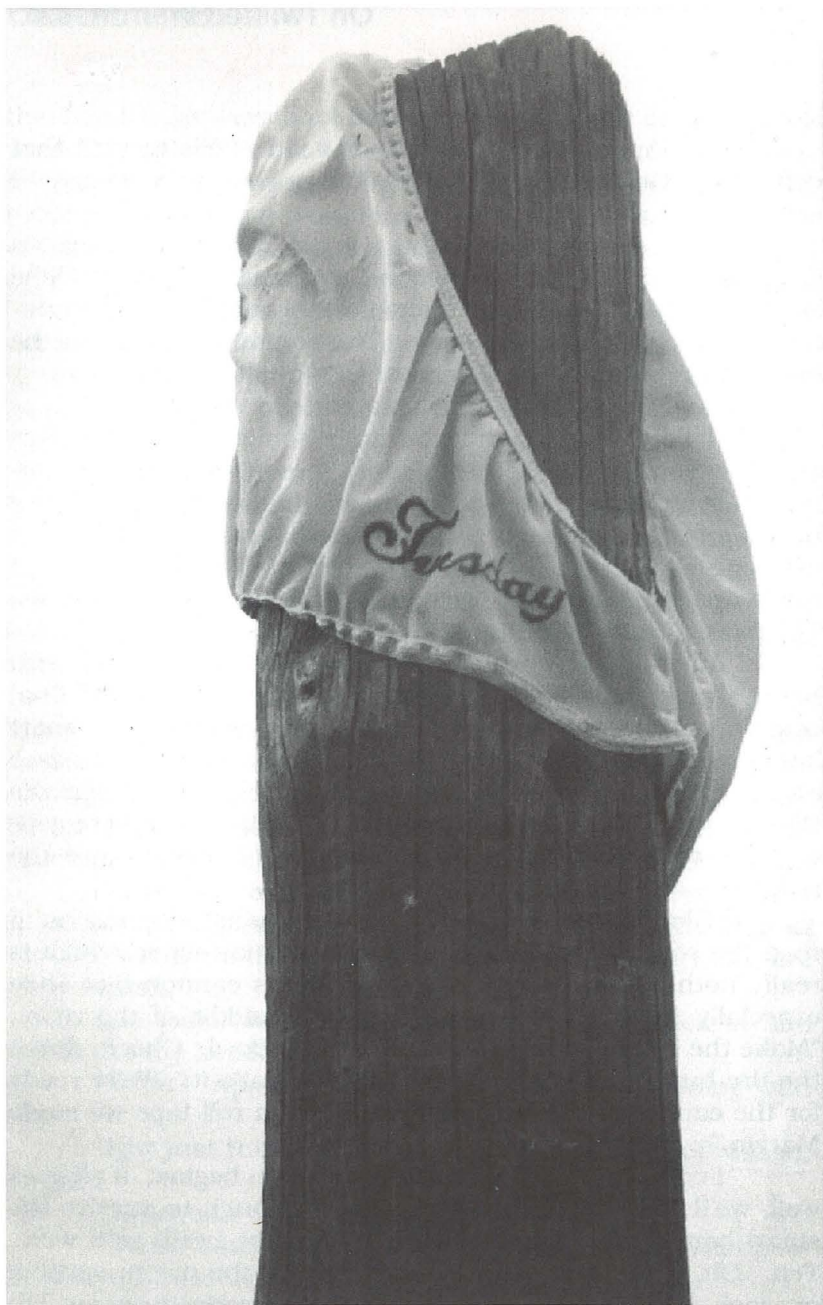
"And the scene?" Appolonia adds to my sentence.

"I don't understand you guys sometimes. First Igor and now you Appol. You talk as if there is some greater significance to our actions as if someone is listening or hearing us. Is our bedroom tapped? Is anyone listening to us?" In my moment of paranoia, I turned the room upside down without really upsetting any of the scientific equipment, safety glasses, Twinkies, Scrabble, Yahtzee...

After the necessary looks of, "no, you're weird," with her eyebrows raised in the center, Appolonia clicked the final command and a perfectly formed circle comes out of the smart bomb machine. It's red and blue with a shiny metal surface and a lightweight middle. I, Marvin Yetsee, have taken the time to record this day in my journal just in case future generations wish to study it. After the test, I plan to give the results in a longwinded and thorough way.

"Okay," Igor, the results analysis supervisor, begins to read the countdown checklist aloud. Our launcher, which is really nothing more than a gigantic circus cannon Igor stole especially for this invention, lies in the middle of the room. "Make the smart bomb. Check. Smoke a bowl. Check. Push the fire button. Check. Okay, I guess that's it. We're ready for the countdown folks. Put on the drum roll tape we made Marvin."

I continue to write as the countdown begins. If all goes well, we'll find out if we're truly smart enough to survive the smart bomb, the weapon which will thin the herd, as it were. Ten. Oh, Glory be. I feel like dancing on the moon, spitting on each and every pigeon who has ever pooped on my lab coats. Nine. What exhilaration! The expectation, the drama. Oh, say can you see? Eight. I won't get patriotic on my



Tuesday
Photograph
By Ian Maclean

friends though. What is Igor doing? Seven. It seems as if he's been looking back and forth between Appolonia and me. I have—six—never seen that look in his eye before. Is that anticipation? He has pulled out a straw and is loading what looks like a miniature smart bomb into the end. Five. He wants a battle, huh? Well he's picked the wrong guy to fight with, let me tell you. I just won't give him the satisfaction. Four. My mom told me the secret was to not let the bully get a reaction from you. So fuck it. I'm not going to even—three—acknowledge him anymore. Ah! it worked. He's frozen again. I knew it would work out well for me, because Mom's advice always pans out. Two.

"What are you writing, Marvin?" Appolonia is distracting me from my story. They probably suspect that I won't survive the smart bomb, but I know I'll be the one to survive! One.

Hi, this is the writer. I just wanted to let the readers know that all of these people are highly disturbed. I walked in and unplugged the Commodore before they could launch the smart bomb. I've taken them to a fictional rest home for a while so they can think about what they did wrong, and figure out how to assimilate into the story environment. Igor eventually called the number he thought he received telepathically, but it ended up being Domino's Pizza. The twisted weirdness surrealism is an attempt to teach the characters the concept of unity with an abstract point of commonality, diminishing their desire to categorize, classify, and eliminate the otherness in the fictional world. Their affirmations of normalcy in the act of creating a smart bomb was undermined by disharmony within the judging group, the signification of the word "intelligence," and the difference between Marvin's articulation and his friends' awareness of fictionality.