

FutureFeedForward

d a v i d r i c e

v. 0.2004.11.22
hamlet monkeys media

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futurefeedforward

1.

O. County

I wore a gray suit to my first deposition, a shapeless, off-the-rack number festooned with cargo pockets and illogical darts. 100% worsted wooline. Summer weight. Hand stitched. 38 Regular. \$49.95 at the GAP I passed on my way in. I left my old pants in the dressing room. They recycle them. Rebuild and re-certify. That sort of thing. Pre-owned pants. I think they have that.

It took me longer than I expected to find the place. All of the exits seemed to be for an enchanted wood. 318b: Deerlick; 318c: Blue Mountain; 318d: Beaver Meadows. I was looking for Brosnan Parkway. It dead-ends into Fishglass just short of the exit. No sign. Nothing.

The place was in a strip mall: Denny's, Donut Star, Ringo's Modified Produce, Fantastic Wok. It was a DEPOTsition. I've heard that On The Record has better food (fried finger waffles, little ginger pies), but the DEPOT generally has plusher seats and the private rooms are quite a bit more reasonable. Besides, the nearest Record is out in the Valley.

I found a spot near the front between a blue maxivan and a late model Spidero with faux crumple and retractable cinder-block risers. Somebody had left their dogs in the van, two black mini-labs. They were sitting in the front, one on the driver's side, one on the passenger's, and were listening to the radio. News radio, or CSPAN. The voices were reassuring, but vaguely histrionic, like an animatronic Lincoln. The blue windows were rolled all the way up so I couldn't quite hear what they were saying. The dogs were sitting perfectly still, ears pricked, ready to rumble.

Generally, DEPOTs are a cross between a cubicle farm and a coffee shop, a honeycomb of little partitioned spaces encrusted with found objects and flea-market furniture. Keeps costs low and puts

everybody at ease. This DEPOT, though, had a sports theme. The waiting area featured bleachers instead of couches. Staff wandered around in vertical stripes and black hats, whistles around their necks. Each of the cubicles was made to look like a miniature playing field from one sport or another: a little ice rink, a parquet floor with hoops on either wall, an AstroTurf grid with goal nets draped on the walls. The field motif was repeated on the tables, and each of the chairs had sport-appropriate jersey slipcovers.

The receptionist was alarmingly tall.

"Hi," I said. "Aren't you Kobe Bryant?"

"Yeah," he said coolly, pointing to his KOBE nametag.

"What are you doing here?"

"Meetin' and greetin'."

"You work here?"

"I own the place. This is my third shop. I've got one in Brentwood, and one up North. I've got a co-branding franchise agreement. Sort of a special-label thing."

"Right."

"I like to put in appearances now and then. Pep up the troops. Keep my finger in the pie."

"Really."

He let loose a sly grin. I cleared my throat and unzipped a cargo pocket.

"Well," he said, examining his shoes. "Who are you here for?"

"SEC. Securities and Exchange Commission."

"Do you have a name?"

"My name?"

"The name of the guy you're here to see."

"I don't think so."

"Did they give you a subpoena?"

"Yeah."

"Let me take a look."

"You know," I started checking my pockets. "I think I left it in my old pants. But I called for a private room."

"A reservation?"

"Yes. A private room. It had a name. The something room."

"The Staples room?"

"That's it."

"They're all set up. They've been waiting for a while."

"They?"

"Three of them. Serious types. A private room was a good move."

He pointed me to a concrete opening towards the back of the main room.

"Through there?"

"Right there. Through the tunnel. They're waiting."

"Thanks."

I started walking back, nervous for the first time since I'd arrived.

The décor in the main room was still pretty new. It smelled of paint and nothing was scuffed or looked particularly worn. Maybe ten or twelve of the cubicles were in use, most of them civil cases. Personal injury. Somebody with crutches and a neck brace being deposed by an insurance company type. As I passed one of the cubicles I heard a woman say "yes, with multiple partners, but I don't see what that has to do with anything."

Little glowing screens in the tabletops, steadily filling with simultaneous transcription, gave everybody's face a ghoulish cast. The whole place was surprisingly quiet, almost hushed. Voices didn't carry. Everything was muted by the thick, green AstroTurf carpeting the pathways and by the enlarged championship banners and pennants on the walls.

The entrance to the Staples room was fashioned after the concrete tunnels that lead into stadiums. Simple cinderblock walls in a washable, industrial-grade off-white. It may just have been an acoustical artifact of the narrow, concrete space, but I could hear what sounded like the distant roar of a crowd coming from just beyond the door at the end of the tunnel.

I stopped in front of the door and took a couple of quick, deep breaths. The crowd sound seemed to come in waves, as if in response to a tennis ball being knocked back and forth during a surprisingly long volley. I shook my hands to loosen up and reached for the knob. Just as I touched it, the door swung suddenly open.

There was no vista. No field. No green court. The room was pretty small and saturated with fluorescent light. Ventilated, metal lockers lined a couple of the walls. One wall was covered with a floor-to-ceiling tromp l'oeil painting of a green-tiled shower room. Some low benches had assumed a conversational arrangement in the middle of the room near a free-standing

blackboard marked with Xs and Os and concealing a smoky transcription screen.

"Mr. Vigor?" said a voice from behind the open door.

"Yes."

"Come on in."

The air was a little stale and humid. I stepped in. The door slammed closed on its automatic hinges, revealing three figures clustered around a table covered in finger foods and bottled drinks. One of them was looking at me.

"I hope you'll excuse us," she said. "We got hungry and couldn't wait." She looked like her name might have been Gidget, except that her head was piled high with an enormous knot of blonde dreadlocks.

"Is that a crudité?" One of the others was asking, pointing at some balls of raw dough pierced with carrot sticks.

"No problem." I said, straightening my tie. She was wearing khakis and a blue, button-down shirt. Loafers, no socks. They were all wearing khakis and blue, button-down shirts. No suits. Not a tie among them.

"Is a crudité predigested?" asked the third. He also had a mass of dreadlocks, gray as my suit, some of them reaching the backs of his knees and as thick as saplings.

"I think sometimes they're just raw." The other one had dreads too, but shorter and younger.

"You're all here to question me?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, wiping her right hand on her pant leg. "But it's nothing to worry about. We often work together. I'm Mischka." She stuck out her hand. I shook it. "This is Tony, and Malcolm."

The younger one glanced over and waved a pepper-crust cocktail sausage in my general direction. The older one was fixated on a small bowl of cheese compote and didn't look up.

"Would you like to have a seat?" She pointed over towards the benches. "We could get started right away. Maybe you'd like a juice box? I saw green berry, blue berry, and something called Motion."

"No thanks. Not just yet." I started wandering over towards the benches.

"I don't think you're allowed to do that to cheese." The younger one was saying.

It was somehow muggy, so I decided to take off my jacket before sitting down. I couldn't see a coat rack, so I tried one of the lockers.

"Those don't work," the older one said, still without looking away from the compote. "They're just decorative."

"Oh." I rattled the handle a little and then hung my jacket on the corner of the blackboard. Mischka sat down, balancing a plateful of hors d'oeuvres on her knee.

"You understand that this is just an information gathering session?" she asked. "And that the Commission is not currently contemplating claims against you or your employer?"

"I understand."

"But whatever you tell us will be on the record, and, should action be deemed appropriate somewhere down the line, we may use the testimony that you give us now."

"Fair enough." I took a seat across from her. The benches were low and my knees stuck up awkwardly above my lap. "I'm here to cooperate."

"Good."

The older guy sat by Mischka, the younger one on my right. With one hand, Mischka took a small plastic card out of her shirt pocket. "This is a formality, but just so we've clearly identified ourselves to you." She handed me the card.

Mischka Roolingworth. Special Investigations Office. Her eyes were closed in the picture. I handed the card back to her. The other two offered their cards.

The older one was Malcolm. In the picture he looked to be wearing the same shirt, and to be about the same age, but his hair was sheared short, marine style. The younger one was Tony.

"Okay," said Mischka. "Are you represented by counsel?"

"Yes."

"Because you are entitled to have a lawyer present during the questioning," put in Tony.

"Yes."

"Yes?" asked Mischka.

"Yes I am represented by counsel."

"But your counsel is not here."

"I guess he's not here yet, but he should be on the way."

"Has he ever appeared before the agency in a representational capacity?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

"And is he your personal attorney, or was he retained by your employer?"

"He's actually the GC. Satchel Pincher. I'm not sure why he's not here yet. I'm sure he'll be here any minute."

"Your employer's attorney will be here representing you as well?"

"Sure."

"Maybe we should hold off 'til he gets here, then?" asked Tony, chewing on some mushroom jerky.

"We could," Mischka replied. "Perhaps Mr. Vigor would be willing to waive his counsel's presence temporarily, so we can get started, with the understanding that Mr. Pincher will have the opportunity to object to anything on the transcript."

"I'm comfortable. I don't think there's any need to wait."

"Good. I think we'd like to go on the record, then," she said, looking around at the corners of the room. A tiny, flashing cursor appeared on the blackboard screen. "We're on the record."

Tony nodded enthusiastically. Malcolm allowed a Gouda flake to dissolve in his mouth.

"Let's first confirm that you are Mr. William Vigor," continued Mischka.

"Wim."

"Wim? Could you spell that?"

"W-I-M. Everybody calls me Wim." I glanced over at the screen, but it had already finished transcribing.

"And who is your employer?"

"Futurefeedforward."

"Futurefeedforward. That company formerly did business as Boudaine Temporal Enterprises?"

"Yes. Before I was hired."

"What is your position at the company?"

"I am VP of Marketing and a member of the Board of Directors."

"And to whom do you report?"

"I report to the CEO."

"Mr. Boudaine?"

"Yes. Red Boudaine."

"Alright. And just for background, can you tell us a little about the company, its line of business."

"We operate a proprietary temporal network through which we offer a range of services."

"A temporal network," nodded Tony. "I saw that in some of the materials. What is that, exactly?"

"I'm not the technical guy."

"That's okay," said Mischka. "Just give us the big picture."

"Well, a temporal network is sort of like a regular computer network, but it spans both time and space."

"Time and space?"

"Yeah. Yes. In a regular client-server network, you have a client machine that requests data from a server. The client and server could be in the same room, or thousands of miles apart. Regardless, the requested data is then sent through the network back to the client."

"Simple enough."

"In a temporal network, the client and the server might not only be in different places, but in different times as well."

"I see."

"So, for instance, back at the office, right now, we have a client that can make requests to a server located in the future."

"In the future."

"I don't know exactly when, but sometime significantly in the future. Not just next week. Maybe ten, twenty years out."

"Ten or twenty years in the future."

"Exactly."

"You have this server in your office now."

"No. The server isn't there now. It hasn't been built yet. The technology to build it doesn't yet exist. But it will be built."

"But you have a 'client' machine. In your office. Right now. A real machine."

"Yes. Just a regular pc."

"And it receives data from an imaginary server."

"Not imaginary. It's real. It's just in the future."

"And how does the data get from the future to the client?"

"That's it. It goes through the temporal network."

"Of course."

"Yes. There's a little black box that sits in the office, and the pc networking card is plugged into it. That's the temporal router. At the other end, on the future-side, the server is plugged into a temporal router."

"The same router, but in the future?"

"Not necessarily. It could be a different router. I think. Like I said, I'm not a technical guy. There's a whole network of them, anyway, spread out all over the future."

"And it is your testimony that this device works."

"Yes."

"That it receives information from the future."

"Yes."

"You've used the device yourself."

"I've seen it used. And I've definitely been privy to information from the future that came across the network."

"But you haven't used the network yourself."

"Well, security is a real concern, as you can imagine. They keep access to the network pretty limited. Wrapped up. Things are compartmentalized. Need to know. That sort of thing. But it does work. I have seen it work."

"I see." Mischka paused. Malcolm started poaching off of her plate.

"Like a time machine," blurted Tony.

"Sort of. But only information is traveling in time. Back in time. No matter. Nothing physical. From what I understand, the energy required to send matter back in time, even just a tiny bit, would be astronomical. On top of that, I think they told me that it isn't even possible to send a real object back in time."

"But you can send information back?"

"Exactly. It involves something called a 'retrograde quantum effect'. It's some sort of wave that reaches its destination before it's left."

"I think I read about that," offered Tony, shrugging his shoulders and grinning apologetically.

"And you can encode information in these wave effects," I continued. "1s and 0s. Data."

"Information traveling in time." Mischka paused. The transcription hesitated. "What sort of information?"

"Anything really. The weather. The names of people who haven't been born yet. What you'll have for lunch tomorrow."

"And this information comes from the server in the future."

"Yeah. So if it's something that people know in the future, we can request it now. In the future, once we can get a hold of the information, we'll put it in a giant database on the server, so that when we request it now, the server just pulls it out of the database and sends it back to the present."

"Any kind of information."

"Anything, as long as it's possible to find it out sometime in the future."

"How far into the future?"

"I really can't say. I don't know specifics, but far. Pretty far."

She hesitated, mouth open, about to speak. A little noise came out of her mouth, not quite a word, something short of a phoneme.

"Okay then," said Tony, rubbing his palms together. Mischka waved him off.

"You explained how information is sent to the present from the future, but you also mentioned the request sent by the client in the present to the server in the future. How does that work, the same way?"

"Good question. I actually understand this part. The request isn't ever sent out over the network. We just store it on the client's hard drive. We don't have to send it into the future, because it'll get there eventually naturally, as long as we maintain and back up copies of the request, and then give the server access to it once we catch up to it, once we reach the moment in the future when the server has the answer to the query."

"The query."

"The information request. In the present, we only have to be able to receive signals from the network; we don't actually have to know how to send them."

"Just receive."

"Yes. Apparently all of the complicated, high-tech equipment that hasn't been invented yet is required only on the sending end, on the server-side."

"I see."

"The receiving equipment, the router back at the office, works off of present day technology. It only requires things that have already been invented."

"Convenient."

"Very."

Tony stood up abruptly and started pacing the room.

Mischka leaned forward, studying my face. A sunburst of worry lines emerged from behind her brow. "So it is your contention that futurefeedforward, the company you work for, possesses a device that enables you to see the future."

"Not really *see* the future. It's not so much about prediction. It's more like getting the answers to the questions before the test."

"Cheating?"

"In a way."

Mischka glanced at the other two, and then at her empty plate. "You understand that you are under legal oath."

"Yes."

"And that there are penalties, both civil and criminal, for lying under oath, and for making misrepresentations or making material omissions to a duly sworn enforcement official."

"Sure."

She mouthed something at Tony, pointing to the door. He shrugged and shook his head.

"Okay," she said. "Tony and I are going to step away for a moment, and Malcolm will continue the deposition. Is that okay with you Mr. Vigor?"

"I suppose."

"Good. We'll return momentarily."

The door whooshed closed behind them. Malcolm sat across from me, still and quiet. He dared a furtive glance in my direction, but quickly looked away.

"We are on the record in this matter," he ventured.

I scratched my head. He started nodding absently.

"I would like to ask you a question."

"Okay."

He furrowed his lips, looked to be gathering himself, but suddenly let out a long breath. It sounded as if his head were deflating.

I unzipped one of my thigh pockets and started feeling around inside. Malcolm looked to be rehearsing a gesture involving both hands. There was a little scrap of paper inside the pocket, about half the size of the note inside a fortune cookie. I took it out.

"This question concerns your company."

"I'm prepared to answer any questions you may have."

He made the gesture, but appeared dissatisfied and began rehearsing it again. I looked at the slip of paper. It said "Stitched by 12" in a font designed to mimic neat handwriting, a draftsman's handwriting.

"There are shareholders in your company," Malcolm began.

"Yes, but we don't currently trade on an exchange."

He began shaking his head slowly and pursing his lips as if agreeing to disagree. I flipped the paper over. Down in the corner, in a smaller version of the same font, was printed the word "HELP."

"But there are shareholders who own shares."

"Yes."

He looked pleased, and pointed at me for emphasis. I put the slip of paper back in the pocket and began feeling around in another pocket. He started to cross his legs by grabbing one knee with both hands and lifting.

"Shareholders other than employees of the company."

"Yes. I believe so. A few."

I found a little packet in the pocket. It felt like a packet of NutraSweet.

"Okay." He said. "They own shares."

"Yes."

"Real shares."

"Yes."

He began cogitating. "But they are somehow different from regular shares."

"Oh. I see what you're after. The interstitial shares. Sure. Yes. We sell this special kind of share that's unique to us. I think we have a patent application in on these shares."

"A patent application."

"Yes. You'd need to talk to our CFO about that."

"The CFO?"

"Emily. Emily Efou."

"Is she here?"

"No."

"Is she under subpoena?"

"I don't think so. As far as I know, I'm the only one who got a subpoena."

"I see." He started slowly smacking his lips. His mouth sounded dry. "Hmm." He kept working his mouth as if priming a pump.

I took the packet out and glanced at it. It was white and stuffed with what felt like sand. On one side it said DO NOT EAT in big black letters.

"I think," he said, pointing to himself. "I think I should consult with my colleagues."

"Okay."

As he opened the door I could hear a din funneled down the tunnel from the main room. It sounded like quite a commotion, including the intermittent squawk of sirens. Once the door shut it was perfectly quiet.

"This is going fine," I told myself. "I can handle these guys." I stretched out my legs and let out a deep breath. I turned the packet over in my fingers. The other side was covered with miniscule, decorative print.

"This all natural humectant is provided to ensure the quality of your garment," it said. "It includes ingredients not fit for human consumption.

"This garment is made of 100% wooline. Wooline is a naturally occurring wool-like substance secreted by certain crustaceans and tree frogs. It is highly durable and water resistant under normal conditions.

"Certain mites and bacteria may infest and consume wooline garments. To reduce the risk of damage, dry your garment thoroughly whenever it becomes moist or wet. Do not wear the garment for extended periods in tropical or humid climates." I noticed a strange smell in the room, something sickly sweet. I kept reading.

"This humectant packet contains extracts from beet larvae and certain deciduous trees of the Pacific Northwest. These extracts have been shown to be a natural repellent to the bacteria and mites that feed on wooline. It is recommended that you retain and continue to use this packet." The smell was getting stronger. I was starting to smell eucalyptus and burning sugar.

"If you experience a rash that persists for more than two weeks after you have worn the garment, or if your doctor has informed you that you have a seafood allergy or a compromised immune system, discontinue wearing and wash thoroughly with soap and water."

The smell was overpowering. I held the packet to my nose and sniffed.

"Shit!" I gasped, convulsively flinging the packet across the room. It bounced off the painting of the shower room and landed near the corner of the buffet table. I doubled over, gagging reflexively.

"My god," I breathed, "tree shit!"

I waited for a couple of minutes, catching my breath. Then I resolved to get rid of the packet, throw it away, before anyone came

back. As I was getting up, something on the blackboard caught my eye. I looked closely at the screen.

"Vigor:" it said. "This is going fine. I can handle these guys. Shit. My god. Tree shit."

"Fuck!" I shouted under my breath.

"Fuck," it repeated.

"No. Stop. Go back."

"No. Stop. Go back."

"Delete."

"Delete."

"No. Delete the last words."

"No. Delete the last words."

I started looking around at the empty room, waving. "No, rewind. Go back."

"No. Rewind. Go back."

"Um. Escape."

"Escape."

"Help."

"Help."

"F-one."

"F-one."

"Quit."

"Quit."

"Control, Alt, Delete."

"Control, Alt, Delete."

Nothing. I started looking around for buttons or switches. Nothing on the blackboard. No ports or sockets. I tentatively tapped the screen with my finger. Nothing.

"Fuck!" I started hyperventilating. "Fuckin' fuck fuck fuckedy fuck."

I looked down at the screen. "Fucking fuck fuck fuckedy fuck," it said.

I closed my eyes and made little okay signs with each hand, picturing an open highway running through a field of rolling, golden wheat. Not a car for miles. The click and whir of grasshoppers fanning out across the field. A crow in the distance.

The door opened. I opened my eyes.

"Mr. Vigor," Mischka said. "We apologize for the delay."

"No problem," I said smoothly, squeezing a deflective glint out of my eye. "You mentioned earlier that Satchel would have an opportunity to object to portions of the transcript."

"Your attorney."

"Yes. That he could have parts of the record stricken."

"He might, if there were a sound reason."

"Good."

"Is there a portion of your testimony that you would like to recant, or modify?"

"Not just now, but maybe later." The three of them came into the room, closing the door behind them.

"Actually, we were just discussing Mr. Pincher."

"Is he here?"

"He's here, but he seems to have been involved in a bit of a scuffle."

"A fight?"

"A scuffle. With the owner."

"With Kobe Bryant? Satchel was in a fight with Kobe Bryant?"

"We don't know all of the details, but it looks like there was some sort of disagreement that led to shoving."

"There was shouting," added Tony. "People heard loud voices."

"Some furniture was overturned," continued Mischka. "Some of the staff were involved. Several chairs were thrown. But the police are here and things appear under control."

"The police? Is Satchel hurt? Is he under arrest?"

"Mr. Bryant left in an ambulance after his physician arrived. I don't think Mr. Pincher was hurt much. The police are questioning him, but we were told that he'd be permitted to join us soon."

"So we'll continue the deposition."

"I think as long as we're all here," said Mischka, nodding. "We may as well see where things take us, but we should, at any rate, wait until Mr. Pincher is available."

"Wait."

"Yes. Tony and I were discussing it, and, based upon your testimony so far, it is our belief that you may be subject to action for violations of Federal securities laws. Because of that fact, we're hesitant to go any further until your attorney is present."

"I see."

"As you may be aware, you were brought to our attention by an individual who attended an investors' conference in Gilmore."

"I didn't know that."

"This individual reported that you, personally, made a presentation at the conference offering to sell 'interstitial' shares in futurefeedforward, the company for which you worked, and that these shares represented an entirely novel form of financial instrument, a sort of combination of a derivative and traditional equity ownership."

"I did make that presentation."

"You don't need to confirm or deny what I'm telling you now. You should in fact probably wait to make any statement until your attorney is present. I'm simply trying to give you some background information to explain our interest in you."

"Okay." The four of us resumed our habitual seats.

"We called you in for questioning concerning these 'interstitial' shares. No one at the agency that we are aware of has heard of or has any knowledge of this sort of instrument. We called you in just to gather basic information about the shares, what they were, and how they worked."

"Mmmhuh," I mumbled, mouth closed.

"However, your responses to my initial questions have led us to believe that you have likely made material misstatements of fact to investors and potential investors in connection with an offer to sell securities."

"Misstatements such as?"

"Well, potentially fraudulent statements concerning the technology developed and allegedly used by the company."

"The temporal network."

"Mr. Vigor, you do not have a device capable of receiving information from the future."

"I don't."

"No. Such a device simply does not exist and cannot exist. Any contrary claim is incredible on its face."

"I see. Anything else?"

"Any monies you, your associates, or the company has received in connection with claims, by you or others, about the existence of such technology are likely to be forfeit as proceeds of a securities offering in violation of federal law."

"Okay."

"In addition, you may be personally liable for civil penalties depending upon the willfulness or recklessness with which you have perpetrated this fraud; and you may face criminal penalties, should a U.S. Attorney decide to bring charges in connection with this case."

"That's it?"

"You understand that my intention is to describe to you what may happen, and that I am not accusing you now of violation of any law. It is important, however, for you to be informed of the shift in our interest in you and the company for which you work."

"Alright. That's clear enough."

Mischka continued to look at me intently. I refrained from blinking. She started to look away, eyes rolling to her left, preparing to glance over at the blackboard.

"Crystal clear," I said suddenly, a bit too loudly. She looked back at me.

"Okay," she said hesitantly.

Out of the corner of my eye I caught Malcolm leaning towards the blackboard, looking over the transcript. He was scratching his head with a peculiar gyration of his wrist reminiscent of a biplane propeller, activated by manual start, but whose engine would not quite catch.

Just as he opened his mouth, an ominous, thunderous stomping of feet erupted outside in the tunnel. We all turned to look at the door. The thundering approached in fits and starts, as if drunk and stumbling down an alley. I glanced at Mischka. She glanced back, her eyes widening. The stomping stopped just outside the door, hanging fire. I thought, in the dozen or so heartbeats of silence that passed before anybody ventured to budge, that I might fall off the bench, or enjoy an unexpected and incapacitating blow to the head.

When the door opened, nobody blinked. It opened explosively, but perfectly soundlessly, without crash or clamor. Satchel Pincher stood in the doorway, lit from behind, holding a Ziploc bag full of ice to the side of his head.

2.

A Death Worse Than Fate

Satchel is not particularly tall, incapable of looming; he is, in fact, a bit on the short side, but rangy. He is built like a boast and looks rather difficult to knock down, as if prepared for life by persistent hazing at the hands of a dozen older brothers.

"I'd like to talk to my client," exclaimed Satchel, nostrils stuffed with cotton.

"Uh," murmured Mischka, looking him up and down.

Satchel's hair is a cautionary tale about the perseverance of Nature. It is characterized chiefly by an enormous, fractal cowlick that refuses to succumb to the fistfuls of gel that slap against it every morning with the regularity of an incoming tide. Rebellious, oily, black spikes of hair jut from the top of his forehead like leaves from the crown of a pineapple.

"Sure," Mischka added with a start, realizing that what at first glance looked to be a white shirt and a bright red tie was in fact an undershirt stained down the middle with a trough of blood.

"Good," he snorted, waving for me to join him in the hall.

"What happened?" I asked, once the door had closed and we were alone. "Where were you?"

"Where was I? Where were you? You were supposed to drive me down."

"I was?"

He snorted and leaned in close, grinning. "Do you want to see something?"

"Maybe."

"This is 100% level," he whispered. "100 per-cent shit." He moved the bag of ice to the top of his head, balancing it like a load of mangoes. "I got it last night," he said, reaching for a large bandage maniacally taped to his right forearm.

He peeled back the bandage, revealing what looked like a gigantic scab in the shape of a hula dancer.

"Is that infected?" I asked, grimacing. It had begun to writhe, seething with malicious animal spirits.

"No. I don't believe in germs." His brows knit for a second. "Wait, this'll help." He reached into his undershirt with his free hand and began scrubbing the scab vigorously with the stained front of the shirt. I could hear him sucking his breath in through clenched teeth. At last, with a toothy grin, he held his forearm up for me to examine.

It was a tattoo, inked in the greens, greys and blacks of a dollar bill: a full-figure, currency-style etching of George Washington, jacketed, stockinged, buckle-shoed, but in a big grass skirt.

"Uh-huh."

"No, wait, check it out." Suddenly the tattoo broke into a full-on, hip-swaying hula, both arms oscillating to the right, then both to the left.

"Huh," I stuttered.

"Completely shitted, eh?" George stopped dancing. "It's a new process, some kind of little ink balls that turn around, different colors on different sides."

"Ink balls?"

"Real tiny. Tick dicks."

"But."

"They just poke a whole bunch of 'em under your skin with needles, and then, the electricity in your skin..."

"Galvanic skin response?"

"Something like that; it just makes him dance."

"Can you control it?"

"Pretty much. I can make him dance if I want, but sometimes he starts up by himself." He looked vaguely confused for a second. "Kinda tickles."

"Is it safe?"

"Safe? I talked to the guy inventor. He told me all about it. He tweaked an FBI lie-detector patch."

"Lie-detector patch?"

"Completely non-invasive. They'd get somebody in for questioning and stick this patch right on their forehead. Based on the galvanic skin thing, the ink in the patch would say 'Truth' or 'Lie.'"

"They can do that?"

"Sure." Satchel began making a show of tucking in his shirt with one hand.

"And, so, does he dance if you're lying?" The bag of ice slipped off his head, but, with a quick move of his elbow, something like the flapping of a chicken wing, he managed to catch it in the crook of his arm.

"I'm not sure, I haven't tested it." He hastily repositioned the bandage and began pressing the strands of tape with his fingers. "Look," he said under his breath. "How's it going in there? Did you say anything?"

"About what? They just asked a few questions and I told them the truth."

"Okay, that's okay then."

"I'm not sure it is okay."

"How so?"

"Well, just before you got here, they pretty much accused me of lying. They didn't believe me when I told them about the network, and the lead one, Mischka."

"Mischka?"

"Mischka. Mischka seemed to think it's a fraud."

"A fraud. That's no problem. I've got that covered."

"You've got that covered, well what about me? I don't appreciate being sent down here unprepared."

"Unprepared? You were supposed to bring me with you so I could prep you on the way down. You left me high-n-dry. I had to borrow Emily's Beater to get here."

"I'm sorry about that. Still, it doesn't look right if the head of marketing doesn't know enough about the product to convince somebody that it isn't a fraud."

"Look, it's under control. This is the way Red wants it. If you don't know anything, you can't give anything away."

"Loose lips sink ships, blah blah."

"You can shit about this later. Let's just take care of the deposition first. Did they say anything else that sounded bad? Did they ask about anything else?"

"Not really. They were a little curious about the shares."

"The shares. Okay. Did they ask about Quarktrain?"

"Quarktrain?"

"Quarktrain, or the Quarktrain matter?"

"No. What's Quarktrain?"

"A former client. Nothing really. What about Megalolift Media LLC?"

"Megalolift? No."

"Sprague Ventures?"

"No."

"Alchemical?"

"No."

"Osmosis Technologies?"

"No, they didn't ask about any of them. Have you been in trouble before? Is there something I should know about?"

Satchel stood up straight, dropping the bag of ice and looking into an imaginary distance. "No," he said, scratching absently at the bandage. "Not really." His voice trailed off. He stood stock-still, surveying a vista only he could see, like some piece of Stalinist statuary.

"Not really?"

"No," he confirmed, returning to himself. "No trouble." He turned to look at me. "Let's do this," he said with a reassuring snarl.

"But wasn't there something you wanted to tell me, some instructions or something."

"No. You've met George. I think we're ready." He opened the door and was into the locker room handing out business cards before I could object.

"Are you sure it's appropriate to continue the session?" Mischka was asking, looking Satchel over again. "My colleagues and I have been discussing it and we would all feel comfortable rescheduling."

"No. I think we should go ahead and wrap this up," replied Satchel.

"I see. Has your client apprised you of our concerns, that, namely that we are taking seriously the possibility that he, and possibly others at the company, have participated in fraudulent representations concerning the nature of the technology used and developed by the company, and that these fraudulent statements may have been made in connection with the sale or offer to sell securities in violation of Federal securities laws?"

"I get the picture."

"And we'll continue the questioning, then?"

"Sure," said Satchel, looking at me. I nodded.

We all took our seats on the benches, and Mischka turned to me. "Mr. Vigor, I'd like, then, to review the key part of your testimony, review it with counsel present."

"Certainly."

"It is your testimony, Mr. Vigor, that your employer possesses a machine, an electronic device, for receiving data transmissions from the future."

"It is."

"And that this device does in fact receive information from the future."

"It does."

"And you have, on at least one occasion, made representations regarding this device to potential investors."

I hesitated, looking over at Satchel. He was lifting the corner of his bandage and peering intently at the bloody mess underneath. "On many occasions," I answered.

"These representations concerning the device have been substantially like those that you have made to us here today."

"Yes."

"To your knowledge, have any persons purchased securities in the company on the basis of these representations."

Again I looked to Satchel. He had pulled the cotton from one of his nostrils and was examining it for saturation. "I believe so," I stuttered. "We have sold some shares. I don't know how many." Satchel flipped the cotton around and stuffed the un-bloodied end into his free nostril.

"But records have been kept."

"I assume so."

"Any records concerning exactly which current or former shareholders were present in forums where you discussed the purported device?"

"I don't know."

"What about records concerning which shareholders have had access to marketing materials making representations about the device?"

"I'm not sure." Satchel was rejiggering the cotton in his other nostril. "Probably all of them have, I couldn't be sure."

"All of the company's current shareholders have been told that this device exists and that it functions and is in use at the company?"

"I imagine so."

"Okay," said Mischka, crossing her legs and glancing at the blackboard. "I'd like to ask you about other people at the company."

"Okay."

"Mr. Boudaine. Redroe Boudaine."

"Red."

"He is the chief executive officer."

"Yes."

"And the founder of the company."

"He invented temporal networking."

"Invented. Okay. Has he, to your knowledge, made representations concerning the device to potential shareholders?"

"Do I count?"

"You? Do you own shares?"

"I do."

"Well, to anybody besides you?"

"I'm not sure. Probably at least to me, and to Satchel." I pointed over at him. He didn't seem to hear his name. He was busy looking around the room, his mouth hanging open, a look of vague recognition on his face. "And likely to Emily."

"Emily Efou?"

"Yes."

"And to anybody else? Any other employees?"

"No. That's all the employees. Just us."

"Four employees?"

"Yes."

"The entire company."

"Yes, but we're looking to grow."

"I see."

For some reason Satchel was beginning to lean back very slowly, like a drawbridge being lowered.

"Mr. Vigor," Mischka continued, "what is the annual revenue generated by Futurefeedforward?"

"Generated?"

"Earned. How much business is the company doing?"

"I'm not sure I know."

Satchel was leaning even farther back, craning his neck to get a look at the shower room.

"You don't know?"

"I'm not the numbers guy. I'm the mouthpiece."

"I see. Well, how many customers does the company have?"

“Hey,” Satchel said suddenly, just as he crossed his own personal tipping point and fell ass-over-elbows backwards off the bench in what can only be described as a fairly plausible pratfall. His head managed to land on the baggie of ice as if on a pillow, and the force of the impact caused the bag to erupt, spewing irregular, half-melted ice cubes across the floor like so many pucks on an air hockey table.

I may have failed to mention something about Satchel. He has a glass eye. One glass eye and one lazy eye. It’s one of the things that people tend to notice about him right away. The odd thing about it, though, is that his glass eye is the one that tends to look directly at you and follow your eyes. His good eye, the lazy one, tends to wander in its own elliptical orbit, sometimes near, sometimes far, a prodigal peeper that only occasionally turns up to complete his gaze. The glass eye, due to some miracle of medical technology, always looks just where you expect Satchel means to be looking: at your unfinished food after a meal, at the road while he’s driving, or at an unusually large dog turd he’s spotted on the lawn and sure to say something juvenile about.

I think that eye has a tiny gyroscope in it and some neuro-sensitive magnets. I’ve sometimes, though, imagined an itty-bitty squirrel, looking out a porthole and rotating the eye by running around like a hamster in a clear plastic ball.

It turns out that the impact of Satchel’s head hitting the floor also caused his eye to pop out. The glass one. And it went skittering across the floor in the shower of ice and came to rest, disconcertingly, between Mischka’s feet, staring up at her. Her mouth, understandably, fell open, then Tony’s, then, five heartbeats later, Malcolm’s, out of which a blob of remoulade fell rather dramatically, splattering on the tip of his shoe.

“None,” I said.

“.....” Mischka ventured.

“....” added Tony.

Before anybody else could fail to say anything else, a shoebox-sized door in the base of one of the lockers opened. Out came an autosweeper disguised as a little zamboni and it began darting from ice cube to ice cube, sucking them into its dustcache.

Satchel was suddenly on his feet, brushing himself off spasmodically. “Pisser,” he muttered, arms flailing as if to ward off an insistent bee. “Sorry about that, but I wonder if anybody has seen....?”

“.....” said Mischka, pointing down discreetly. I was reminded of one of those people who manage to inform you that you’ve got spinach between your teeth with just a snarl and the flick of a tongue.

“Ah, yes,” Satchel huffed, hiking up his pants and surveying the bench that stood between him and his erstwhile eye. It was then that Satchel’s socket seemed to spot the zamboni working its way towards Mischka’s feet. We all noticed it then, and gasped in unison, drawn together by our desire to plot the trajectory and speed of the sweeper against the distance between Satchel and his eye.

Mischka, instinctively, started to lean forward and extend her hand, as any civil person would to retrieve for somebody something out of reach, but she hesitated as soon as she caught the eye staring up at her. The sweeper, meanwhile, made an oblivious beeline for its prize.

Satchel pounced over the bench, coming within inches of landing on the sweeper. The rest of us startled, but had no place to run. He lunged just in time to see his eye sucked up under the zamboni, but, on the follow-through, without a moment of hesitation, gave the sweeper a swift kick. The general effect was that of a toaster being drop-kicked inside a public bathroom. The sweeper bounced off a wall and came to rest near the hors-d’oeuvre table, dented and flipped over on its back, its various wheels and brushes still turning forlornly like the legs of an upended beetle.

Satchel sauntered over, shaking his head pityingly. He stood over the struggling sweeper, head bowed, considering its predicament. He shuffled around it to get another vantage and began scratching furiously amongst his cowlicks.

Mischka made as if to raise a finger.

Too late. With an unexpected fury, Satchel snatched the sweeper up with both hands, raised it high over his head, and, like some catapult that had been aimed accidentally at the floor, flung it down with an exertive grunt. Bits of sweeper shrapnel pinged around the room. A pinky-sized brush lodged itself deep in an untouched mint pudding amidst the hors d’oeuvres.

Satchel snatched the thing up again before it could stop spinning and hurled it down. Then again. And again. His rhythmic assault quickly filled the room like the clangor of an automated assembly line. An automated dis-assembly line. A miniature zamboni fender bounced off of Tony’s hair. Plumes of dust began to shoot from the sweeper like feathers jetting from a pillow during a

ferocious pajama party. I'm almost certain I saw cascades of red and blue sparks whenever the thing hit the floor.

Eventually the attack abated. Satchel began to wind down until his throws became intermittent chugs, the final spasms of a piston running out of juice. The sweeper finally came to rest near the door and an eerie quiet settled over the room. Satchel tossed his head back, panting, arms akimbo. Another blob of remoulade fell out of Malcolm's mouth, decorating his other shoe. Mischka coughed and cleared her throat.

"Never mind me," Satchel said, stooping over the carcass and somehow plucking his missing eye out of its distraught innards. "No need to be embarrassed." He began polishing his eye with his shirt. "I'm not," he concluded, working the eye back into his head.

You may be wondering, as I often have, how it was that Satchel lost his eye in the first place. It is not difficult to imagine him toddling around perilously with scissors in hand, or having a close encounter with the proverbial sharp stick. According to his kid sister, Eva, who was born after the fact and so may not be an entirely reliable source, Satchel, as a child, fought with the sun. He despised its regularity, its white-hot, blithering redundancy. Every morning, up; every evening, down. He was consumed by the injustice of it, that something so powerful could be so boring. And so he defied it. He resolved to stare it down.

I don't know his age at the time, but, as Eva tells it, he knew enough to know the dangers, and so, out of a sort of prudence, decided to risk only one eye, covering the other with his hand. I suspect that he thought he might really pull it off, make that shiny bastard blink or cry uncle. How long did he stare? Long enough. Where was he when he did it? Was he alone? Did he keep at it after he could no longer see? I should ask him.

"I think I've got a way we can wrap this all up quick," Satchel was saying, pacing the room. "Have you got a wireless?"

All three of them nodded, mouths still hanging open.

"Good." He began to gesticulate. "Your big thing is you think we're a fraud, right?"

They nodded.

"You've never heard of a machine like we've got, a temporal network?"

"Mmmhmm," Mischka managed.

"Doesn't make any sense. Can't work. Impossible."

"Yes," she coughed, "impossible."

“Can’t be?”

“Can’t be.”

“Pipe dream?”

“Pipe dream.”

“Well, let me tell you what we’re going to do,” said Satchel, “we’re going to dream that pipe dream together, right here, today.”

“Today?”

“Today.” Satchel had begun to punctuate his sentences with wild stabs of his fingers. “We’re drinking the Kool-Aid.”

“Kool-Aid?”

“We’re taking the red pill.” He hesitated.

“The red pill?” asked Mischka.

“We’re taking the blue pill. We’re taking the red pill and the blue pill.”

“Two pills?”

“I’ll tell you what we’re doing,” he turned sharply on his heel, “we’re eating the EAT ME cake.”

“Cake?” asked Malcolm.

“Have you got that wireless handy?” Satchel asked, turning to Tony, who, without blinking, took out an LG. Satchel began brandishing an envelope he had pulled out of his hip pocket.

“This is the cake,” he intoned. “This is THE cake.”

He handed the envelope to Mischka who almost failed to take it. After a moment the furrows on her brow relaxed. She sighed in resignation, and opened the envelope. It had a single sheet of paper in it, which she held up and started scanning. By dint of the light shining through it, I could make out what looked like a column of newspaper print marred by a half a dozen thick, black redactions.

“No,” interrupted Satchel, “go ahead, read it out loud.”

“I don’t know where this is going, Mr. Pincher.”

“Out loud,” he insisted.

“I really don’t think it’s appropriate.”

Satchel grimaced, shrugging with mock encouragement.

“Do you mean this as some kind of threat?” she asked.

“Threat?”

“I mean if your intent is to intimidate us with a document like this, it’s just not going to work.”

“Intimidate? Let me see that.” He snatched the paper from her and started reading it. “Huh. Wrong envelope.” He stuffed the paper back into his pocket and pulled out another envelope.

“I hope this isn’t some kind of joke. Disemboweling is not funny.”

“Disemboweling?” asked Malcolm.

“And neither is trepanation,” she added.

“Trepanation?” Malcolm repeated.

Satchel tossed her the other envelope, which she deflected into her lap with the palm of her hand. “Forget about that one,” he said. “This is the one.”

“The ‘cake’?”

“Yes. The cake.”

She took out three or four pages covered with columns of numbers and letters. She flipped through them quickly.

“You’ve got five stocks there,” Satchel explained, “and a long list of trades for each one.”

“I see,” said Mischka, pursing her lips, “these are trades that haven’t happened yet?”

“Check the execution times.”

“And this information came from your machine, from your company’s machine?”

“Bingo. Take a look; we’ve got some there that should be right about to pop.”

She handed the pages to Tony, who had begun breathing over her shoulder with his LG in hand. “Hnn,” he sneered after a minute, “there went one; when’s the next one? Oh, wait, there it went. That’s two.”

Satchel smirked, winking and giving me two pistol-fingers. Certain faces are just built to wear self-satisfied grins.

The three inquisitors huddled together for a good ten minutes, getting quieter and quieter. At one point, Mischka glanced back at us with a look equal parts disgust and credulity.

“Okay,” she said at last, clutching the pages, hands on hips, “what do you expect us to do with this?”

“Take it under advisement.”

“Advisement?”

“Take it back and take a good long look at it. Check it up and down and see if we’re not right, 100% right. Then call us if you have any more questions.”

“I see. Call you with questions. No more questions now.”

“I think you’ve got plenty to chew on. I’d also like to remind you of the accident.”

“The accident?”

“The disemboweling. The dragging. The bystander’s umbrella.”

“The accident,” Mischka repeated, nodding absently.

“Yes. Now you’ve got it,” said Satchel taking the piece of paper from the first envelope out of his pocket and smoothing it out on his thigh, “the unfortunate accident. As it turns out, our network delivered some sad news. One of you, I don’t know which one, is going to....”

“Be disemboweled?” asked Tony.

“And trepanned?” Mischka added.

“All that, and, I’m afraid to say, a bit more,” said Satchel reassuringly. “This, here, is a clipping with all the details. It’s from the *Times*. The date’s been blacked out, but I can tell you that it’s guaranteed to be too soon.”

“This story is about one of us?”

“Poor sap. It’s the indignity of it all that really gets to you. I had heard that circus animals do sometimes just snap like that. I hadn’t heard about their taste for human intestines. Just like a string of little sausages, I suppose.”

“Is it Malcolm,” asked Tony, hopeful. “It’s Malcolm, right?”

“Can’t say. Don’t know where, don’t know when.” A twinkle sprang into his eye. “But maybe you should keep this,” he added, holding out the rumpled article. Mischka took it, her jaw set in thought. “Otherwise, I think we’re done here.” And with that, Satchel lifted me bodily by an armpit and hustled me out into the hall.

“What about the cake?” I heard Malcolm ask in a small, disappointed voice as the door closed behind us.

* * *

“We won’t be hearing from them again,” Satchel boasted as we emerged from the DEPOT. “One thing you should know about me is that I’m a closer. I shut things up.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Another thing you should know is that your car has been impounded.”

“What?” I stopped dead in the middle of parking lot traffic.

“I needed it to post bond.” Satchel kept walking. “It’s not a big deal. I’ll get it back in 30 to 60 days.”

“30 to 60 days?”

“I had to throw down this morning...” His voice was breaking up as he got farther from me. “...bogus charges...assault...spot bond...asshole...”

“My car?” I shouted, incredulous. Traffic was starting to collect behind me like flotsam in an eddy.

“...appearance...impound...get it back...” He looked around suddenly, a prairie dog on high alert, then caught sight of me.

“Why MY car?” I asked.

“I couldn’t give them Emily’s car,” he explained as I caught up to him, “she’d wring me, and I’m tapped. Always pushing the limit. Leverage over liquidity. I had to make the bail or they’d take me down to book me, and if they did that, I wouldn’t have been there to save you just now.”

“Save me?”

“Save us. Temporary cost of doing business,” he said as we got to Emily’s car, a brand new Volkswagen Beater: mismatching driver’s door and hood, mangled passenger’s side, jaws-of-life moonroof, dragable muffler, all the extras. It looked like it had been wadded up in a giant fist. There was an attaché-sized box in a yellow cellophane bag on the passenger’s seat. I put it on my lap as I got in.

“Did they give you a receipt or anything? If I give you the money can you get it out sooner?”

“The paperwork on that alone would take more than 60 days,” he said, getting behind the wheel. “I’ll just get it back when I make my appearance.”

“Can I trust you to do that?”

“Can I trust you to shut the fuck up and check in the glove box for some aspirin?” he asked with a grin.

I started rummaging around in the compartment and came up with a purple plastic bottle with one of those child-proof caps: LARVAPRIN. There were no gelcaps in it, but there was a surprisingly large, throbbing caterpillar with a dangerous looking orange spike on its business end. I put the cap back on and took note of the smiling, cartoon caterpillar on the label spitting out a speech bubble: “Feed me for headache relief!” I turned the bottle around to read the instructions:

DIRECTIONS FOR USE: Larvaprin spins 3-6 tablets every 1-2 hours. Feed Larvaprin an amount of fresh

plant material that will fit comfortably in the bottle. Do not overfeed. Take tablets for temporary relief from minor aches and pains due to headache, fever, stress or the common cold. Discontinue use if directed by physician. Eating Larvaprin itself does not provide relief.

“Hold on,” I said, getting out of the car and wandering over to the parking median. The median was covered with thick, lime-green grass. I tore out a couple of handfuls and stuffed them into the bottle.

“I’m not eating grass,” said Satchel leaning out the driver’s side window. “Just give me the pills.”

I ripped a couple strips from the leaves of a newly-planted sapling, dropped them into the bottle for good measure, and climbed back into the car.

“What? No aspirin?” he grouched, cranking the ignition.

I held the bottle up to the light and could make out the profile of the caterpillar patiently chomping on a blade of grass as if it were a cold, crisp celery stalk. If it had lips, it was likely smacking them. “This might take a while,” I said.

Satchel is a manicautious driver, sort of like a manic-depressive who’s both up and down at the same time, all of the time. Everything about his posture says Little Old Lady from Pasadena; everything the car does says Monster Truck Rally. We hit the freeway with the muffler on Drag, a dozen cars lurching in our wake, horns blaring. Satchel looked over at me with his glass eye.

“You done good,” he said.

“About that,” I started.

“No, good. I’m not kidding. Gu-hood.”

“You don’t even know what I did. You don’t know what I said. You just put on your Hulk show, no questions asked. For all you know, I fucked up the whole thing, spilled the beans.”

Satchel went back to peering over the steering wheel. “No sir, you spilled nothing because you know nothing, ja?”

“That’s the other thing that doesn’t make any sense.” Satchel began to raise an impatient, cautionary finger from the steering wheel. “I need to know what’s going on. I can’t do anything about our public image if you and Red are showboating all the time. Wild stunts don’t help our reputation. You think VCs

invest in reckless companies?” His finger began to waggle. “I can’t work this way. I can’t do my job under these conditions.”

“Look, junior,” Satchel blurted as he began using the shoulder to pass slower cars, “you’re a pretty face, but you’ve got no chops. You weren’t ready for the deposition not because I didn’t prep you, but because YOU. WEREN’T. READY.” He punctuated each of the last three words by swerving into a new lane just in time to fill a Beater-sized space. “I know you’ve got questions. I’ve got questions. We’ve all got questions, like When am I going to get paid? How does the machine work? If the machine works, why doesn’t it tell me when I’m going to get paid?”

“How does the machine work?”

We veered onto the 1015, barreling by levels of freeway stacked up like the tiers of a massive wedding cake, on-ramps and off-ramps, carpoolways and mergeways arcing across the skyline like the loops of ribbon on a Christmas bow.

“You’ve got to come to grips with the big picture,” Satchel was saying. “The big picture is you don’t see the big picture, and neither do I. But Red has shown you what he’s shown you and he’s shown me what he’s shown me.” He trailed off as if dazed by a sudden memory. “The future is tricky business,” he said finally. We sat in silence for a good while.

Eventually I got tired of the scenery and looked down at the box in my lap. It was covered in large, isometric rectangles, tone-on-tone greens and greys. “The Michael Graves Collection” it said in one corner. I pulled back the edges of the cellophane bag. The cardboard was smooth and crisp. “Clock Timer” it said in a coy typeface. In another corner was a picture of the Timer. It looked like half a white fluffy cloud that had been encased in a smooth, translucent candy-coating. There were two large slots cut into the top, a different bedside clock balanced in each. I tipped the box up and started reading the bullet points:

- GAUGE THE ACCURACY OF ANY CLOCK.
- NO BATTERIES REQUIRED.
- TIMELESS CONTEMPORARY DESIGN. LOOKS GREAT WITH ANY DÉCOR.
- TAKE IT WITH YOU WHEN YOU TRAVEL. WORKS IN TIME ZONES WORLDWIDE.

- SIMPLE TO USE: PUT AN ACCURATE CLOCK IN ONE CRADLE. PUT A TEST CLOCK IN THE OTHER CRADLE. WATCH THEM BOTH. IT'S AS EASY AS ONE, TWO, THREE.*

I looked up. We were shooting through a canyon of big-box retailers and cantilevered office parks. Satchel had both eyes on the traffic. We rode the rest of the way in silence.

As we pulled into the office lot, Satchel managed to take a hand off the wheel and start kneading his forehead. "What's with the aspirin?" he asked as he turned off the ignition. I handed him the Larvaprin bottle and climbed out of the car.

Satchel stood on the sidewalk for a minute, wrestling with the childproof lid. Eventually he dumped the bottle into an open hand. Bits of grass rained down like ticker tape. He regarded his palm. "There's a fucking worm in the aspirin," he said without concern, plucking up two tablets and popping them into his mouth. "Look at that," he said, proffering his palm.

"Huh." I said.

With a flick of his wrist, Satchel dropped the caterpillar onto the concrete and ground it out like a used cigarette. Then, without missing a beat, he leaned around into the car, snagged the Clock Timer from off of the passenger's seat, and trotted off towards the office. I stood for a moment, transfixed by the bright, sticky stain that remained on the sidewalk among the scattered shards of grass, transected by the great orange spike that had been its best defense.

* Clocks not included.