

ADVENTURES OF BASTARD AND
M.E.

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Whisk(e)y Tit
NYC & VT

CENTERDAY (ONE)

RENT YOUR BRAIN.

It was late morning when the phone call rang. Just before the Marker reached the Half-Day Signifier on the Circhronometer.

It was unusual for Bastard (not the Bastard) to be awake so early. He suffered from a chronic condition (one of many) that typically disabled him from waking up before the Time of One Major Mark after the aforementioned Half-Day Signifier signified its signification.

So far, the day had flowered as any other dayflower flowers, at least in relation to the flowers that had dayed since Bastard's reincarnation. For the proceeding daze of adventure are of Bastard's second life (note not necessarily significant, except that, in his previous life, Bastard had never paid attention to dayflowers – nor their flowering).

He stared at the tidy surface of his desk, which was never cluttered with papers – nor with anything else, for that matter – , because he had not much, and even less

papers. As a recently professionalized private detective, he'd yet to land any work.

Maybe I should hire a new office? he said to himself as he engaged the desk in a routine game of mindless eye-casting. Then he sat up, and sipped at a cup that contained within an ever-depleting amount of absinthe-warmed-down equal parts liquid stimulant. It was whilst in the midst of this meditative idleness that the phone's ring rang.

No one had ever called him before.

Bastard sent his eyes around the room, scanning it for any clues as to where this noise was coming from and what meaning it bore. After a timed series of rings, a harsh BEEP sent his body to the floor. Hands over his ears, he was still able to hear a strange voice pronounce, seemingly unprompted, that Bastard was presently unavailable.

But it was obvious that Bastard was present – and available, because he had nothing to do.

While the un-attributable invisible mouth continued, unheeded, Bastard got up off the floor and strolled over to the kitchen. He opened the cooler, pulled out a sandwich, and watched the door close on its own. Amazing, he thought to himself. Then he began to unwrap the glass sheet he had utilized to preserve the prepared consummation's freshness, having made the delectable gustatory item earlier that year. Thin but durable whole wheat paper bread comprised seven-year-old foot-stomped mashed gooseberries, pigeon wing twig bones, flounder-bile marinated cat tail, thinly sliced *as well as* pressed dinosaur shallots, a thick slice of yeti lard topped with purple orange peels within a papier-mâché crust, all drowned in a madras corduroy lysergic acid dressing.

He stumbled into the bathroom, where he tossed the

glass wrapper into a garbage bag that was full of garbage that he would never throw away, took two bites of the sandwich and flushed it down the toilet. He pooped in the sink while brushing his teeth in the bath, dried himself off with a few half-threes of shoes, and, resuming his seat at his desk, adopted a sense of sophistication in order to press some blinking button light on a black box on his desk, which said,

“Bastard. It’s M.E.. Meet at our old spot. Soon as you can.”

He recognized the voice immediately, even though it was one he had not heard in many, many Circles.

The Circhronometer on the wall looked at him and said, “Eleven forty fifty p h d.”

“Give me fifteen, I’ll be there prior,” Bastard noised into the black box but at the Circle-Keeper.

As Bastard gathered his things in preparation to leave his office, I decided to accompany him. Then, I did.

It was a sunny day in the city of Metropolisse, and very cloudy.

Bastard exited the building and crossed the street, his eyes lowering from the sky below to the street above, between which he tasted a billboard advertisement splattered upon one of the new condominiums (one of many that were ejaculating all over the city at that Time).

“RENT YOUR BRAIN,” it shouted in big black letters on a yellow back. In quieter print below, “One thousand balls per week. Painless and risk-free. Call now!” Below that, telephonic contact data. And most hush-hush, “We promise not to sell any private or personal information to any alien entities without first drawing your blood.”

The sign was signed by Free-Enterprise 999.

STEFAN O. RAK

Bastard didn't break step, just kept walking.

**THE HEADS OF THE ORGANIZATION
REUNITE.**

Miguel Evangelista was sitting at a table in the corner by the window. As Bastard approached his old friend, he calculated about three decimals since their last encounter. They shook hands formally, like best friends do.

“So,” Bastard cringed in pain as he sat down, smiling, “what are you doing back in Nation? Correct me if I’m wrong, but your Physical Presence Privilege was revoked some Time ago. Eternal External Exile. Never to be allowed back within the border that protects our great Kingdom from the lesser and most disgusting lands beyond. Right?”

“You’re not wrong,” his friend answered. “In fact, in that sense, you are right. However, I’ve been granted temporary amnesty for one week. They’ve flown M.E. here to testify at Grand Justice Court.”

“Hm. And the Magistrates let you back in for that?”

“Appears so, man. I volunteered, and they offered.

Seems they're desperate. They really wanna get this guy – public enemy number ten, and for some Time. And only I know who he is.” M.E. inhaled and then exhaled.

Bastard regarded his friend. The face had aged a bit, but he knew that this was M.E..

“Listen. I don't have much Time. We need to start working now. Today is Centerday. The Official Conditional Beneficial Absolute Judicial Hearing is to be held on Wonderday. Next day, I'm out. Back down Beyond South. And them ain't fucking around. If I don't catch that flying saucer on Time, ...well, they promised – in writing – that they will torture M.E. through life to death. Maybe even through death to life again. Bring M.E. back like they did you,” his wide dark eyebrows arched and his eyes danced around a fire, naked.

Someone in a shaved head and brown kimono interrupted them with a harmless whisper. “Would you mind something to drink?”

Bastard pointed at Miguel's glass, trying not to appear too anxious. The stranger turned around and left.

M.E. pushed his glass towards Bastard, who smiled, dehydrated. He took a decent hit and slid it back. Some Time passed. Others stayed.

“All right,” Miguel began. But then M.E. had to pause at the return of the attender, who set down a glass with Bastard's whiskey. He tasted it good.

Bastard and M.E. hadn't seen each other since B ran that stretch, and that was years before he first died. The conversation meandered through the evening. Getting high and getting drunk, they caught up and talked a lot of shit. Love was clear.

“All right,” Bastard resumed. “You gotta tell me: who are you testifying against? What's the case?”

“Ah yes! You'll like this: me.”¹

“What?”

“You heard M.E..”

“All right. Go on.”

“Remember the Guns and Butter Scandal of 293?”

“How could I forget? It was all over the announcements some Time ago.” Bastard paused. He looked at M.E., who leaned in a fraction of a degree to confirm his singular role orchestrating that scandal. Bastard grinned and exclaimed, “Ha!”

“That’s right! They have no idea, of course. They’re looking for a highly developed being named Newt ‘Newt’ Humbert. Clever little fellow. And I have hard evidence against the man – enough to put him away for all rotations to come. So they’re bringing M.E. in as an I Witnessed.”

Bastard’s grin widened beyond what seemed physically possible, or at the very least proportional and comfortable. “And you’re not afeared they might catch onto you?”

“First of all, no,” M.E. nearly offended! “Second of all, no. Thirdly, the information that I have for the Court will lead them to conclude, beyond a Shadow of a Doubt, the absolute and unquestionable guilt of one Mr. Newt Humbert – while at the same Time leading them further and further down the wrong track course that they’d have to pedal seventy-twice at point four three seconds per horn rim on a tiny tandem bicycle before they could catch up with M.E..” Bastard’s friend snickered. “Fourthmore, if you remember, I wasn’t here when that shit went down. I’d already been Exiled...” M.E. looked around the room.

“So...okay. Aight. Quick though – for the record –

1. M.E. can say the word "me" in this context because he's not talking about M.E. (he's talking about Newt Humbert).

Newt Humbert's a dude, right? Not a slimy little amphibious creature?"

"Yes and no. He is a person-man. He's not little, but he is slimy and slightly amphibious. It's his real name though, for real. I mean, I gave it to him. He's my creation. So he doesn't exist outside of my mind, then theirs, and now yours."

"So why do they call him 'Newt?'"

"What? That's his first name. Just call him Newt. You don't have to say 'Newt.'"

The bald kimono arrived with more liquor juice. When s/he left them, Bastard considered aloud, "So, officially, you are here for this official reason, which is not an officious reason for your being here, nor for my being to hear. I don't think I get it, my dear friend. You have nothing to benefit from testifying in the Guns and Butter Trial. And as much as I know that you love me, I'm ware awell that I'm not the soul purpose for your detourn to the Nation.

"So...am I within reason to conclude that you intend to benefit from this visit otherways?" Bastard pawed his whiskey glass, spinning it in its approximate place. With his eyes, he looked at M.E.'s eyes. "What are you doing here, for real for real?"

"Well, Bastard: we have work to do. I need your help organizing the Organization's new operation for organized confusion. Needed to see you in person, and wanted to be here for the initial stages. I need your help putting together a crew."

"What do we need?"

"We need an operator, a safecracker, a master planner, probably one or two form-fitters, a munitions specialist, a cat burglar... Other needs will present themselves. I have Haile Leburik and Doctor Diemande already on board."

“Consider it done. What’re we talking about?”

“Free-Enterprise 999. You passed a billboard on your way here.”

“As you know.”

I nodded, but said nothing.

“F-E 999 is our key to the lock on the door that opens to a room full of balls. I need you to look into F-E 999, find out everything you can. Who they are, where they are, what game they’re playing, how they keep score. All that shit.”

“What’s our endgame?”

“Can’t share that yet. Of course, I can, but I don’t want to, I guess, probably because it isn’t important at the moment. I’m waiting for some news from the South; then, we’re on. Your immediate mission: find us a way into F-E 999’s main control room. We need to get in there to fuck with their pooters. I don’t know how we’ll manage this, but I have no doubt in your abilities. You will always be the most charming con I know, Bastard; I am certain of this and little else.”

“Thank you for your appreciation,” he replied. “What do we have on them already?”

“Quite a lot, my lighter-skinned brother. But I have even more than that.” Bastard waited for M.E. to continue. “I’m confident that I know what they’re up to...and if I’m right, then we are in a position to make enormous balls. It’ll be our biggest job to date. Serious risks. Elephantine returns.” M.E. smiled. “And judging from your current listing in the Cellephonic Peoples-Locator Handbook, you could use the balls.” Pause. “What’s the fuck is you doing as a private dick, anyway?”

“Why? You think I should go public?”

“Ha,” they giggled.

“But for real, to answer your question: nothing.”

Bastard proudly desponded. “I’ve had this business card for several hands now – haven’t had the opportunity to play it. No work yet.”

“That’s wonderful!” M.E. congratulated his friend.

“Yes, it’s been great,” Bastard smiled. “Back to the footwork in hand. I’ll get on top and underneath this F-E 999 shit, and I’ll put together a crew. You said the trial come Wonderday?”

“Yeh man. Gives us five switches to launch this shit. Not nearly enough Time, meaning way too much. Meantime, I have to go about the preliminary procedures for the trial. I’ve several meetings with my lawyers, my lawyers’ lawyers, the prosecutor’s lawyers, their lawyers’ lawyers, their lawyers’ mothers, their mothers’ daughters, the lawyers’ daughters (that’s personal, actually, not business); and the legal representatives of Guns, as well as of Butter, plus the newly formed Coalition for the Protection of Civic Oppression by the Citizens’ Interests Representing the Production, Preservation, Propaganda, Distribution, Anti-Abolition, and Fair Trade of Dairy Products and Firearms. And of course Newt Humbert’s lawyers, who have no apparent scruples defending someone they’ve never met and never will, who’s definitely guilty, and who won’t be at the trial, because he doesn’t fucking exist.” The two friends shared a double smile, on a cone, with rainbow sprinkles. “Leave now, and return even sooner with your findings and our crew.”

Bastard downed the rest of his grain and stood up, reaching into his pants. “Put your balls away, it’s on M.E.” They shook hands. “F-E 999. Get into it, deep. This part is all you. We need to get in there. I’ll see you tomorrow at thirty seven, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

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