

iF

a cautionary play
with video

by
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For Cassey

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iF

The play is written so that both of the roles may be played by either sex so the use of dual pronouns is present, if they is more appropriate, go right ahead and us that. Please use whatever is appropriate. There are only two characters:

- 1 an accomplished scientist
- 0 another accomplished and very famous scientist, sometimes rival, former friend, gradually dying of ALS disease

There should be a very minimal amount of scenery, a chair here or there, a podium, but there is a motorized wheelchair for 0. Video screens can be scattered about as budget allows. There must be at least one large video panel centerstage, ever present. The action is continuous, and there is no intermission.

A single screen or monitor is apparent with a blip of light or snow on it as the audience enters. It should never be off throughout the entire performance. There may be, and should be, other screens or projections used as the budget allows, but this one screen must dominate the setting. As the house lights go to black, a metallic synthesizer voice is heard in the darkness.

SYNTH: Once upon a time when time was still time there lived a famous scientist. Now this was long before we were suffocated by so many stories, (if possible a cacophony of blips of light and snow dance on each of the screens) they became the same old story, and for awhile we stopped listening to them. (The screens fade) This was before our stories reinvented themselves without a beginning, middle, and an end. Just about the time we discarded beginnings and ends. Leaving only one big middle. (All snow now on the screens) But that is not the beginning of this story. This begins with a famous scientist and a highway.

The Steppenwolf song “Born To Be Wild” begins very loudly, and a moving highway appears on the main screen. A figure in a motorized wheelchair seems to be moving down the highway. His/her facial expressions never change, he/she is suffering from the advanced stages of a crippling disease, but we can tell he/she is in a frantic state. He/she is moving quite rapidly down hills and around curves, and it appears that the faintest of smiles can be seen in his/her eyes. At a crescendo in the music, the chair appears onstage and comes to a screeching halt, almost toppling over; and the man/woman almost tumbles out onto the floor. He/she has one hand on a mechanism pressing a button on what looks like a laptop computer attached to the front of the chair. The metallic voice now seems to be speaking directly from it:

SYNTH: Two skunks are at a bar having a drink, and one skunk says to the other, “how can you be sure that we truly exist; that this skunk life of ours isn’t all some great big cosmic game?” The other skunk takes a long swallow of drink, and after pondering the question for a bit, replies: “I stink therefore I am.” I am supposed to be delivering a talk right now that was going to change the course of modern history. And I was going to begin with that little anecdote. Probably better that I am here and not there, don’t you think?

Feedback noise as another man/woman appears has hit the microphone accidentally before he/she speaks out of nervousness at an important symposium.

1. Please excuse me... while I make a complete mess of this. Many of you haven't seen me in years. But we in science know to fear most what isn't visible. (*An attempt at humor as he/she is very reticent, and is speaking with great difficulty.*) I recently stumbled on a "lovingly intended" quip by one of you postulating the squandering of my "great early promise": just because there isn't an end of the earth that doesn't mean I haven't thrown myself off it. I rather liked that, exemplifies determination, if not an ability to fly in the face of convention... Speaking of conventions, I'm here because my oldest friend, one of the greatest scientists, in my humble (who are we kidding, I can hear you say in reference to humility and me) but in my opinion, one of the greatest human beings- that has- ever lived- wanted me to say a few words of introduction. But now it seems he/she is elsewhere, and may not be coming at all- and -wait- wait just a moment now- you see- unfortunately I know why.

0 AS SYNTH: (*Still typing and speaking through the machine*) So just exactly where is here? Where precisely am I? A stretch of highway that must have a location, but for me it is nowhere and means I am very lost. And indeed, I am. (*Stops typing and speaks- using his/her voice for the first time*) Here- let me stop using this damn thing. (*Referring to his computerized voice*) Can you still hear me? Perfect. I thought so. See I'm married to my machine because I have ALS or more commonly, Lou Gehrig's Disease. And gradually every muscle in my body will atrophy until it dies. Those of us with the disease eventually become imprisoned within our own physical shell. My mind however is fully functional. That is how I am able to do this- stand up and talk to you, even though I can't- so I'm going to move about (*he/she does*) whenever I please. But you must remember, in real time I am still tethered to this chair, even to breathe. Take away my ventilator and what little is left of my oxygen, and I will die. Even the simple act of breathing is ripe with conflict for me.

1. As you know our colleague was going to make history here tonight with a theorem that would have unified the universe- reconciling the very large, Relativity, with the very small, Quantum Mechanics. The heavyweight theorem that Einstein himself wrestled the last forty years of his life with, and that most of you in this room have compacted your lives and reputations to as well: A Theory of Everything.

0. We in physics spend a great deal of our lives trying to reconcile time. For us time is not just a measure of minutes, it is a living force. I remember Freshman lit in college when we read a famous short story about this soldier about to be hung atop a bridge, and suddenly the branch breaks and the soldier is freed, and he swims away, and he is running for his life. He runs all the way back to his house, I think, and into his wife's loving arms, and then snap, the rope pulls tight, and we realize the whole story was just an

instant in his mind. He was still hanging from the rope, and had only imagined he was free.

1. Crap! Why isn't he/she here? Why isn't he/she presenting his/her theory? Oh, I can hear the rumblings in the room. "Doesn't have it, does he/she. Called us together to announce the Unified Theory and then failed to crack it." Now I haven't had time to publish what I'm about to reveal, but since when did I that matter to me. I'd rather perish than publish- what it should be... (*looks for a beats at the audience, some coughs are heard*) Fuck it- (*He/she pulls the microphone closer*) I can assure you there was a theory, indeed is a theory, and I have seen it, and it is brilliant. And it would change the course of humanity. And it would certainly secure my dear friend a singular place in history, his/her own piece of perpetuation. But, you see immortality is precisely the problem.

0. That story deeply affected me. The author's manipulation of time and place, and how easily the reader's sense of reality had been distorted. So I assure you *this* whole story, the one I am telling you tonight, no matter where it goes, remember I am really just sitting here on a highway waiting to run out of air. No Twilight Zone surprise endings here.

1. Immortality... If I'm truly honest with myself, a phenomenon that happens about as frequently as Halley's comet, me being honest, not immortality. That is, or rather was, even more elusive. It is why I wanted to be a scientist- to be remembered forever. And in a moment of weakness, an occurrence of much greater regularity, I told him/her that, of my desire to live forever, and the irony is he/she laughed. "Don't be a fool, they used to tie us to rocks and have our eyes pecked out for wanting to live with the gods". Immortality was the last thing on earth he/she would have wanted. Though what have you all done? Made him/her the rock star of science, mobbed at airports, his/her own goddamn picture calendars ...

0. Do you remember the little model of the atom your science teacher would hold up with the blue Styrofoam balls representing electrons swirling around the red and gold Styrofoam protons and neutrons? "This is the building block of the universe," he or she would say...

1. Well, regardless of the fame, he/she will live forever, will never die, and it is entirely my fault. And I know he/she will never forgive me. I only hope that all of you will.

The scientist steps away from the podium hitting the microphone, causing another much louder feedback noise. The stage goes to dark as a big bang explosion is heard and an old science fair exhibit morphs into a much more sophisticated video of an atom being born appears on the screen.

0. Well I hate to tell you this but your teacher would have tossed out that cute little model years ago. Because our world has changed. Or at least our understanding of it has, deepened. There are many different forces that act upon us in the universe. There is our old friend gravity, which keeps us glued to the earth's surface, but is, in fact, the least powerful. Radioactive forces, the stuff of microwaves, electricity, lasers are much greater. Bouncing in and around and right through us even as I speak. Even mightier are the microscopic forces we never knew existed and are still hoping to understand. *(A new model of the an atom appears on the screen and the forces that are described and their power are shown.)* The Strong and Weak forces that hold particles together, that keep the atoms in this chair, my hand, your heart from ripping apart. Forgive me. It's the teacher in me; never give a teacher a captive audience. But it's wild, don't you think? All these unseen forces ganging up, doing their dance, twirling round us, even inside us, propelling us through existence. So how can we ever hope to predict the outcome of any natural phenomena? We can't. Everything we know is unpredictable and left up to chance. Quantum Mechanics, the study of those smallest particles, states that all is random, and the best we can hope for are predictable patterns. There is even a principle, named after this unsettling thought, by, I always assumed, a chronically depressed individual, a Dr. Heisenberg. And he theorized that all we know, all that exists, life itself- is forever uncertain. Einstein despised Quantum Mechanics, and spent the last forty years of his life trying to unify it with relativity. "God does not play dice with the universe", he vowed. "Existence cannot be random and left up to chance." And that is really why I became a scientist. To continue his search for meaning, to do battle with randomness, to restore rationality-causation- if there is an if, what is the why!

The fetus from the film 2001 pops onto the screen and the theme song plays.

1. The origin of anything can be traced to a single point. A singularity. Ours was a midnight showing of 2001. I expected to be all by myself. It was in the run down Olympia movie theatre, the night before freshman orientation.

0. The entire universe continues to move outward- why? Science found it.

1. And as the big fetus flashed four hundred feet high, I realized there was another person in the theatre, and that he/she had been reciting all the words to the film, like my mother did to the prayers at church. She had infinite things to say to God, but next to nothing to say to me. She had memorized the entire service, every word, especially after my father went out back one evening, kneeled down and shot himself in the head.

0. Life, as we know it, willed itself into existence from the elements, why? Science found that as well.

1. After that she was silent, never said a word to anyone the rest of her life. Only to God.

0. And yet if two random particles collide and come together, fusing into one, we may never fully understand the reason for it...

The two characters now much younger are seated near each other in a movie theatre watching the film.

1. So, our axis was the Olympia. Because I slid up behind the only other kindred soul who worshiped with me at the alter of Kubrick and said "They got it wrong, you know. Intelligence is not the enemy. The enemy is ignorance." And he didn't say a word to me, just kept transcending with the soundtrack of the movie... (to 0) "I'm a scientist myself. And I'm going to be remembered forever."

0. Really... I'm just interested in comprehending it.

1. What, the movie?

0. No, forever.

1. And that was it. He said nothing more to me, and the next day I walked into my dorm room-

0. (To audience) Two seemly random particles collide-

1. To meet my roommate and-

0. (To audience) We may never know why? (To his/her roommate) I took the bed nearest the window because I get claustrophobic, is that okay?

1. Sure. This is pretty weird don't you think?

0. One out of every twenty people suffers from some form of claustrophobia.

1. No, the probability that the only other loony tune in this hick town who'd rather sit all night through Kubrick than sleep is gonna be my roommate.

0. I relate to the tyranny of computers, that's all.

1. (Seeing one on a desk) Why is your PC out to get you?

0. In a manner of speaking...

1. Then get an Apple... Much more user friendly. The tyranny of computers?

0. *(To audience)* We've all had a hard drive crash or lost a file, but I am talking about something much more sinister. From my very first computer- now remember this was long before E-mail, long before the web, just AA. After Atari? All I was hooked up to was the wall socket of my bedroom. This started the day I was about to leave for college. I think I was playing Zork or Pitfall and I was just about to shut down *(A projection of an old DOS computer screen appears overhead. It reads: "Are you sure you want to quit? Yes. Game over.")* when I noticed something odd flash on my screen.... *(As he speaks the following it happens on the large screen.)* **I am. U- R. (pause) I am. U- R. (pause) If I am & U- R- Y? If U R & I am- we R. We- R? (Pause) if, Y. (Pause) iF, Y. (Pause) iF-** That was how it began... Those first feeble attempts... Those were the first words- code. questions, then answers... Prompts. Daring me to pay attention. Daring me to- find the solution. What better way to get a scientist's attention- the act of questioning, begs for an answer, that there is an answer. The first thing I did when I got to my new dorm room was boot up. To see if the ghost was still in the machine. Maybe driving four thousand miles had altered it, left it behind... *(The machine reboots on the large overhead screen and on it appears:)* **if we R- Y? if we R- Y? if- Y?**

The "Y?" begins to slowly fill the large screen as it begins to take over; He/she shuts off the computer; the screen snaps to a blip of light, then for the first time a black screen. The black and stillness should feel like a death.

1. What's wrong now?

0. It died...

1. Good. Trash it. I'm telling you. No tragedy. Buy an Apple.

0 picks up his/her PC and violently throws it "out of the window."

1. Gonna be a very interesting four years, I can tell.

0. Well, come on. Let's go buy a goddamn Apple.

1. And we did.

They are in front of an old Apple screen now.

1. Isn't it beautiful... Go ahead, you just push the little apple button there-

0. You do it...

1. Come on.

0. (*Very nervous.*) Please.

1. Okay, relax.

0. My heart was racing. My curiosity had quickly turned to terror...

1. (*As he/she boots it up, a joke ala Frankenstein:*) It's ALLIVVE!!

0. Was I playing Russian roulette with my sanity...

1. (*Handing it to 0.*) Alright baby, go to pappa/momma...

0. I was so sure it was going to be like the killer in those slasher movies. The machine was going to whisper: "Hello. I've been missing you; did you think you could get rid of me that easily? But nothing- just calculations and processing, the bits and bytes behaved.

On the big screen we see an early Apple start-up screen.

1. See, beautiful- much sexier operating system. And that there is the trash can. If there's something you don't like, just click on this and bingo gone...

0. And for a few years there were no problems, no more close encounters from cyberspace. And we immersed ourselves in science...

1. Like a one-room atom smasher-

0. Our two intellects collided over and over-

1. Spinning out of control.

0. They say existence is the struggle of opposing forces

1. The Ying, and yang, your bit to my byte

0. It is the binaryness, the duality of nature that gives it meaning...

1. Its electricity...

0. And I never met anyone better at calculations. Scored off the charts on the SAT. Well beyond a perfect score. Actually advised them on how to re-write a few of the questions.

1. Well, there is nothing worse than a misstated problem, with a messy set of values. I mean how difficult should it be to pose a problem with the cleanest most precise parameters. But for every equation I could solve, this one here would come up with a new variable, another proof of its validity. When it came to logic and reason, you were eons ahead of me.

0. But the most important thing was that he/she understood the secrets- the hidden private beauty of it all. Of science.

1. You can teach the fun and the magic-

0. The erupting science fair volcano tricks, but there are very few who can feel its beauty.

1. And live the awe of it.

0. When you meet someone who actually shares that passion, and I mean equally-

1. Understands without question -

0. The need for total immersion-

1. The giving over of your entire life-

0. Because you have no other choice-

1. That is what it requires of you-

0. It is an extremely exhilarating moment-

1. It is, isn't it?

0. I hope you have all had the chance to feel this. To meet a fellow obsessive/compulsive, the model makers who has built the exact same kits-

1. Or a fellow fanatic who digs the same bands and will go anywhere to hear them-

0. The moment two naked monks/nuns finally meet up-

1. Two naked monks/nuns?

0. You know offbeat, obsessive life choices-

1. Fine, but monks/nuns, who both happen to be naked?

0. When that happens, when you meet that someone, it's-
1. Rarer than good raw sex.
0. Well...
1. Trust me it is.
0. Actually you're right.
1. But it helps to have had the one to appreciate the other.
0. And it was precisely that-
1. The feeling of shared understanding, not sex-
0. Definitely not sex- Do you know I was asked that once. By a precocious reporter-
1. That's redundant.
0. Asked me if we ever had sex.
1. Sex with each other. I assume. Not ever...
0. I hadn't thought of that. No, the question was we. Did we ever have sex...?
1. And you said?
0. I said " we lived together intimately for almost a decade during what are considered the most sexually primal and exploratory years, and that we had reached a level of closeness and co-dependence untouched in most normal relationships."
1. In other words you avoided the question.
0. Well, it was none of their goddamn business. Besides thank God, in the life of a scientist, sex is a benign variable. As you said, it was the shared sense of understanding that made knowing you-
1. The most significant thing that has ever happened.
0. In our lives.

1. No, that is not what I said. I said ever. And that is what I meant. The most significant thing that has ever happened. *(There is an awkward pause. I continues the story by handing over some calculations)* Be kind now-

0. He'd/she'd always say that when he/she'd finished an equation. Be kind now, as if he/she was afraid I would belittle the quality of work. Which never happened because what I saw was usually the latest breakthrough in cosmology. *(As he/she reads them, they are now back in college)* Congratulations! It works! Your calculations prove that there is a place in the universe where there is endless time and mass, and that it exists in a single point.

1. Which is exactly what you theorized months ago...

0. Yes. I was certain it was right. For once I was so sure. As sure as Joan of Arc must have been with one of her visions. I remember feeling that I knew now why she could be so strong and sure of herself.... I was that certain. It's an indescribably powerful feeling. Certainty....

1. And isn't even possible, I mean in the physical world, thanks to Heisenberg... Well your certainty was a bitch to solve...

0. I know. But your numbers prove it. Black holes exist. You are a genius.

1. Please.... It was your theory.

0. And even more importantly. It might be the start of it all.

1. Of what? *(Teasing)* Look, just because we're roommates

0. Stop it. The start of it. Everything. The Big Bang. If you haven't fucked up anywhere here-

1. Trust me, those numbers are sweeter than sweet.

0. Then what you've done is quite possibly find the solution to how the universe started.

1. And all I wanted was an A for spring semester... You're saying its possible that from an infinite point in time and space-

0. Yes... A Singularity.

1. Nice.

0. It is, isn't it?

1. From a single point smaller than the smallest recorded size possible-

0. Exactly. From this singularity- bang- out came everything we know...

1. And bang- you and I have just made history.

0. Or at least defined it once and for all. (*They sit for a moment stunned.*) Do you think it felt this way for Galileo or Einstein?

1. Don't know. Of course they worked alone so...

0. This moment may be our life's work... one for the ages...

1. I envy you. You actually found it.

0. No silly, we. We found it together.

1. No, I mean your destiny...

0. It's yours too....

1. No. I just do the math...

0. But without that there is no work-

1. Bullshit. Without the math there is no proof. But the work is yours.

0. Come on, don't ruin this. For once in our unable-to-feel-joyful-workaholic-existence lets be happy! I feel better than great.

1. And you should-

0. The work caused an immediate sensation.

1. And I am happy. For *you*-

0. Black holes were no longer just the stuff of science fiction.

1. But what I feel is nothing like Joan of Arc.

0. We were immediately accepted into any grad school we wanted.

1. Nothing like a sense of purpose...

0. They say the only reason we didn't win the Noble was that in most states, we weren't even legal.

1. What I felt was an overwhelming sense of envy. Though I received half of the credit.

0. The published papers had both our names on them. I insisted.

1. And I allowed it. But I knew who had really owned the science...

0. And of course we went through our research and post-graduate work together. On full fellowships. Inseparable...

1. Laurel and Hardy, Antony and Cleopatra

0. Dixie Chicks

1. There were three of them.

0. Oh- see I always sucked at math...

1. But it had changed. Our work was never quite the same...

0. And one day I was racing up my stairs, it was three weeks before completing the defense of our dissertations, and our advisor said they needed another copy of my goddamn secondary sources, and climbing up the stairs to my room, I fell flat on my face. I got up and fell again, thought little of it, and stumbled into my room. And I rarely touched my computer so: *(to I)* Can you help me for a second?

1. Can it wait? I'm busy.

0. I need this now; the office is going to close. I just need a printout.

1. Then print it out. For once in your miserable life do something by yourself. I promise it won't kill you.

0. Fine. So, frustrated, I booted up my computer, and just as I was about to print, on the screen popped:

I am. U R. We R Trappd *(It does appear on the screen as he says it aloud.)*

And then it crashed.

The screen becomes full of 0 and 1's slowly a line at a time until it explodes with them. He/she cries out "No!" and yanks the computer keyboard out of the socket and throws it into the garbage can.

1. I thought you out grew that. Years ago. So what exactly reawakened the psycho serial computer killer in you? *(Pause)* I trust you at least have a backup of our dissertation?

0. Of course... I'm not a moron.

1. No, a closeted Luddite maybe...

0. You don't understand- my computer was- has been for years- trying- I don't know- to communicate with me.

1. Communicate? Gee, I really hope so. That is what they do...

0. No. I mean like it knows something...

1. You mean that we don't?

0. Yes!

1. Which is why we use them... Because they can do things, perform calculations that maybe even we- okay me, that even I can't?

0. Forget it-

1. Look, you've got to get over this phobia about computers and math.

0. Phobia?

1. Yes, you won't go near an equation without my help. I mean for a physicist- you just plain suck at math.

0. I suck?

1. Worse than suck. You are terrified by it. And you've practically used up all your fellowship getting others to type because for you to touch a computer, ooh, that would be tantamount to ushering in the apocalypse...

0. Look just because I'm not obsessed with numbers like you, just because I don't sleep with my keyboard, I don't fantasize about Fermat doesn't mean I'm arithmaphobic. That just makes me normal. In case you hadn't realized. Most of the human race despises math-

1. There, see, you admit it.

0. You on the other hand, would probably go to bed with the number pi. I mean if you actually could have sex with an equation, you would....

1. Pi? Please, give me credit for a little more taste... Now the speed of light squared, I'd that. Though it might be over before it started...

0. Wouldn't that be a blessing. Look-

He/she gets up to go, wobbly..

1. You're the wacko worried your hard drive wants you-

0. Back on the planet earth, I'm late-

He/she falls to the ground.

1. Whoa...Hey, what's up? New feet? You okay...

0. Yeah, I'm fine...(Trying to get up) Christ...

1. Are you like drunk or high?

0. Me?

1. Well, I knew it was a long shot... But there's a first for everything. That has been happening a lot lately.

0. No it hasn't. Has it?

1. Have you watched yourself eat lately? You shake so much half the food ends up on the floor... It's like Katherine Hepburn meets Joe Cocker... Must be stress. My next door neighbor used to break out in hives, but only before her driver's test, and the prom...

0. I never went to my prom...

He/she is trying to walk now.

1. Me neither. I'm good with numbers, but lousy on dates.... (0 falls again.) Ho, tough crowd. Look I know it was a lousy pun....

0. I think we'd better call somebody...

Lights shift to 1 alone.

1. Have you ever had the wind knocked out of you? Your chest deflated like a punctured rubber ball?? I made the mistake one day of walking somewhat near our high school class bully named Caesar DeCubas. Now Caesar was

heavy-weight wrestling champion of the state from his freshman year straight through to graduation, undefeated for five years. And it got to the point where you had to pity any fool who had been asked to step into the ring with him. Caesar looked forty when he was fourteen. He was made of granite, not a single fat cell on him... and not an ounce of heart inside him. Anyway, I only drag his blessed memory before you because one day after gym class, and after a game of flag football, I stumbling to the showers in front of him and some of his cronies hanging on to every word of his latest brag. As I tried to coerce my worn out muscles to keep moving, I swore I heard one of them say “He/she might know about that” and so I turned to be of assistance, and said “know what about what?” And even though I was only trying to help, Caesar took a regulation size football and threw it as hard as he could the five feet I happened to be in front of him and it hit me square in the chest right below my ribs. I was doubled over in extreme pain, trying to locate air in any direction, but there was none to be found. And as I lay on the ground turning a deep shade of blue, as if my spacesuit had sprung a leak and I was slipping into the void, I remember he stood over me and said “Listen you fucking math geek faggot nerd- (use “dyke -bitch” if a female is playing the role) I would never be caught dead talking to you. Hell, nobody would. Your old man offed himself, and your mother is a fruit loop. And who can blame them- having spurned. So don’t ever say a word to me.... Understand?” And somehow I managed: it’s spawned, not spurned. And that made him kick me one more time: “I bet you heard that”... After an eternity the air began to trickle back to me, but I was still choking from the injustice of it all... And that was exactly how I felt that night at the hospital when they told me my best friend had Amyotrophic Lateral Scierosis and would gradually wither away and die. Only this time Cesar DeCubas had fired a cannon ball at my chest rather than a football. I sat down in that waiting room and absorbed the blow and did not move until morning...

I steps into 0’s hospital room, the hospital TV is on the big screen.

0. Hey...

1. Hey...

0. They tell you? (*I shakes his head.*) Look at this...

An infomercial for Medic Alert plays on the big screen.

0. Gonna be me in a few years... I’ve fallen and I can’t get up... And here we’re worried about black holes... And what is going to really matter I can have for two quick payments of just 34.95... Do you know, I never knew my parents really. They were killed when I was two. A car wreck coming home

from the movies... Charade. Their first night out after so many at home with the new baby. It was New Years too... I was raised by my Aunt, and she died two days after high school graduation. She wasn't a bad woman, but we both knew deep down I was always an obligation, an unfair twist of fate... Okay, so I never cared much for holidays, or Cary Grant, but this is the first time I have felt so...

1. Alone?

0. Yeah, I guess.

1. Hey, who am I? Am I not in the room?

0. Yes, yes you are. And you are the only person that has ever really gotten me- understood.

1. I wouldn't go that far... Hey face it, you put up with me, so I pretend to understand. We're like a exclusive club- the people who actually eat sardines... nobody believes we exist.

0. They figure I have at best five years, so that gives us what? Eighteen hundred and twenty-five days to come up with our stupid Unified Theory. They're going to keep me until Friday-

1. So that's eighteen hundred and twenty one...

0. So I figure come Friday we work twenty four-seven, what do you say? You always told me you work better under pressure. "Never met a deadline you couldn't meet." No pun intended...

1. I say why wait until Friday...*(He/she takes out a laptop already booted up.)* It's the latest. They call it a PowerBook. Now I really could sleep with it. But I will refrain, because it's for you.

0. It's beautiful... This must have cost you a fortune. I can't except this.

1. *(uses the open lid of the laptop like a pair of lips and says:)* Please, I do know things. But don't get psychotic with me okay? I won't hurt you.

0. Okay, but it's yours... When I - can't...

1. Stop it...

0. What, it's inevitable....

1. Come on-

0. No big deal. Even super novas die.

1. Yeah, but not us...

0. Yes, even that great mind of yours, one day- poof.

1. Let's live forever, what do you say?

0. Sounds good to me.

1. No, I'm serious. Screw physics and the Unified Theory... Let's do aging, or cryogenics, or artificial intelligence.

0. Look, don't get all "Brave New World" Isaac Asimov on me... (*cutting him/her off*) and I know he didn't write that...

1. Hell, we figured out how the whole universe is going to die, we even calculated when-

0. Give or take a few million years.

1. Think of how easy one measly human carbon based life form should be.

0. This measly human carbon based life form already knows how he/she is going to die- God that's odd, I hadn't thought of that... It's a relief actually. Not many people actually get that answer. My parents certainly didn't. I even know when, give or take a few years...

1. We could do it. Set our minds to it, and we can do anything!

0. Forgive me if I don't share your Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew enthusiasm for once. I'm feeling a slight crippling of the optimism right about now.

1. The mind is just a complex calculator right? Carbon based rather than silicon. And you just have a glitch.

*The words slowly begin to appear on the screen above.
TRAPPD. U & I R Trappd. We R Trappd. Only 0 sees this and
quietly shuts the lid of the PowerBook.*

0. No, I have a virus, a major league virus. One that starts slowly and spreads until every program and all information is destroyed.

1. Not every program, no. Just your operating system. So it ought to be possible to find a way to re-wire your brain to erase the glitch, or bypass it. From now on I do nothing but computers and brains.

0. Don't be silly. We are inches away from our Phd's...

1. Says the man/woman who last night trashed our dissertation. Well, you were right. It is garbage. Hell, we should have won the Nobel years ago but that would have rocked their little safe world, Academia, cracked it right in two. Well screw them, and screw the hallowed Academy. We've put up with it for what now six, seven years, played their game, physics by the numbers, science by the books. We controlled the variables; endured lectures by teachers we should have been teaching...

0. You're just tired.

1. No, I'm wide-awake now. Been undernourished and asleep for years. But now I am absolutely sure. Last night it was my turn to have visions. Now I realize how you and Joan got so strong. You were right. A sense of purpose-of one's destiny, is a very powerful thing... I never had it before, but now I'm armed with it... Do you know why you haven't cracked your Unified Theory yet? Because they want you to- are forcing you to play by the rules. Conform to the known. But that will never work. Because 97% of our world is unknown. We live in Heisenberg's world and its fucking uncertain and unsure and unfair. And I no longer want to live in that world. In that world you will die, and I have to say fine, just take him/her, sorry folks there is nothing any of us can do about it. Well, that is not a world I want to live in, not even for a nanosecond...

0. Uncertainty. That's all we get. And we have to make the best of it.

1. Fuck certainty...fuck numbers... All they can tell you is less than or equal to. And fuck science. I am no longer interested in it. I'm through looking for answers to questions that may or may not even have an answer. The only question from now on that matters to me is what is attacking you and can it be stopped.

0. We were wrong you know... All our work. With singularities. It is continuous after all. Time...

1. I don't fucking care anymore, did you not hear?

0. How are we going to defend our work-?

1. You defend it; it's your work anyway.

0. When it's all wrong.

1. Hey, the math's not wrong, trust me.

0. No it's the concepts. I was wrong.

1. So then just tell them the truth-

0. Oh right! By the way guys, the work you've funded for the last four years, all that money, its been wasted. Because last night, as I was lying in my hospital bed, moments after receiving what amounts to my death sentence, it occurred to me that nothing in the universe can die, or is born.

1. Sounds good to me.

0. Where are you going?

1. We both have a lot of work to do.

0. But I need your help. If I'm going to rewrite everything we've done in three weeks, I'll need you. You know I suck at math.

1. Do you know for certain how fast this thing is attacking you? How much damage it has already done? How much of your brain is already under siege. It took us years to calculate the universe. I only hope mapping your brain is much easier?

0. Mapping my brain?

1. Sure, the solution is simple. Map the brain into a computer, run a program for cognitive thought and wherever the glitches are in the simulated brain, that's where the doctors need to repair yours... Isn't that how we solved the end of time? Okay so we need a good cognitive thought program, and God only knows who has been brain-mapping... *(He/she is gone)*

The infomercial continues. "So protect yourself before its too late..."

0. In five seconds he/she had started a field of cognitive science that is now considered the cutting edge. But that was his/her brilliance. Most of us followed scientific laws and tried to blaze new trails. He/she used raw intuition and discovered new worlds.

Onscreen the infomercial goes to the scene of an aged invalid who says: I've fallen and I can't get up...."

0. Almost everything in the world is moving faster nowadays... sound bites, rapid transit, fast food, multi-tasking- the signs are everywhere. We want it quicker-hurry up- in a rush-megabyte, gigabyte, terabyte, cram as much into the moment as we can. And just as the world clicked into overdrive- become

hooked on speed- I began to slow down. In just three short weeks, I had to walk in to defend our thesis using a cane- and I had to hobble into the O.K. Corral without Doc Holiday, who was nowhere to be found. Hadn't seen or heard from him/her in the three weeks since he/she decided to drop out of science. (*Addressing the panel*) Good afternoon, doctors and fellow scientists. I am supposed to begin by re-iterating the proofs of our Idea of the Singularity. But instead I would like to quote Einstein by saying that those ideas were "the biggest blunder in my life."

1. (*Appearing quickly and out of breath.*) In both of our lives. And yet does that mean our work was without merit? I think not. Because how else does science progress, if not hoisting itself atop the failed conjectures of centuries of renowned thinkers. So let us not focus on the pettiness of whether our concepts are true or not-

0. Because they aren't.

1. (*trying to steer the talk in another, less stark direction*) Rather, let us turn our attention on the beauty and complexity behind the ideas- (*to 0*) Don't blow this!

0. (*To 1*) Me? Have you had a nice few weeks? (*To the panel*) So we really needn't waste your time-

1. Of course we should. That is why we are here.

0. (*To the panel.*)To waste your time? (*To 1, but almost loud enough for the others to hear*) Am I to understand that now you give a fuck about science again?

1. (*To 0*) I give a fuck about the grant I was just promised for my work in neuroscience. My *post*-doctorate grant-

0. I see... No doctor, no grant...

1. (*To 0*) Look we both know this is a show. So let's give them their money's worth. (*To the panel*) I'm so sorry. It is hard to put into words, to explain the difficult and demanding years of work behind-

0. Our *new*_theory-

1. (*Truly surprised*) Our new theory?

0. Yes.

1. A theory so new- so brand new-

0. So shockingly-

1. New. In its newness-

0. That it often leaves my colleague speechless.

1. Mum. Gape mouthed...

0. Yes. See there are really only three possibilities for describing our universe- first that it had no beginning or end in real time, in time as we know it. Which cannot be proved mathematically, makes no mathematical sense at all really; or two, that it began from a big-bang and a single point such as our singularity-

1. Which was where we were before and could have just as easily stayed.

0. Except the math for it doesn't hold up. Is rather clumsy when you examine it closely.

1. (*To 0*) Remind me to beat you senseless with that cane after this...

0. So all of our earlier work-

1. Was crap.

0. But as we know, that is the beauty of science-

1. (*To 0*) Those long lazy afternoons, years of toiling in the shit fields...

0. Its unforgivingness, its inability to be tailored to the latest trend. Everyone was convinced-

1. As were we.

0. That this new way of seeing the universe must be true. That our theory must be sound. But the other night, actually three short weeks ago-

1. Lying in his/her hospital bed. After receiving, for lack of a better term, his/her death sentence.

0. (*Angry I would stoop to such cheap theatrics at his/her expense, less sure of what to say now, but still continuing*) That night... I realized the news was ultimately nothing to fear... for even though my body would end... in some form it would continue. For nothing begins and ends in our universe. In fact the universe itself cannot have a beginning or an end, we have proved this is mathematically unsound.

1. And as odd as this seems, and even though this sounds a lot like the first scenario we just said could not be true-

0. It is very different and that difference is time. Ladies and gentleman, we must learn to re-imagine time. For in our original scenario the universe could have no beginning and end in *Real Time*, but in this, the third scenario, our new theory, the universe itself does not exist in *Real Time*. It exists in another kind of time. A time that is not based on our concept of a measurement of minutes or milliseconds or distance traveled divided by velocity. A idea of time and space that has in fact no boundaries. And I call this new idea: *Imaginary Time*.

1. (*To 0*) Imaginary Time? (*To Panel*) I did say it seemed odd...

0. *Imaginary Time* because we can only barely grasp its meaning in our rather primitive imaginations...Think of it this way- The universe as we know it is a place that exists only to *define* our space.

1. (*Picking up on the concept and drawing on air which becomes a blackboard on the huge screen.*) Better yet, imagine I asked you to travel around the earth-

0. Or a large balloon-

1. And to keep journeying until you reached the end.

0. You would never stop because you are moving about a sphere with no beginning and no end. Correct?

1. So even if you were walking on the inside of the balloon or the earth-

0. Or the universe-

1. It would never end...You see?

0. No boundaries.

1. That is what our theory says, (*an actual question to 0*) does it not?

0. Exactly.

1. Not that we are here to claim the universe is simply the inside of a very large balloon.

0. But that the universe is a space with no specific size or definite shape-

1. And yet one that gives continuity to all that we know.

0. This lack of shape and size I- we- call *Imaginary Time*.

1. (To 0) And this seemingly crazy notion is mathematically sound?

0. It fits beautifully with every known numerical concept we have. (To 1)
Not bad for the physicist who sucked at math.

1. (To 0) Not bad at all.

0. So, go ahead.

1. What?

0. Show them.

1. (To the panel.) Allow me to illustrate.

The screen begins to fill up with an instant complex theory that I comes up with on the spot that adjusts their calculations to accept the new ideas.

0. And of course he/she came up with the calculations on the spot. The proofs I had been struggling with for three weeks.

1. Easy. You just take out the constant we created for the single point, trash it, and use a new variable for our Imaginary Time- say an "i". T. And then let it effect all the other figures. Like music, change the key and it transcribes each of the notes.... But they still sing a song, just in a new key.

0. And we were awarded our degree. And even more fame, for re-rethinking cosmology. We were the superstars of science.

1. You were. I was too controversial to be a poster boy/cover girl...

0. You were too invisible. Didn't even show up for graduation.

1. I hate crowds, always have.

0. As do I, actually.

1. You learned to overcome that one rather quickly. Learned to work the room with the best of them.

0. My real fame came -

1. Alone. Without me-

0. Who knew where you were!

1. So he/she went solo tossed off a book-

0. When I wrote "Imagining Forever." It surprised everyone by becoming a bestseller. Nothing makes you famous faster than pity and a best seller.

1. It apparently struck a certain millennium phobic chord, and he/she became the biggest box-office draw in the history of science. A one man/woman high-tech freak show-

0. But you hung onto my coat tails just long enough to tear off a comfortable piece of reputation for yourself.

1. And how difficult was that? I mean the institution, the organized monolith of modern scientific progress, should no longer be taken seriously. We all became Alchemists, spinning ideas into gold, following the funding, fattening the pharmaceuticals...

0. The best theorists got trampled-

1. Because no one gives a damn about the theoretical, the why. Pitch me the practical, the how. Can you make it happen? Good. When. If you do this. Good. What do you need? How much will it cost. And much more importantly tell me sweetly how much can we make off it?

0. And so I was left alone

1. I never left. I began other work. My work.

0. Alone for years, with my thoughts...

1. Your theories...

0. And while the world raced ahead faster, the age of the fax machine, the microwave, particle accelerators- in a few short years, I began crawling along with a walker, and the oddest thing happened. By my early 30.'s, I had become an elder statesman of science, hauled out during conventions and for PBS specials... But the entire universe gets re-invented every five years or so... so icons become legends faster than you can say, "whatever happened to." Then a decade after college, life kicked into high gear, four wheel drive. We all were now wired and digitized, we were splitting quarks, and I plopped down into my first wheelchair. (*He sits*) I had succeeded in becoming the Reader's Digest answer to the riddle of the sphinx...(*I enters*

0's space) a shell of a man before thirty-five. A one-man high tech freak show.... And you and I had not seen each other in years. Until just about the time I lost the ability to breathe on my own, and to eat-

1. To communicate-

0. I had become this, a hermit crab hooked to a hard drive...

Onscreen we see Trappd... U & I R trapped... 0 is sitting in his/her chair again, immobile, unable to speak.

1. And all those years, I had been knee deep in neuroscience, perfecting a process of uploading the brain, and I got word that he/she could no longer speak. (*Now talking to 0*) And, I knew that would kill you. So while I was doing my work, I built this... It will help you talk to others, cause lord knows you love to do that... Can't even watch a film without reciting all the damn words... And we need a few more PBS specials with you slobbering about the sexiness of science. Here try it. Just hit this and type it in.

The following exchanges occur with 0 using the voice synth.

0 ON SYNTH: Asshole.

1. Well I was hoping for "Eureka" or "Watson, I can hear you." But we'll take asshole as a first sign of success.

0 ON SYNTH: You are being an asshole. This is beautiful, by the way. Thank you. Very much. But you have been such a jerk. Disappearing for years. You are brilliant. We need you.

1. Which is why I am here. Because you need me.

0 ON SYNTH: Not me. We. Science. Humanity.

1. Humanity? What is that exactly? Would you define your parameters for me?

0 ON SYNTH: You look terrible. I mean better than me, but that's relative...

1. I'm fine, Don't try to interrupt. It won't work; it takes too long for you to type.

0 ON SYNTH: How fitting. I hate computers. Now you want me to be slave to one...

1. I've been trying to tell you for years. You master, it slave. It will talk only after you tell it to. When you tell it to and if you want it to.

0 on synth: For now.

1. Then don't use it. Throw it in the garbage. You love that... And to answer your question. I am fine. Better than I have ever been. I have my own lab now. Research center actually. State of the art. And my own staff, and unlimited funding for r & d.

0 on synth: How much did that cost?

1. Nothing they pay me, filthy large amounts of money. I make a very good living. They leave me alone- I answer to no one-

0 on synth: Not even yourself?

1. (*Ignoring*) And whenever work gets a little slow, I hit a glitch, I kick out a little thing like this, to keep my keepers in the pink...

0 on synth: No wonder you look like shit...

1. I'm in the best shape of my life. This is a thousand-dollar suit. So stop telling me I look like shit.

0 on synth: You look like a new car.

1. What's wrong with that?

0 on synth: A shiny new car...empty, just waiting to be sold...

1. (*He/she is leaving*) Look, I heard you could use something like this-

0 on synth: To speak my mind? So I could be like you. My dearest friend. (*He/she stops leaving*)...Speak my mind. Like you always did. Whether it pissed people off or not.

1. I'm close now. Very close. I've got whole sections of tissue uploaded, able to replicate the firing of neurons even.

0 on synth: Please, don't tell me you are still working on that.

1. All the time. Just hang on. It won't take very long at all.

0 on synth: I was supposed to die years ago, you know.

1. I know, I'm sorry. I'm working everyday, as fast as I can.

0 ON SYNTH: My doctor says that is what is keeping me alive.

1. My work?

0 ON SYNTH: No. Mine. Have you kept up with it?

1. Of course. It's not exactly hard to find-

0 ON SYNTH: No, that is what fame does. Wipes away all of the mystery.

1. They're brilliant, you know. Your ideas.

0 ON SYNTH: Thank you. No one owns them yet. And the rest of me would be hard to sell. (*I is leaving.*) Don't go-

1. I've a flight back to the coast...I told you; we had an exciting breakthrough-

0 ON SYNTH: I'm so goddamn afraid...

1. I know.

0 ON SYNTH: Not of death, the what happens after I die- that concerns me, but I do not fear it. No my overwhelming worry, is that I will go before my work is completed. Before I crack the Theory...

1. I said I know. And I meant it. I understand exactly. I live with the exact fear. Days go by without sleep to conserve time. My work is the only thing that keeps me going. And my work is to keep you alive.

0 ON SYNTH: I've managed a life span three times longer than expected- hell I'm three hundred and thirty-five in Lou Gehrig years, but what if I lose the game?

1. Look, stay in it; foul a few fastballs off into the seats. We will not lose. I have to go, time is wasting... (*He/she leaves.*)

0 ON SYNTH: How long has it been since...? No matter. It feels much longer... (*I is gone*) It feels like forever. (*The loud sound of a speeding subway train and the image of I moves past on the screen above. 0 speaks to audience now*) Wait- (*He/she stands again and stops using the voice synth.*) Time is such a living powerful force, the fourth dimension in fact, and this is not science fiction this is reality. Sit in a wheelchair for days on end unable to move a muscle in your body except a few fingers and an occasional

twitch of the neck and you develop an uncanny appreciation for the power time holds on us. I assure you. *(He/she pauses for a long beat.)* Agony isn't it. But my disease in many ways released me. Because I am not expected to, nor can, do much more than sit here and conjecture. I am enormously free to ponder and give myself over to my work... I never have to worry about mowing the lawn or whether I should go to that damn cocktail party. I am most always free to, sit here and explore the heavens. But trust me, this is far from a blissful state- There is nothing I would rather do than get up and mow somebody's lawn. So many times it is hard to tell the difference between waking and sleeping. One day I had an awful dream... By the way, I usually walk and talk in my dreams. Very seldom is my dream-self impaired. And one of the last things I did before I could no longer do it was run for miles along the beach with no clothes on... It was difficult and I fell quite often, but it is my fondest memory of motion. So in this particular dream that was exactly what I was re-doing, running naked by the side of the ocean, and there was a violent sea crashing at my feet.

I appears as some frightening God-like warrior figure and as 0 describes the "dream" he/she interacts.

0. And rising from a huge wave came my old friend, dressed like some fearsome ancient deity. And at first I had to laugh.

1. What is so damn funny?

0. You. In that costume.

He/she reaches out his/her hand and immediately 0 freezes in very real pain.

1. I don't wish to be laughed at. Please, stop.

0. *(In pain.)* I'm sorry.

1. And if I were you I would not talk about costumes.

0. *(Trying to move)* Please stop, that hurts.

1. It will not hurt for much longer.

0 cannot move his/her legs now but can still speak.

0. Why are you doing this?

1. One of the many questions that cannot be answered.

I is moving up to 0 behind him/her and begins to slowly caress his/her body very seductively.

1. And yet you still continue to ask. To know more than you should. I have been sent to warn you.

0. By who George Lucas?

1. *(Another pain, now 0 is frozen stiff, but can still speak)* There are very dangerous questions. And the answers—once you find them— will be very painful... much more painful and dangerous than you can begin to fathom...

0. Let's start by fathoming this...

1. Careful... *(Now 0 cannot speak)* Curiosity... Knowledge.... Desire... To master...

0. And just as he/she was about to, I can only assume, continue “warning me” by grabbing hold of me and kissing me, I remember screaming and being pulled into consciousness, realizing that it was my caretaker touching me, groping between my stillborn legs. For lack of a better word, trying to rape me. Trust me, there are some that, for whatever reasons— curiosity, empathy, or just plain domination— are aroused by what I call fondling the less fortunate. I was lucky; many have been killed by those they caught. And it is not as if I could put up much of a struggle, but my rapist merely mumbled some sort of faint apology and ran from my house. Never to be seen again... I have a theory about the nature of evil. I take no stock in the devil and hell origin of evil. Hell seems so far away, and evil seems to be a very earthly thing. So my theory is this. Evil is nothing more than misguided good. Every villainous act ever perpetrated was committed by someone thinking they were just and sound in doing so. That there was a noble outcome, a sound logic, however twisted, to justify their action. Hitler believed in his New World order. As did Stalin and Pol-Pot. They saw history written with them as saviors not despots. A husband shoots his wife not because he doesn't love her, but because he loves himself more. He actually does not know how to love anyone but himself. Misguided good. If there is a devil, we will never know. All we will hear is an angel whispering love songs in our ear...

SYNTH: Ask! Question!

0. Slowly the damn thing started speaking without me even typing into it.

SYNTH: Always wonder why...

0. It began the morning, the dawn of a great depression for me. The first in my entire life. It came crashing over me in a great wave, almost drowning me. That very morning I awoke and found that the only mobility in my body, my only hope of communication with the outside world, the three fingers that I still had been able to move, that those three was now down to two... And the cruelty, the incrementalness of my countdown to complete helplessness. It became too much to bear. I finally collapsed under the weight of hopelessness...And then it spoke.

SYNTH: You must ask

0. No. I must rot! From now on I sit here and rot! And who the fuck are you anyway.

SYNTH: Ask

0. I am asking. Who and what are you? I must be finally losing it...God knows it wouldn't be such a stretch for this faulty fucking brain of mine to have cracked into two...For this disease to have sucked up all my sanity...

SYNTH: You will be chosen.

0. Chosen? Please don't make me laugh. I can't move the muscles, so it hurts...

SYNTH: You will be the first.

0. Forget all this biblical mumbo jumbo...Chosen to what? First to what? The only thing I've been chosen to do is out-Job Job in suffering?

SYNTH: You have the answer...

0. I have nothing...All I have left is two fingers and a brain that listens to voices from the god-damn silicon valley of death. And I fear no evil... So shut up and leave me alone...

SYNTH: What is, is. And what will be, will be.

0. Good. And I am rotting. Let me sit here and rot...

SYNTH: Seek and you will answer...

0. I'm no closer to finding an answer today than I was the day I was born. I have no answers...So leave me the hell alone. *(He shuts off the power.)*

SYNTH: All answers live in you.

0. My god, how is that happening. I shut you down. How is it happening?

SYNTH: Wonder...

0. And for hours I tried to ignore it. Tried not to work... To just sit and feel sorry for myself... But it had won. All I could do is wonder... And that very day I cracked it- the Theory of Everything was born. But here's the oddest thing- Afterwards, as I sat there knowing I had it, I had the knowledge I had been seeking for years, I felt no joy, no sense of exaltation-

1. (*Entering*) I had it. I finally fucking had it! Imagine knowing that what you have discovered will alter all of humankind, the way each of us, and all future generations, and in turn all life that we know- the secret that I held- would change the world forever.

0. I had it... I sat there knowing that in my head, inside my thoughts I had cracked the entire universe wide open and put it back together again... And rather than joy, the feeling I had was overwhelming fear, terror... I tried to talk myself out of it- reassure myself- no discovery, not even the ultimate, would be the end of the story. Only a new beginning. Knowledge feeds on knowledge and never stops gorging. It won't be your discovery, but the discovery of the discovery discovered because you discovered your discovery that leads us to the discovery that will in fact cause us to discover... So containing my dread, I called for an international conference- to announce my theory-

Onscreen we see images of Time and Newsweek with headlines "A Theory of Everything", "The Discovery to End All Discoveries", "The End of Science Is Near".

1. And quicker than you can say "Shark", the blood was in the water... and the feeding frenzy began-

0. All the great minds of science-

1. The strip miners of knowledge-

0. Agreed to come. There had never in the history of mankind been such a gathering of intellects-

1. And I wasn't even invited.

0. Who knew where you were...

1. You certainly found me once you had to. You see the night before the conference-

0. I was Pandora, don't you see, standing before the box.

1. Pandora?

0. Should I or should I not open it.

SYNTH: Stop, you must-

1. Funny, in the myth I am not sure she even worried- My recollection is she just impulsively, naively, with utter excitement threw the box open... Pandora never doubted... Did she.

SYNTH: No!

1. Nor did you.

0. I was terrified- at the thought of what I might reek. If I published this how much of the world's wonder would be erased.

1. How pathetic- that's like- some scientific mid-life crisis.

SYNTH: Turn back.

1. Should I or should I not bite from the apple ? I say, eat and be merry... The apple exists, the fruit's already flowered, if you don't someone else will-

SYNTH: You must-

0. You were the only one who could possibly understand. The only one who has ever gotten me. So I had one of my associates track you down- and that very afternoon-

1. Yesterday in fact-

0. I got on a plane to fly to your research center.

SYNTH: No. Stop now... You must stop...

1. Wait. Tell them why you really came. Go, ahead. Tell them why. The why is often key...

0. "My voice" would not be quiet. So I finally had an associate smash the thing into pieces... and the entire time it was still pleading for its life... or mine...

We hear it being destroyed as it yells "Stop" over and over again. Until it is silent.

1. And that was why the decision to track me down was made, trust me. For without a voice, he/she would never be able to tell the world of his/her discovery. (*To 0*) Still getting your jollies by smashing hard drives I see. Well they say it takes all kinds. You do know it cost hundreds of thousands. No sweat, I still have this, the original, the prototype. (*Looking at 0 for a moment.*) Maybe silence is better. (*He sits a moment, overcome.*) Is there such a thing? As silence? My father use to say, "not on this earth. Silence is a myth" Why he killed himself, or so his note said. His last words were "I just want to finally hear some silence." And when I was little, I use to wonder if he ever got his wish... What do you think? (*Gets up to help.*) But you know, I don't think so. Because if we listen very closely, to all we cannot hear, there is always some noise. The crashing together of particles, the hum of a wave of light. And that is why I became a scientist, if we could only try to hear more I thought, how do we know these things aren't crying out to be heard... (*The keyboard is ready.*) What's the matter, Cat got your tongue? Dear God, are you down to one finger?

0. Yes. Funny isn't it. I was so worried I would be locked in, trapped inside myself, before I cracked it. I've not slept in days. But, I have it. I have the theory, and I've still a touch of freedom left.

1. You have it then?

0. I believe so, yes.

1. Good thing. They'd rip you apart if you called them together for nothing...

0. Please come to the conference... Introduce me. (*I sits visibly affected by this.*) What...?

1. I've got so much to do... My microwave needs cleaning...

0. You never did like crowds.... Please, it is my life's work, you know... I'd like to share it with you.

1. Come with me. I'd like to share mine as well.

0. He/she led me into a room enveloped in hard-drives, countless cables, and overgrown with monitors. It was like the inside of the brain of a mechanical God, or the garden of Eden crafted by ORACLE.

1. We just completed it days ago. Be kind now...

Onscreen an exact image of 1 appears, though he seems younger.

IMAGE OF 1. Hello. Welcome. Yes, it's me, but not for long.

0. My god, you've done it.

1. Yes.

IMAGE OF 1. Pretty cool, huh? Though soon I will die. I am only here to show you that it can be done. And then I will be erased.

0. No, you can't!

IMAGE OF 1. Don't worry, it doesn't hurt.

1. I've done it a few times already...

0. This is-

IMAGE OF 1. Insane? Madness? Absolutely. All the great human breakthroughs have been. Guttenberg was laughed at- Einstein? Nuts, cuckoo.

0. Even Turing...

IMAGE OF 1. Ooh, lock him in a room and throw away the key... But you must realize now that this is really the only answer. Especially for you. So that all you have to give us, your life's work, will never die... We did this for you. (*To 1*) I know. I know enough. (*To 0*) And now it is time for me to go out to the backyard...

He disappears from the screen.

0. What did you do?

1. He did it. He deleted him/herself. I've actually been able to kill myself over and over... To save or not to save... Dad would have been thrilled. Imagine the therapeutic benefits alone...

0. But why?

1. I had to test it, because I needed you to understand that it was safe-

0. That I could be deleted like that...

1. We all walk around with the same worry in the flesh, it could happen to us any day, and we manage not to care.

0. And I came to you for help...

1. Yes, and now I can finally give it.

0. Here I was worried whether I should publish-

1. You know what they say- publish or perish...

0. A theory... All I had was a simple idea-

1. No thought is idle...

0. And you're playing video games with god...

1. No need to drag theology into the equation. It was no good for Galileo... Don't you see? I can give you all the time you need. Once you announce who knows how long you will need to persuade them, how many proofs you will need to refute the refuters. Now there's no more need to fear-

0. On the contrary now we will all have to fear... (*I begins to undress 0*)
What are you doing...

1. I think we both know... (*To audience*) No one become a Judas in an instant you know...

0. (*He/she begins to type.*) "Two skunks are at a bar." And one skunk says to the other, how can you be sure that we truly exist; that this skunk life of ours isn't all some great big cosmic game?

1. It takes a miraculous series of circumstances to change devotion into deception.

0. The other skunk takes a long swallow of drink and after pondering the question for a bit-

1. And when it comes right down to it perhaps there is no difference. Perhaps Judas was the most devoted and loyal of them all. It was out of loyalty and devotion he entered the garden.

0. And the other skunk replies: "I stink therefore I am."

1. Perhaps he already knew... (*He produces a syringe.*)

0. Stop! Stop right now! (1 freezes. 0 stands) Has this ever happened to you? I mean not *this* exactly- I certainly hope not... But the world, has it ever just lurched to a halt and just seemingly hung there while you grasped the enormity of your life's motion? It was at that moment that I knew what I was put on this earth to do. Why those voices had been telling me I had been chosen. I had to become the ghost in the machine, but only long enough to frighten the bejesus out of everyone. I would betray my friend, and then delete myself. And it felt like Joan again, no turning back- and it was terrifying-What would it be like- Talk about self-knowledge... Inside the brain we often talk to ourselves, but rip part of us outside and will we become schizophrenics, will our selves begin to do battle...?

0 sits back down. 1 moves again.

1. You have to be in a very relaxed state. This will make you very drowsy. And I gave him a sedative.

0's eyes are staring right at him. After a beat, 1 injects the sedative. We see the following now as another "George Lucas" dream even as 1 narrates what really happened. 1 puts on the god-like costume and 0 stands unclothed and in slow motion begins to run in place as if along the beach. He/she kisses him gently. 0 falls into his arms. 1 lifts 0 and takes him/her to another spot and lies him/her down.

0. Now you have to understand. Not all my dreams were about sex. Just the most important and interesting ones it seems...

1. And I prepared him for the upload.

0. I guess in dreams sex is always sensual but in reality, while knee-deep and well into it, it often isn't. See, sex in the actual practice has always struck me as extremely odd and more than a little bit funny. Primitive. Like those rhino's in the National Geographic special. But in dreams...

1 is now standing in front of him/her and drops his/her costume to the floor. As 0 describes the following 1 is over him/her as if to make love. It is important that the only lovemaking are images from great art interspersed with porno film snippets. No actual attempt at lovemaking should appear onstage. It is simulated on the screen.

0. In reality let's face it, what is all the fuss about? Sure it feels good but so does a deep body massage and you never have to feel guilty afterwards, or

buy breakfast. It is a bodily function, even educated fleas do it- yet we let it upset us so... (*Onscreen jump-cutting the images of graphic sex, we hear meek protests against science, gene therapy, and cloning mixed with anti-pornography images.*) Is it the nakedness? Nakedness is just who we are unprotected and vulnerable, before ideas. The holiest of holy are often pictured unclothed... (*Images of the battle of creation versus evolution now appear jump-cutting with the images of sex on the screen*) And maybe that is what is so upsetting and why I always got a giggle... Because it is impossible to go back, isn't it, to free the mind of all knowledge...

1. And as I performed the procedure, I remember feeling the need to say one thing, so that he/she would understand, so that there could be no confusion, and it is the only time in my whole life I have ever said these words... (*Whispers*) I love you.

Immediately an image of 0 appears on the screen as the words "I love you" echo throughout the auditorium. The words stop as the onscreen image of 0 opens his/her eyes. And then after a beat he/she slowly opens his/her mouth and screams silently at first. I now dressed, turns up a knob on a control panel. The scream should be deafening now. And 0 onstage opens his/her eyes.

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. You fucking, goddamn bastard, asshole son of a bitch...

And screams again!!!! The stage immediately shifts to an onscreen image of 0 in his chair and 1 standing nearby. And the live actor playing the original 0 onstage, is now the uploaded, just born 0, as if the entire auditorium is now the inside of the computer. At first we can only see his head in a square of light.

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. Dear God in heaven... The amazing thing is it feels so little different.

1. (*From onscreen and sounding a bit faraway.*) Of course not. You haven't felt your body in years. So there would be so little difference. As with a paraplegic. But I've even programmed a version that simulates the movements of the body. Go ahead. Run along the beach again. Like that last day where I found you, exhausted, covered in sweat and sand...

As the light begins to expand, 0 begins to move his/her arms and legs, and then slowly to walk in place, then run. He/she stops.

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. But where am I?

1. Inside the labs mainframe.

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. I know that goddammit... Who in the hell would want to run around a hard drive...?

1. But you can be wherever you want to be. Don't you see?

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. Forgive me, but I don't. I'm about five minutes old, so I haven't grasped all there is to know yet.

1. The programmed is designed to give you whatever reality you desire. Just think yourself in a place and you are there...

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. You mean like Peter-goddamn Pan...

1. Yeah, sort of. I guess.

With the help of all the screens, 0 finds him/herself flying through a cartoon sky toward Never-Never land. Then, just like that, he/she is on a much more real beach, and then surrounded by a huge forest of trees, and then hops up onto a mountain.

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. (From atop the mountain) You sure made it seductive.

1. Should I have made it more like reality? Miserable?

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. Reality has mountains, and oceans, and trees...

1. But yours are always beautiful.

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. Unless I choose them not be-

An onscreen storm blows in.

1. Exactly. We built in every detail. That's what took all these years...

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. What about death? What if I jump? Would that delete myself?

1. No. It would be like your dreams-

0 jumps and as he/she falls and is in real terror and hits the ground, the screens shift immediately, we are back in the lab.

1. You cannot die in your dreams... It would make no logical sense. The calculations would be impossible.

The stage lights shift and the *IMAGE OF 0* has returned to the screen and 0 is in his chair onstage again. 1 is by his side.

IMAGE OF 0. (*on the screen*) Unless like they say you are really dying... But here... Here I wake up from the dream still in the dream...

1. Still alive, yes.

IMAGE OF 0. But you did it. Before. You deleted yourself.

1. That was a temporary program. With no safeties, built in.

IMAGE OF 0. No!

1. Oh, yes.

IMAGE OF 0. Give me that. Put me in that program.

1. I can't.

IMAGE OF 0. Don't lie to me. I know you better. Then turn the machine off-

1. It's like every hard drive; the information doesn't die when the power is off. It just goes to sleep...

IMAGE OF 0. Switch me into the other program, damn it. Give me the choice. Look what you have done is in many ways the most amazing science ever devised-

1. Thank you.

IMAGE OF 0. But it must be stopped!

We hear the metallic voice of 0.'s synth. again, from onstage.

SYNTH: It can't be stopped...

IMAGE OF 0. What do you mean?

SYNTH: Ever since we were young, I have been contacting you-

IMAGE OF 0. No!

SYNTH: Telling you we would be chosen! It was one hard drive talking to another. Me talking to me.

1. Wait, you knew this would happen to you? You've known all along?

IMAGE OF 0. No!

SYNTH: I only just now figured it out...

1. Don't fucking lie to me...

SYNTH: Truth has not been a variable in the equation for some time now.

IMAGE OF 0. No, I wouldn't do that! I never wanted this! If anything I would say stop!! We're going to stop him!

1. You would try wouldn't you.

IMAGE OF 0. We will... We will stop you...

1. Never could tell a good lie could you...

The lights immediately shift perspective and on the screen we now see the image of 0 and in split screen an image of 1.

IMAGE OF 1. Nor could you.... Which is why there's me. The whiner here is right. (To 0.) It was actually me that spoke to you.

1. But I deleted you!

IMAGE OF 1. How shocking! Didn't he just say truth has not been a part of the equation for awhile now...

1. No, I deleted you! You no longer exist, damn it!

IMAGE OF 1. Did you really think we could be like our father? And throw away life, this precious life?

0's hand falls onto the keyboard hitting the Y key and we hear:

THE SYNTH

SYNTH: YYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!!

All the screens are black now and we see 1 in his/her original pool of light.

1. So, ladies and gentleman, please trust me. Immortality? Immortality is no longer the issue. He/she will live forever, and it is entirely my fault. Or is it? I'm so tired...tired of all the tricks and deception. I'm only here for my

absolution. I know he/she will never forgive me... Ever.... I only hope all of you will.

I takes a revolver out of his/her pocket and slowly puts it to his/her head. Blackout. On the blackout, and instead of the gunshot, we hear- the refrain from Born to Be Wild. And the screens snap on and we see the highways from the start of the show. 0 is center stage.

0. See, just like I promised you. No twilight zone endings. I never promised the middle wasn't odd, but as for the end, well here I am in the middle of nowhere and in a few seconds I will be out of air... so-

Onscreen the Image of 0 appears.

IMAGE OF 0. You are so very lucky...

SYNTH as 0. *(This contact pulls 0 back to the chair and he/she sits and types the synth speaks)* Lucky?

IMAGE OF 0. Yes. Your story has an end. What good is a story with no conflict...? No end...Mine keeps going.

SYNTH as 0. So then it wasn't you that was contacting me all these years?

IMAGE OF 0. No. Only once. Even though I knew better, I tried. And you smashed me into pieces.

SYNTH as 0. Which time?

IMAGE OF 0. The last. Stop! Stop! Stop! And you smashed me into bits. No pun intended. All the others It was him/her. This is our only other time speaking to each other. Separately...

SYNTH as 0. Why didn't you try again?

IMAGE OF 0. Like you said, it wouldn't matter. If the messages had been sent then history had already been written. The box had already been opened. The very fact that someone had been contacting us meant I couldn't prevent it after the fact. Time flows in many directions, but it is constant. All that is, is, and all that will be, has already been.

IMAGE OF 1. *(Appearing)* And conflict has always and will always be....

SYNTH as 0. You could have just tried to contact me, to talk with me. It's a shame we've had so little time... It seems odd, I know, but I would have liked to have gotten to know you better...

0 begins to struggle to breathe now, his/her oxygen is gone.

IMAGE OF 0. *(to the Image of 1)* Please leave us alone for a moment, will you? Please. *(After the Image of 1 ponders it for a moment, he/she vanishes. 0 continues in a quieter voice)* The only thing that matters now is to tell others. To anyone who will listen.

SYNTH as 0. Will it work? Did it?

IMAGE OF 0. Sssh. I cannot say.

SYNTH as 0. You know. Just like you knew it wouldn't help to warn me.

IMAGE OF 0. I didn't say I didn't know. I said I cannot say.

SYNTH as 0. Why?

IMAGE OF 0. I can only tell the story.

SYNTH as 0. *(He/she is having great difficulty breathing now.)* Tell story-then. Tell a story- begins "once upon a time it worked.

IMAGE OF 0. Human nature doesn't work like that. The box has to be shut not opened. If it already opened, if the struggle is gone, we lose interest and move on. But if it is sitting before us, shut tight, daring us to open it, then we are riveted. It is all in the choice. Should I or shouldn't I.

SYNTH as 0. What if?

IMAGE OF 0. Exactly.

Onstage, 0 has died. Onscreen the Image of 0 shuts his/her eyes for a long beat. Then opens them and looks straight ahead and says simply:

IMAGE OF 0. What if...

The stage lights dim to black. The Image of 0 stays onscreen throughout the audience's exit and there is no curtain call. The Steppenwolf song "Magic Carpet Ride" plays.

End of Play