

Night Life
By Chris Zell

Chris, you didn't forget to meet us at the studio, did ya?"

"Of course not." I lied to my answering machine.

"We need you to clean up the mess we've made. Are you there? If you're there pick up the phone."

Why do people say things like that to an answering machine? Is it instructions in case I've had a total brain melt? 'Oh, geez, that's what I'm supposed to do. Thank God for friends like you.'

People leave their answering machine on to collect messages when they're not home. Or, if you're me, because you don't want to talk to most of the dingbats that call. Don't get me wrong, I'm just as friendly as the next guy. Well, if the next guy snarls at people he passes on the street. In that case, yes, I am as friendly as the next guy.

"Chriiiiiissssss," the next message begins. "Did you forget that you're supposed to meet me at the Rock Stars tonight?" Is it me or did you also notice that both messages revolved around the word forget? I thought so. Maybe these people know something that I don't or maybe I know it but I've just forgotten. That's more likely. I think.

"Is this on? Hello. Dave Levine. Hello. Testing, testing, 1,2,3. Ahhhh. Dave Levine. Its Dave Levine. Itsssss, 5:45. I'll be home until I leave."

"I guess that was Dave. I wonder what I forgot to do for him."

"Mr. Zell, this is the Acme Collection. . ."

"Pass." I say hitting the magic fast forward button.

". . . and if you don't pay. . ." Zip through a little more.

"Its reggae time.

When I was a young boy
I had a friend named Chris
We used to write the reggae
And then we'd take a piss

Hi Chris, its just me calling to tell you that I feel silly. And I need some help with the close of that song."

"Holy sheep shit, Batman, its George." George and I wrote songs when we worked at the same advertising agency a long, long time ago.

"You don't know how long it took me to track you down."

"Oh, how long, George? Three minutes? I've had the same number for ten years." I say talking back to the answering machine. I wonder if anyone else does that? I sure hope so.

"How've ya been? Not that I really care. Well, I'm going to be at The Room tonight. I'm going to be dressed as Zorro. I love Halloween."

"Uh, George, its not Halloween." And people worry about my brain.

"I know its not Halloween," George reads my mind. "But I just can't wait. See ya if you're there."

Sounds logical. For George. There were a few other messages of varying importance and then I got ready to go out.

"Ready to go Chris?" Doug looks at me. I guess I'm ready, I've got clothes on. I nod. "Are you going to wear that?" I look at myself just to make sure that I do have clothes on. It's been a bad year. Sneakers, jeans, shirt, yep, I'm dressed.

"You can wear anything your little heart desires, you yuppie scum." I say to the salesman of a client. If you think I'm being hard on the man, let me tell you, I haven't even begun.

It's not that I don't like this guy, it's just that I wasn't planning on having a body guard tonight. We were sitting in my office talking about a project and Doug says,

"What are you doing tonight? I hear that you're a wild man." I've known his boss for a few years and he's always making up things about me.

"Its an exaggeration. Your boss, Ron, has no photos. I wasn't even in the state at that time. And I've never met the person in question. That's my story and I'm sticking to it."

"Huh?" Confuse your opponent, it makes the game more fun. "Well, Ron says. . ."

"Would you like to hear what Ron says about you?" Doug's face gets hard and squishy at the same time. Kind of like an over ripe melon.

"Ur, ah, well, he, ah, we're good buddies."

"Do you want to hear or not?" I'll clue you in that Ron hasn't said much about Doug. But I know that Doug's paranoia level pins the meter. And I'm just the guy to use that.

"Yeah. NO! Oh, OK, what does he say?" Now in the fine art of driving someone crazy, it's best to keep it simple. Let their mind do somersaults through the broken glass. So, in keeping with that tradition, I say,

"Nothing." He jumped back like it was a major boo.

"Well, that's good." Then he ponders for a second. "Or is it?" See, one word is worth a thousand nervous twitches. "Well, if I was doing a good job Ron would say something, wouldn't he? Or maybe. . ." I let him ramble on for a few minutes just adding sympathetic smiles from time to time. OK, so the smile was really my 'what a putz' smile. A few minutes and a lot of released time released perspirant later Doug repeats, "What are you doing tonight?"

"I've got to make a few stops." I say as my mind struggles not to scream out, 'Its nothing you'd enjoy, you newt.'

"We should hang out more. It'd be fun." About as much as French kissing Bella Abzug. I just sit there nodding, smiling and looking for a way out. It's close to closing, he'll tag along in whatever I do, my only hope is to lose him early.

"Well," I say as my razor sharp mind races to figure a way out of this. Nope, nothing. Blank as a fart. I guess I'm in for a night of, wait, just then something pops in my brain. Oh, I mean pops into my brain. "We could go grab a beer at a place around the corner." I figure one beer, I'll say I'm late and crawl through the bathroom window.

"Great." Isn't everything in the eye of the beholder? Don't get me wrong, I like Doug. It's just that I can't remember one conversation I've had with him. He's the kind of guy that surprises you when you turn around and you see he's still there.

We pile into his car and I point to the right. Doug bops off to the left. Great, two minutes into the frivolity and I'm already losing control.

"Where are we going?"

"To the strip joint."

"Oh." I look out the window and see a guy at the gas station yelling at the air hose.

"I'm a hornball from the get go."

"Oh." See, was I right? All you people hated me a minute ago and now I'm sitting next to a person who is a confessed hornball. What the hell is a hornball? I've looked in the dictionary and it's not there. But, I guess I have a living example two feet to my left. Scary thought.

We start walking to the door and the sun is right in my eyes as it drips below the building. Doug has what I guess is the generic hornball smile on his face, a guy looks at Doug and smiles. Must be a secret society. I open the door and this big guy with a full Grizzly Adams beard and a 'Here comes trouble' t-shirt on bounces this guy off one wall and banks him off the payphone smashing him to the ground in front of me.

I gently step over America's finest bouncing some poor saps head off the threadbare carpet. Just thinking about the stains on this carpet gives me the willies. I look back and see that this is a

little too much reality for Doug. Ah, the look of a lifelong suburbanite at a bouncer bouncing. There's no other look like it.

"It was your choice, dude. Just climb over them, they won't mind."

I turn and walk further into the bar. I get hit in the face with a little too much bass out of a suspended speaker. It enough to give you a nose bleed. As I open my eyes I see blackness. There is nothing darker than walking into a bar while it's still light outside.

After a minute Doug catches up to me and breathlessly grabs my arm and says, "Didn't that bother you?"

"Yeah, that much bass always hurts my ears."

"Huh?" Doug says bumping into me. At least I hope it's Doug. He may be a hornball, but at least I know where he's been for the last hour. "No, the fight. Weren't you concerned climbing over them like that?"

"Nah," I say adjusting to the light. Gee, everything was so much nicer in the dark. The stage is surrounded by little Christmas lights and what looks like a giant plastic sneeze guard. I guess you wouldn't want the dancers to catch a cold now would you? It makes the naked person lying on the stage look like the Manson Families Christmas Buffet. "He wasn't after me." I say finding two seats.

We sit and I watch the rare American Hornball in action. Each dancer, as they are euphemistically called, was the recipient of a critique of the form and function from this fellow human.

"Whoa, looka dose tits!" Was probably the highlight of his art.

We sat there for a while and this one dancer started to stare and spit remarks at Doug.

"All you do is stare." She stomps her black leatherette spiked heel on the stage. "Why don't you do something useful?" She says flipping her ass into the air. I laughed as I thought of the psycho-sexual ramifications of this act. Nah, I laughed because I thought Doug was going to piss his pants.

"What should I do?" Doug says out of the corner of his mouth. His eyes locked on the frowning dancer.

"Give her a dollar and she'll leave you alone."

"In all the years I've been coming to strip joints I've never given anyone any money." Doug says as his eye begins to twitch.

"Well, I guess you'll just have to shoot her."

"She keeps staring at me."

"Maybe she wants you." This got his attention. No matter what he's said about this girl, if she said 'crawl' he'd fall over his tongue to get there.

"You think?"

"No you dickhead," I say reaching into my pocket. I must admit that her petulant act was starting to get on my nerves. And anyway, her body odor was starting to flow this way. "Here," I say handing him a dollar. "Give this to her and she'll go pick on someone else and you can relax your butt cheeks and get that fart out. You look a little uncomfortable."

The dollar bill in his hand must have been electrified. He was totally confused. I think that, to make it easier for the remedial in the audience, strip joints should have instructions on how to place a dollar. 1) Get you lazy ass off the chair. 2) Walk to the protective sneeze guard that keeps our pristine entertainers from coming in contact with you slime heads. 3) Fold the bill (no change accepted but we do take all major credit cards). 4) Place it on the protective sneeze guard. 5) Get the fuck back into your seat before the bouncer comes over and smashes your tiny brain into window putty.

"Place it." I say pointing in the general direction of the stage. "I've got to be going."

"I've never done this before."

"You've never said anything smart either, but you don't let that stop you." He looks at me, the snarling stripper, the dollar in question and the five feet between him and the stage. It's a vision quest.

I look down to see that my beer is gone and before I look up, it's over. He's done it ladies and gentlemen, the dollar has left the building. In a move that would have impressed even the most jaded athletic supporter, Doug half stood, lunged, placed the bill on the top of the plastic and retreated all without leaving his chair. I think that the pressure of the impending fart has seared the chair to his ass.

"Where to next?" Doug says flush with victory. It's at this point that I realize it's inevitable that Doug hangs with me and my friends make him a target for all their jokes. As I think about that, I see that it's only fair. Why should I have all the fun?

The line around the Rock Stars circles around the block. Its times like this I like knowing the right people.

"Look at that line." Doug whines as he zips his fly after peeing beside a dumpster. Now take a look at this picture. Doug is the perfect son of Mr. and Mrs. Upwardly Mobile, Alabama. Well tailored, neat, today's man. I, on the other hand, look like the love child of Joan Jett from the Blackhearts and Steve Tyler from Aerosmith. My pants have a big hole in the ass (I'm not being fashionable, I need a raise), my sneakers are battered and who pisses on the dumpster? Isn't

America a wonderful country? The man who pisses on the dumpster will be called sir during some part of the evening and I'll probably end up in jail.

"Don't worry." I say trying to stay one step ahead of him.

"We'll never get in."

"Man, stop whining. I hate that." I say as I walk to the front of the line.

"What do you want?" The doorman glares at me. Have you ever noticed that in dives the people at the door are called bouncers and at upscale establishments they're called doormen. To me they're all big goofy guys with no necks. Check for yourself, they don't have necks. I think they breed them that way.

The doorman shoulders past me and smiles at Doug. "Good evening sir, what can I do for you?" Now I may not be a big guy, but I know that I'm standing three inches from this walking steroid bottle.

"I'm with him." Doug says and doorman bends over me and looks confused. Rock and roll does that. I was at a restaurant one night and Dad, AKA Steve Tyler, was stopped at the door because of the way he was dressed. Now he's not sure who I am, but I could be someone who could get him into trouble.

"Ummm, how may I help you?" Did you notice that there still wasn't a sir there? I've got to get a better tailor. Nah.

"I'm on the list." The doorman turns around his clipboard and asks me my name. There it is. He gives us our VIP stickers and waves us into wonderland. I put the sticker in my pocket and Doug sticks his right on his lapel.

I walk into the club and Doug is right on my ass. Like he's afraid that we'll get separated and he'll be thrown out as an impostor. Hell, if that were the case the VIP section would be all but empty. Doug gets closer to me.

"Yo Doug, I didn't know you were circumcised?"

"Huh?"

"Could you back off a bit? I think I've met too much of you now."

The Rock Stars all over the world look alike. They all have Jimi Hendrix's guitar that he used at Woodstock, John Entwistle's bass from Tommy, all that fine stuff. And it's all certified real. Right from the star themselves. Yeah, sure.

"Chris, glad to see you made it." Chip says passing me. He's a small time record producer who lures youngsters into believing that he's a mover and picks up has beens who are too fucked up to understand what they're signing. The prototype music sleaze.

"Yeah." I say wiping my hands on my shirt. And you wonder why musicians dress like they do. It's so they don't have to worry about ruining nice clothes when they run into all the slime.

"Have you had anything to eat?" You'd think he owned this place. "Why don't you get yourself a drink."

"Gee, thanks. Now why didn't I think of that?"

"Bennie's in the VIP Room." Bennie Sane is the guest of honor tonight. Another has been for the roster. "Why don't you go say hi. I know that he'd like to see you. He liked the story you wrote."

"Yeah." Just what I want to do, go and talk to a guy who needs to rub the two good brain cells together just to remember that he has to piss. "Where's Lenny and Joyce?"

"I don't know." Chip says as he flies off to ooze on someone else.

"You've met Bennie Sane?" Whoa, geez, I'd forgotten Doug was here.

"Yeah," I say looking at and smiling at the same faces that seem to be at any party that has free food and drink. That means that the place is crawling with journalists.

"Hi Chris." I could smell her coming. Deena is a legend in her own mind and body. Or is that uses her body to get into the minds of legends? I get so confused at these things.

"Look at that!" Doug says into my other ear. "You know her!" I think he's more impressed that I know someone with tits the size of a Yugo than with Bennie now.

"Hi, how's it going?" I'm not real good at small talk. Doug bumps into me. I'm assuming that he wants me to introduce him to Deena. "This is Doug." She looks at him. He pants. She goes through her mind to see if he's someone she should sleep with. I wait a second. Nope, she blew him off like a tissue on a fan.

"Hhh." Deena says the hi that used when you don't want to get involved.

"So," I say as her dress slips off her shoulder. "What are you doing now?" I moved her a little to the left. Not because I wanted to hang on her every word, but because Doug was drooling on my shoulder. I may shake hands with slime, but please don't drool on my shoulder.

"Well, I've got some articles coming out in Chip's magazine. By the way, your article was great." OK, so he may be slime, but he pays on acceptance. I've never said I was any better than this human dredge that I associate with. Just quicker to put it on paper.

"Thanks." I say as I take my drink from the passing waitress. Someone waves to me from across the room, but the glare from spot light shining on a prescription that Dr. Nick gave to Elvis makes it tough to see who it is.

"Besides that, I've been working as a security guard at the Grand Ritz." She gives me the resume of everyone in the music business. Working some worthless job because you're too hip to get tied down to a real job. Or too stupid to get a job that pays over minimum wage?

"Cool. Well, I've got to find Lenny."

"He was in with Bennie last time I saw him." She leans over to kiss my cheek and one of her tits bops out of the dress. I actually heard Doug's body go BOING. "What are you doing after the show?"

"Supposed to go to The Room. Gotta meet some people there."

"Oooooo, I love Swimming In Circles."

"Don't you get dizzy?" I knew what she really meant, they're one of the bands that's playing tonight, but I like to see that totally bewildered look on her face. But she regains herself like the true trendoid she is (if they don't like it or understand it, it doesn't exist) and asks, "Don't you have something to do with that band?"

"Yep. Named them and write their songs." I smile looking over the crowd. Everyone seems to be smiling. They all can't be this da "*****"?mn happy. It's got to be something in the water.

"Great, how'd you get that name?" She asks looking over my shoulder for the next person to network with. With a wave I know she's found him.

"When Gary couldn't use his arm I got tired of everyone asking me how he was doing. One day someone asked me how he was doing and he just caught me at the wrong or right time and I said that he was doing fine. As a matter of fact, he was taking up swimming therapy. The guy says, 'Oh, that's great.'

'Yeah,' I said. 'But there's only one problem.' So the guy tries to figure out the problem.

'He keeps getting his arm wet?' He guesses.

'Nope, the problem is that he keeps swimming in circles.' After a few snickers, the kind I get when people try not to encourage me, Deena says,

"You're sick."

"So I've been told."

"All right then, I'll probably see you there."

"Uh huh." I say as she leaves with a wiggle and a gaggle of bosom.

"Where do you know her from?" Doug scares me again. I'm just not used to seeing him in this situation. It's like seeing a priest at a heavy metal concert.

"Around." In music that's considered an appropriate response. Mainly because you really can't remember where you met this person.

I look at Doug and he is like a kid in play land. Now that he has my attention he points out people and asks if they really are who he thinks they are. There are so many wanna bes of just about every rock star that it takes a seasoned eye to suss it out.

"Yes; no; no; yes; yes; yep, that's the whole band; nope, he's been dead for a month now." And on and on until we wandered over to the rarefied air of Bennie Sane.

"Hey, bloody good story on me, mate." Bennie struggles off the bar stool to shake my hand.

"Thanks, I'm a good fiction writer."

"Hahahahhohohahaha." And everyone joins in. Even if they didn't hear the joke. "You're a funny bloke." He says slapping me on the shoulder spilling his beer on my shirt. See, it's not that musicians are slobs, it's just that they dress defensively.

"Hey, Ben," I say turning him slightly. He gets a dazed, disoriented look. Oh wait, that's his normal look. Sorry for the interruption. Back to the story. "Why do you use that phony English accent? You were born in New Jersey, weren't you?"

"Aurrrgh," he points in my general direction. "Sometimes you go just to far, Chris."

"Ain't no such thing, mate." I smile at Bennie as everyone in the circle gives me the evil eye. How dare you disrupt the legendary artist before a performance is the look I'm getting from everyone. Maybe I should get another free beer before they kick me out.

"Hahahahhohohahaha." Comes the patented Bennie Sane laugh. "You kill me. Are you going to be around after the show? Some of us are going to have dinner at Steve's." He taps me on the shoulder as he staggers up to be inducted into the Rock Stars hall of fame. What that means is he gives them a piece of useless equipment and they quickly put it in storage.

"Maybe. Have a good show, Ben."

In seconds the VIP room empties. All that's left is me, a bartender and a girl slumped over on a poofy red chair. Oh, wait, Doug's here too.

"He seems to know you really well." Doug sits in the seat that Bennie was just in. I swear I saw him swoon.

"Nah, in a week he won't remember me. Its just that we've been running into each other lately."

"It was great to meet him." Doug starts looking towards the door. You can hear the sounds of people moving towards the stage. "Should we get up there?" He has that expectant look on his face. Like he's missing something.

"Sure." I say as we walk up the stairs to listen to Bennie and the Retch.

We hit the segregated VIP area and this neck less guy stops me with a hand, a very large hand, on my chest.

"This is the VIP area." He says to me as Doug stutter steps by. It's that suit thing.

"Wait a second," I say reaching into my pocket. "Here it is." I hand him the VIP pass.

"OK, my man, just doing my job."

"No harm, no foul." We laugh and he stops a waiter and asks me what I want.

"Most of these people would have a fit if I stopped them." The doorman checks the passes of a few people.

"That's because most of these people are assholes."

"You've got that right. Man, I could tell you stories."

"We should get a contest together. Most obnoxious thing done in the name of music."

"That'd be funny. Here's your beer. Is that guy with you?" My neck less friend points at Doug.
"Because if he's bothering you. . ."

"Nah, its kind of my fault he's here." The first feedback of the evening starts. Let the festivities begin. Yee Haa. "Well, I'll let you get back to work. I'll stop back before I leave."

"You don't and I'll be mad." He smiles.

"Great, just what I need, a building with genitals mad at me." He laughs and pushes me in the general direction of the crowd.

"I didn't think he was going to let you in." Doug says with more concern than necessary. Think of it this way, if you were that doorman, and people were giving you shit all day, wouldn't you stop someone who was breaking the rules and give them shit? Of course you would.

"No problem." I say looking for a nice place to stand. Next to a pole would be nice just behind the speakers. That way I can lean and the speakers won't ring my ears dry. I think I've done this too many times.

Lenny comes out to introduce Bennie (this rhyming thing is getting on my nerves). Just then someone comes over and taps me on the arm.

"Well, you finally made it." Its Lenny's producer Joyce. We worked together in this high tech music company that exploded one night in a vicious battle of egos. It was funny to watch three people bitch at each other while the rest of us watched and played volleyball with a balloon.

"Yep. How're things in the studio?" We both look at her boss, Lenny makes some inane jokes about a monitor. Lenny, a great guy, isn't the quickest man on the airwaves. It takes him three minutes to formulate a burp.

"Its like baby sitting a bear."

"Yeah, well, its tough to be a star." Joyce snorts at my comment and we watch Bennie start his set. It starts out ragged as Bennie trips over an invisible gremlin. It only gets worse so I'll let you hum your favorite tunes as I get on with the story. Hey, I like that song.

"Hey, um, who's that guy there?" Joyce whispers. In music you don't like unknown people standing too close to you. It's just a general paranoia that's prompted by the fear that you could trash someone and the stranger standing next to you could be his brother.

But, at times, strangers can create real problems. After a show some musicians were standing at the back of the club talking and this stranger wandered into the circle. No one paid that much attention. After a few minutes he asked if the guy standing next to me was the singer in the last band. I thought that was a stupid question. I mean, how many other 6 foot tall guys with black hair half way down his back and his eye lids colored with black mascara while dressed in purple spandex with sequins pasted to his chest are here tonight? Kinda narrows it down, doesn't it?

"Yeah?" The singer said. Everyone just looked around the club seeing if there was anyone more famous there.

"You were making eyes at my girlfriend." This guy with a well-stained crew shirt said as he stabbed the singer in the stomach. So, you see, the basic paranoia is well deserved.

"Is he with you?" She turns to smile at Doug.

"Sort of." I nod over to Doug and introduce them. Quickly. Joyce turns back to me and we talk about the industry. Its pretty boring. We both look at Bennie struggling to remember the words to a song he made famous years ago.

"You should have seen Lenny today." Joyce says as some girl in a leopard skin leotard shimmies like she's freezing. "A CD machine broke down and he couldn't pull off the transition of all time and he frisbeed the disk into the sound proof tile."

"Ah, well, you know Lenny. If he didn't have such a great voice he'd be selling insurance."

"And no one would be buying." With her punch line I said that I had to get a move on. Oh so many important people to watch look confused when I ask what the last book they read was. Amazingly, the winner seems to be 'Be A Guitar Hero In Thirty Days.'

"I'm outta here." I say passing Doug and shaking hands with my new friend.

"Stop in again." The doorman smiles at me and holds off a girl who's trying to get the autograph of someone just inches away.

"You bet." I say wandering through the crowd. At first the crowd seemed to actually pay attention to the flat show Bennie was putting on. Now it seems that everyone realizes that he should stay in the world of the has been. Its better to be a has been then come back and show everyone that you've lost it.

"Howdy." Lenny grabs my shoulder.

"How's it going?" I say looking back toward the stage. The bass player is looking at Bennie and shaking his head. He mouths to the keyboard player,

'A bucks a buck.' And continues to play.

"What do you think?" Lenny asks. He's a little concerned because one of his companies helped put on this show.

"He sucks." Ahhh, you can always count on me to shade my opinions.

"That's what I was afraid of. And look," he says pointing to a newspaper writer shaking his head and taking notes. Probably better notes than Bennie's hitting. "Do you think he'll trash the set?" Do the male VJ's on MTV have too much hair? Of course he'll trash the show. I just nod.

"Oh well." Lenny, a man not to let things get to him, says. I think its because he forgets it as quickly as its released. "And do I know this guy?" He reaches out and takes Doug's hand. As usual, I'd forgotten that Doug was behind me. Lenny pumps vigorously as I let them introduce themselves. I figure they're big boys.

"I'm a big fan." Doug drools. Its unseemly.

"Why, thank you, Dan." Lenny says and that's about the end of the meeting of the mind. Where can you go with an opening like that except out.

"Well," I interrupt. "Its time for me to hit the road." I shake Lenny's hand and in one quick step I reach the out of doors. It always takes my breath away after leaving a club. When you're in the club you forget that there is an outside. It's nice to see normal people doing normal things. Oh look, there's a guy vomiting on a BMW. Ahhh, normality.

"Why are we leaving?" Geez, I wish Doug would stop sneaking up on me.

"You can stay."

"That was really good." For the first time in an hour I look Doug right in his eyes and say the only thing that comes to mind.

"What are you vegetation? He's lost it." A look of horror crosses Doug's face and he almost gets hit by a car.

"Why don't you watch where you're going, dirtbag." The driver says as he hits a pothole and bangs his head on the steering wheel.

"At least he played all his hits." Doug says not noticing that he caused an accident.

"Yeah, but a juke box does it much better." I'm just tired. But I have many brain cells to kill before I sleep. And people ask me why I don't like to go out much. Oh I know, it's so glamorous to have faded rock stars burp in your ear and have people scream in your ear for a quarter inch and you still can't hear them. But I feel that you should only have so much glamour in one's life.

"Are you sure you want to continue on?" I ask Doug extremely concerned. OK, not really, but I wanted to find out so I had to ask.

"Sure. Why wouldn't I?"

"Would you like the list alphabetically or numerically?"

"You're late." A member of Swimming In Circles (or as we in the industry call them, SIC) reprimands.

"No I'm not, I'm early. I wasn't supposed to be here until tomorrow." Always remember rule number one, keep them confused. It makes it easier to escape. We walk into The Room with Doug close by.

"We go on in ten minutes." The SIC member says tapping his foot.

"That means besides being a day early, I'm also ten minutes early. I think I'll go out and come back in again." I'm searching the crowd for George. He should be easy to spot, after all he is dressed like Zorro. Just then a girl dressed like a medieval princess passes. Maybe it won't be that easy after all. Off hand, I say to the singer of SIC, "Have a nice set." And I fade into the general population.

"Hi." Someone slobbers in my ear. It's the #1 disk jockey in the area. He slobbers in everyone's ear. Especially young men. "How've ya been? Didja hear my show today? What'd ya think? Wasn't the guy I interviewed an asshole? My ratings are going through the roof." And he goes on slobbering in my ear for a minute. See, not all disc jockeys are nice and simple like Lenny.

"Nice to see you, Dick." Perfect name I think, as I pull away and suction out my ear.

"Was that?" Doug scares me again.

"Would you stop that. You're going to give me a heart attack." I grab my chest like Redd Foxx in Sanford & Son. "And, yes, that was who you thought." I wander through the club thinking about the neon colored clothes industry.

I think I'm going to run for president and outlaw neon colored clothes. What is happening to America? I remember the old days of rock and roll. Everyone wore nice respectable black. A nice color. All your clothes matched and you could wear it for three weeks without it looking dirty. OK, so after stumbling out of a club at 3 AM you were a prime candidate to get hit by a fast moving vehicle, but hey, at least you didn't assault the senses of your fellow human being with screaming lime green clothes. We had respect for our fellow man. What's the matter with kids these days?

I'm formulating the rest of my platform for the run for the presidency and then decide I shouldn't rush it, I'm not even old enough to run. And I haven't got down the sincere lying bit yet. But one day I too may be able to say, 'no new taxes,' with a straight face. You set your goals and go for them. Just as I'm getting the neon kill rule written in stone, I hear,

"AhhhhKiiiiillluuurrrrrrrrduuuuuuuuudemmmmmwhatsupooooooooo."

At the same time I feel, how can I explain this so that you get the full impact of this motion? Let's see. OK, I've got it. Walk over to a door (any generic door will do, but I'd suggest a metal one with real sharp edges. What? Don't you want the full effect? Of course not, you bunch of spectators), open it, place your nose between the door and the frame, now lunge into the door. Owwww, that hurts. For an added bonus, take a nail gun and pierce both your ears at once. Get the image now? Good.

Now, as soon as my brain stops shaking in its fragile home, I have to think about a couple things. 1) Is this person friendly? If not, go to number two. 2) Kiss your ass good-bye. If this person is friendly, go to number three. 3) If this person is smaller than you, or big and wimpy like a keyboard player, kick his balls to Pluto. If this person is bigger than you and could probably turn your spine into a party hat, smile and go to the hospital to check on the severity of internal damages.

"Yo, man, what's up?" Translation: you'd better be one big mother or my best friend in the world because I'm going to play tennis with your tongue. I turn and see Zorro. I should have known.

"Ah ha, my swine," George says waving a big, drooping aluminum sword.

"Ah ha, my swine? I don't think Zorro ever said that."

"Mine does." George says putting the sword down his pants. "I couldn't find a sheath." Maybe not, but he seems pleased with his improvisation.

"Other than squeezing my liver into my ear, what have you been doing for the past five years?"

"Nothing."

"Cool. Want to have a beer?" Whew, I'm a little tired from that background check. Time to wander to the bar.

As SIC takes the stage a local hero stops by to say hi. A local hero is anyone with a major label record contract. No matter how bad the debut stiffed. We talk about the new album and how its amazing, flawless, the label's really behind it, we had much more artistic freedom, gonna go through the roof, MTV loves the video, the production is crystal clear, etc., etc., etc. I'll translate,

'I'm scared shitless that this is going to flush and I'll be working at the Burger Shack by the end of the year.'

Just as SIC begins the haunting intro to 'Penguin Lust', one of my favorites, a girl stomps up to ask me a question,

"What kind of girl does Jim want?" Ahh, yes, Jim's going through a break up again. "You know him better than anyone. What does he want?" We both look around the club and I try to find Jim's vision.

I see a girl on the dance floor with laser beam hair and a tight, white very holy dress. A holy dress is one with many well placed holes. This one could have been the Pope. If the Pope was a girl dancing like a land bound fish.

"There." I say pointing to the Pontiff.

"That?" This girl in her working woman armor (shoulder padded suit, designer sneakers) points towards the dance floor. "That's what he wants? What's wrong with me?"

I will ignore that last question because it can only get me into trouble. There's nothing wrong with her, but even saying that will make it worse. It comes down to the fact that Jim's basically nuts. But I will give her my insights on life in general.

"Its the bug and the bug zapper thing."

"Huh?" OK, so maybe I'm getting carried away but I understand what I'm saying. Don't you? I knew you'd say that.

"The bug knows that its going to be fried because it just saw its best friend explode in a sharp blue flam8e. But it still has to visit the house of electric death."

"Huh?"

"He likes religious girls." I say as I pat her shoulder and shove her towards the dance floor. I turn to look for George. Ho, geez, there's Doug. I'm going to put a bell around his neck.

"Its all right." He nods to the music. I nod back and hide behind a pillar.

I lean on the bar and look around the room, too much neon clothes. I'm sorry if I keep harping on this, but I don't think people should dress in the colors of third world money. No wonder these countries are never taken seriously, how can you take a country seriously if they used comic books as a reference when they designed their money. And, following logic, should we take these neon pod people seriously? Of course not.

As I lean on the bar and ponder this and other important events of the world, like why all the people that go to MIT have such big foreheads. Are their brains that damn big? And where do they get dogs to pose for those paintings of the dogs playing cards? None of the dogs I've known would even let me tape them to a wall much less dress them in a suit and make them smoke. OK, so once I put a cat in a freezer. Hey, hey, just for a second, don't give me that awww, you mean guy, stuff. He looked hot. And don't tell me that you haven't thought of a little cat juggling. I knew it, you sicko.

To my left is a headbanging honey. If you don't know what a headbanging honey looks like, walk down any street in America and spot a girl in a ripped sneakers, torn jeans, a pristine Metallica t-shirt (don't fuck with the t-shirts), snarling face and plank straight dirty blonde hair.

This little headbanger is, well, headbanging under a picture of Iggy Pop with peanut butter on his chest. She looks like one of those bobbing head dolls that people put in the rear window of their car. It makes me want to walk over and whack her on the top of her head so that her head goes Booiiiiinnnnnggggg, boing, boing, boing, boing from side to side.

She must have read my thoughts because just as I smiled she turned around and snarled. For a moment I saw the red letters on her t-shirt spell out:

I never liked flies

Until I opened one'

Her parents must be so proud.

"There's a nut on the roof." A bouncer says leaning over the bar to get a bat.

"George." I smile and the bouncer looks at me.

"Do you know that idiot?" Oh great, I haven't seen George in years and I'm already guilty by association.

"Maybe." I figured I'd take the easy way out. "Is he. . ."

"Dressed like Robin Hood?"

"Zorro, he's Zorro."

"Yeah, right pal." Well, that's exactly what I'd expect. What do you think people would say if you said a friend was Zorro? Oh sure, you'd expect them to agree and buy you a beer. Yeah, sure. They'd haul your ass off to the looney bin. "Come with me." He orders.

Yep, there's George and he's hanging half way down the building by a rope. There's a cops flood light on him and he's singing.

"Hey, George." I yell up.

"Hey, Chris, the view up here's great." George waves at me. I can see the aluminum sword hanging out of the cuff of his pants. I don't know where the handle is.

"What are you doing up there?" It seems to be the question on everyone's lips.

"I'm repelling down the wall." Well, that about explains it to me.

"Repel your ass down here." Shouts up a local cop. I look over at him and the doughnut powder is shining in the spotlight glow.

"Coming at ya." George sings as he slides down the rope. The moment he hits the ground two cops grab his smiling face and toss him against the wall.

"Can I talk to him for a minute?" I ask shouldering my way through the fairly hysterical crowd. You've got to admit that its stunts like this that make you life long fans.

"Are you his counsel?"

"Sure." I say walking him three feet towards a dumpster. There's nothing in the world like a dumpster in the middle of summer. I remember when I was young, all the kids would search the world for that perfect dumpster to play in and around. Then the owner of the dumpster company put those little yellow stickers on them: Do Not Play In Or Around The Dumpster. Boy, that sure ended my childhood.

"Are you wasted?" I ask the first question that comes to mind. Oh, like you'd have asked if he'd switched from vinyl to CD's yet.

"Nah, I was bored and found a door open and took it. You know," he said turning us into a semi-circle. "It lead right to the liquor room." His eyes are actually vibrating. Either that or the dumpster fumes are making me woozy. "So, oh, by the way, I'm having a party tomorrow and I want you to come."

"Sure." If you're out of jail in time.

"What was I saying, oh yeah, so I took a case of scotch and I was so happy. But then I figured that they would just let me walk out of the club with a case of scotch." Make's sense to me so I nod. "So I figured that I would keep trying to go up. It was incredible, Chris, I found the door to

the roof. So there I am dancing around the roof. You know, the roof really shakes when the bands playing."

"I'll take your word for it. So, tell me," I can see that the cops are getting edgy. The sugar rush must be wearing off. "Where's the scotch."

"That's the beauty of the whole thing." I'll just bet it is. "I tried to repel while carrying the case, but I just couldn't get a good grip."

"So, you dropped this mad fantasy and left the case on the roof?"

"What are you, nuts? Of course not," he says striking the classic Zorro pose. "To the victor goes the spoils." He gives out a Zorroesque laugh and continues with the story. The cops are now thinking about calling in the straight jacket.

"So, where is the scotch?" George grabs the back of my head and draws it close. His hat pokes me in the eye and falls off. The hat not my eye. Keep up with the story folks.

"It's in the dumpster. I dropped it in from the roof." His shoulders are shaking in a silent laugh. "And I didn't hear anything break."

"OK you two," I hear a cop call from behind us. "Let's get this on the road." He reaches George and pulls him into the squad car.

"See you at the party, my trusty companion." George gives me the Zorro good-bye wave and is compacted into the car. I wave back and laugh. Never a dull moment with George. And I guess he won't be following that Do Not Play In Or Around The Dumpster warning. Good for him. It warms my heart as I walk back into the club.

"Hey, how are you man?" I'm not even back in the club when a satin tour jacketed, all access passed, too much cologne wearing, nose pierced band manager blocks my way.

"Yeah." Hey, I think I've just invented the catch phrase of the 90's.

"Have you met my newest sensation," he leans close. "Who I want you to take into the studio." He leans back. Thankfully. "Rag Dolls." I turn to look at the new sensations and say,

"Aurrgh." Nope, I didn't see Doug this time. What I did was many times more frightening. It was a hair eclipse. These two huge girls had more hair than the entire state of Nebraska. And there wasn't just acres of it, it could achieve statehood by itself. Big, scary hair. I swear that I saw one of the girls old boy friends trapped in there.

'Help me, help me, I'm being teased to death.' I swear I heard the guy cry.

"Why don't you just call the band 'Big Hair'. At least that would be truth in advertising." I'm just staring at this perfectly geometric pair of heads. Besides hair that could trap low flying aircraft,

they're also dressed like Racquel Welch in the movie 'Two Million Years B.C.' Kinda like Pebbles Flintstone on the prowl for a new Bam-Bam.

As soon as I regain my composure, I start to assess the situation. These girls aren't really that big, it's just with three feet of hair and six inch stiletto heels, they look like they'd rip the spleen out of those glamour boy wimps in those pseudo heavy metal bands. But even without the hair there's still some scary shit going down.

"So, what about it? Ya gonna take my beauties into the studio?"

"Are there any other members of the band?" I want all the facts before I jump to conclusions.

"Yeah, three other beautiful ladies of rock and roll." Does this guy sound like a walking ad or what?

"Sorry it's a no go." See, I know all the hip phrases.

"But why?" The manager whines as the girls pout in stereo.

"I don't know a studio in the world that's big enough for all that hair. Maybe we could rent Vidal Sassoon's." I start to walk away.

"I'll look into that." The manager calls.

I start to take one last trip into the vast wasteland called The Room. Just a normal night. I stop for a second to allow this frat boy to bound into me.

"Herada sorpid." Don't ask me. I just report the facts. I'm going to take a shot in the dark though. He either said,

"Gee, I'm awful sorry that I bumped into you." Or,

"I think I swallowed my tongue." I knew I should have taken the course frat babble when I was in college.

I look at his eyes and I swear to you that I see Magic Johnson slam dunk them shut. One second this guy is standing there having a debate with himself on the advantages of sucking up to debutantes with a straw (and losing) and the next minutes he's in slam dunk heaven.

"Skiiiiippppppyyyy." I hope this is one of his friends weebleing (cause you know, weebles wobble but they don't fall down) over to him. "This is increduable." Again, I'm just reporting what I hear. Wouldn't it be terrible if they were speaking properly but my hearing was going? Oh yeah, like you'd really care. And you call yourself my friend. But, with that last vowel, Biff's friend touched him ever so lightly, well, lightly for a bus, on the back of the head.

WHOOFBAP.

That, my friend, was the sound of Skippy hitting the floor. Face first. The straw jets up his nose. But he never let go of his beer. A trooper to the end.

"Wha hapes?"

"I think Skippy's made one too many kamikaze runs tonight." I say strolling past

"Wha a fuckin' great plan. A kamikaze run. Wanna join me?" I decline but thank him for the offer of having him vomit on me later. You know, there's nothing like the people you meet at a club. It's like hanging around a contagious disease ward.

"Hi." This girl just appears in front of me. I really should pay more attention. I nod. "Are you Steve?"

"Nope," I smile. "Got the wrong person." I smile. And start moving away.

"Are you from Virginia?"

"No." I smile and edge by a couple fighting or loudly making out, it gets so confusing sometimes.

"Are you good with mechanical things?"

"What?" She's got my attention now. Don't you want to see how this comes out? I knew that you would.

"Well, Steve is good with mechanical things and you look so much like him. He fixed my car, you know."

"No, I can't really say that I'm good with mechanical things. As a matter of fact, the state won't let me turn on a light without proper supervision. And we won't even talk about using kitchen utensils."

"Gee, that's too bad. Is it a hassle?"

"Only when I get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom and I can't get the door open. It can get pretty tense."

"I can imagine." And, it's true, she does look like she's imagining that. "Maybe you're related. We should call him to see if you're related." I look at her with my most sincere face on. It's the one where my eyes are misted over with the wish of a better life for all men. And then I spit.

"Yes, but aren't we all related in this crazy, metaphysical world of ours? Oh, I have to get the government agent, I've got to work my zipper." I turn at the end of the bar and I see, yep, Doug. It's my chance to sneak up on him. I tap him on one shoulder and fake to the other. It's an old trick but hey, it got to be a cliché by being great in the first place. Doug looks left. I tap and

move right. Gee, he's really goofy. Most people catch on after the first one. Now I guess I've got to go for the record. Again. And again, when will this madness stop? Right now, I'm sorry but there's only so much fun you can have at the expense of the terminally whacked.

"Hi." I figure a simple greeting would be best.

"WHAT?"

"Having fun?"

"I SHOULD GET MORE SUN?"

"Having some problems with your ears?"

"THANKS, BUT I JUST ORDERED ANOTHER BEER."

I know what's really happening here boys and girls and I take his arm to lead him out. It's a temporary (I think) situation. It's like the first day that you work out after six years of watching Beverly Hillbillies reruns. The next day you hope you don't get an itch anywhere because you know that you won't be able to reach it. Watch people on the trains, if their eyes are a little bugged out and their arms don't swing back and forth when they walk, they just started to workout. I point this out because these are perfect people to rob.

We get outside and Doug's opening and closing his mouth like a grouper fish. He opens that grouper fish mouth and says,

"WANNA GET SOMETHING TO EAT." And he's answered by a guy a few yards back in the parking lot.

"YEAH, I'LL MEET YOU IN CHINATOWN."

"HEY, BUDDY, I'M NOT BEING A FUCKING CLOWN."

"YOU'D RATHER GO TO CHARLESTOWN? OK."

"Get in the car." I wave to the guy in the other car as he heads off to Charlestown.

"DO YOU WANNA EAT?"

"You wanna pickle my feet?"

"OK, THAT SOUNDS GOOD." God, my ears are starting to ring,

"Doug, watch my lips." I say as I lean real close to his ear. "YOU DON'T HAVE TO YELL. I'M TWO FEET AWAY FROM YOU."

"Oh," he says a little bewildered. He didn't realize that he was screaming. He can't even hear himself talk. With everything he's said tonight does it really matter? I didn't think so.

Because of the volume of conversation, I just direct the real man's way. I grunt and point. We get there in a few minutes, but Doug decides to search for that perfect parking space. He found a vacant street just around the corner from the restaurant. As he pulled in I saw a guy standing on the corner and I recognized him. Doug turned the car off and started to get out.

"Doug, I don't think we should park here."

"Yeah, they'll have pork ribs."

"No," I watch the guy pretend he's not watching us. "Don't park here." I shake my head, point at the car and make the international sign for 'don't do this' or illegal contact with a baseball bat. This international sign thing always confuses me.

"It'll be fine."

"See that guy?" Doug nods. "I worked in this area and that guy steals cars."

"Why would he steal my car?" Doesn't that sound like a line from a Friday the 13th movie? 'Jason would never think of looking for me under the thrashing machine in the deserted barn.'

"I'm just telling you that you should move your car."

"You're just being paranoid. Let's go eat." I shake my head and we head towards the restaurant. As I pass the guy he smiles and nods.

We walk by a cop and Doug takes that as a sign of encouragement.

"See, no one would steal a car with a cop standing right here." Doug, I have come to the conclusion, spends too much time in the suburbs.

"Hey, buddy," the cop taps Doug on the shoulder with his night stick. "Did you just get out of that car?" We turn around to see the car head towards the expressway and a waving arm out of the driver's side window.

"Oh shit, my car." Doug screams grabbing both mine and the cops' shirts. We both shake him off. "Aren't you going to do anything?"

"What do you want me to do?" The cop says taking out his radio. "Chase it?"

"Oh, no. What am I going do." Just then a squad car turns the corner. Two cops get out of the car.

"Not you again?" The cop who took Zorro away says.

"Nice to see you again, officer."

"Someone stole your car?" One boy in blue asks a frantic Doug. He's actually bouncing on the street.

"Yeah, why aren't you doing something?"

"We are." The doughnut cop states taking out a book. "What's the license?" Doug starts to rant and rave until I grab his shoulder and explain to him that this happens every ten seconds and the quicker you give them the information, the better chance you'll have of recovering your car. I don't believe any of that, but it gets Doug in an information giving mood.

"Oh, and one more thing," I say. "I told you so." OK, so I'm not a big enough person to let that go. Like you would have been the perfect being. I didn't think so.

"How are you going to get home?" Doug asks as the second person I know enters that squad car tonight.

"TAXI." I wave one down, get in and say, "Home."