

The Desert Surfer By

M. Thomas Champion

"David? David, it's getting late. Get up..."

I would not mind an enraptured dawn sneaking quietly into my room like a lover; a warm gentle ray of sunlight caressing my cheeks, kissing my eyelids, enticing them to open the way a rose unfolds to greet the newness of the day. That would be nice. That I could handle. That never happens.

"THIS IS THE END, THE ONLY END MY FRIEND..."<sup>1</sup> The end to blessed darkness as Apollo's chariot thunders near. Reborn 7,000 times, born anew, wounds healed, heart and hope refreshed I awake only to face the torments of another day. Why, Zeus, why must you punish me so? It was not I who stole the magic of fire and gave it to the savages.

Once again from the womb untimely ripped. There in the east, is it the sun? Hell, yes, it's the sun. And the little Timex on my night table sounds the crack of doom to herald its arrival. Shafts of light erupt into my chambers like a hydra spewing reckless mayhem. Dreams are torn asunder, shattered shards of glass, innards strewn about for the scavengers. I shield myself as best I can beneath my cloak of invisibility, but Sol has powerful allies. It is scarcely 10:00 a.m....

Did Prometheus suffer such indignity while chained to his rock, the vultures pecking away at his liver? Is it nothing less than my soul that will appease these

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Morrison and the Doors

monsters' appetites? Wouldn't a Pop Tart satisfy them? No, they seek to rob me of my Shangri La, to drive me from the land of wet dreams into the stark naked face of reality. Must eternal rebirth each morning carry such a price? Then damn immortality. I am not really a morning person anyway. Coffee... codeine... strychnine, purely for medicinal purposes, you understand. Maybe just a Carter's Little Liver Pill? Facing any hour with an AM appellation, in the full directness of sunlight mind you, requires chemical assistance. Cut me some slack, comprende? I believe Dow Chemical: "Better living through chemistry"...

Outside my window Sol's vultures, those sunny birds of summer, break forth in a cruel arpeggio. Those birds... The feeder Mom hung to attract them... Damn it all. Damn their raucous cacophony... Back to perdition you evil warblers... Better to peck out my eyes, vile vultures, and let the blessed shroud of darkness once again enfold me than so blatantly assault my ears with your hellish chirping and drive me from my pillowed sanctuary.

From downstairs echoes the sweet voice of my mother extolling the virtues of a fresh new morning. "Rise and shine, David." she sings in conspiratorial harmony with those hellish songbirds. "Rise and shine. Breakfast is getting cold. It's the most important meal of the day, you know." Mother does not understand zymurgy<sup>2</sup>. Nor could she possibly contemplate the critical mass of alcohol consumed at last night's fraternity bash. Rites of Bacchus, freshman rush, all that rot... "They seem like such a nice bunch of boys," she always says. Opinions differ. Ask campus security.

<sup>2</sup> The chemical process involved in fermentation.

Would a rational thinking being with even a rudimentary awareness of chemistry shovel Sugar Pops down his gullet into a frothing churning belly still swollen with the contents of a dozen longnecks? I think not. It would be the penultimate act of a dead man. I cannot die today. Tonight is Evans' turn to buy, my turn to engorge at his expense. Such days are rare.

Mother's voice, a punctuated pizzicato, rings out true. She won't be stilled. Instead she will pass from diva to harpy as her volume escalates. I must capitulate. She will hold no quarter. My appearance is past due. Breakfast - a handful of Bayer aspirin with an Alka Seltzer chaser -will set me on my way. I have duties to attend. I am a student, a college man. I attend Arizona State University. I am majoring in English. I will spare you Dad's opinion on that. And right off the bat; fuck you if you can't take alliteration. I like words. I'd like to be a poet. I have no idea how a man makes a living doing that. I don't care. It's not what I want to be when I grow up; but I'm too tall to be an astronaut. It is what I do because I do not wish to be saddled with gainful employment. Nor do I care to have Uncle Sam paint a bull's-eye on my back and fly me free to Southeast Asia; do not pass go, do not collect \$200. I am a student, a small sacrifice on my part not imposing too harshly on my social life. It has been suggested that I might even learn something in the process. I never eliminate the possibility...

Mother reminds me half the day is gone. To me half still remains. It is the way we look at things; Mom and I. She worries and frets and in doing so demonstrates her love for me. I give her reason to worry and fret and in doing so demonstrate how much she is needed. This division of roles defines our relationship and gives purpose and fulfillment to us both. How much more perfect could life be?

I am running late. No time to demonstrate. My chariot of fire awaits; my mount, my steed, my conveyance to the fulfillment of dreams. The key glides smoothly into the gate releasing all 300 horses, their mellifluous syncopation drowning out and scattering those damnable songbirds as an acrid blue gray belch of hydro-carbonic smoke disperses into the conurbation's mélange of atmosphere. Less poetic people call this smog. Screw them. They can't see the forest for the haze.

I pilot a Chevrolet Impala, a big block convertible of course. This not only allows me to maximize the darkening of my body's melanin and the lightening of the pigments in my unkempt but stylish hair, it affords me an image. I am the desert surfer, the wind-blown sun-tanned waif - the child of Nature reveling in her elements. I live in harmony with my environment. Each day I close the gap to my Nirvana, a paradise of tanned taunt bodies, sun bleached hair, cocoa butter incense, and Ravi Shankar melodies. Totally tripencicular...

I am beginning my sophomore year at Arizona State, a fact simply amazing me for it seems in the preceding twelve months I killed enough brain cells to induce catatonia. My father is equally amazed. He constantly reminds me that when he was my age he had started both a career and a family. In my defense I point out, "Yes, and look what you wound up with." He does not see my humor. Then too, he cannot come to grips with the idea of Henry Fonda's daughter being a communist subversive or Frank Sinatra's daughter singing so badly out of key – "These boots are made for walking..." Still and all, our relationship is close and strong. He is my father and my meal ticket. And as he has often said, "Under all that hair is my son, the college man."

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The Impala slides silently into reverse slipping back the distance of the driveway without a sound. We have engaged stealth mode. Our neighbor has a daughter. This is Scottsdale mind you, not Hollywood. There every female child is Natalie Wood who falls for you even if you look like Woody Allen. My neighbor is the reality of the girl next door and as my mother puts it, "seems like such a pleasant young lady. Why don't you ask her to join you and your friends some night?" For the same reason I don't seek out lepers, Mother; I have no desire to be shunned, to be shamed, to be vilified for bringing a wart riddled toad to the land of the damsels fair. Torture me, maim me; Christ, Mom, cut my allowance, but do not let me be forcibly reduced to public humiliation. After all, under all this hair is your son, the college man.

Punch it. Stomp on it. Burn rubber. The neighbor's house is the last one on the corner. Fly. Fly. California stop... Roll it on through the intersection; then dash away, dash away, dash away all. Around the corner I am free from all obligations to extend offers. Free. Yes! "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Onward... Onward... Adventure awaits. Okay, it's only Evans waiting by his mailbox. But he is not a figure easily missed. Ethnically Hawaiian, all 6'6" and 280 pounds of him, he is my partner, my brother, my main man. Billy is my best friend and constant foe. He can get me to do anything. Likewise he can turn down no dare I make. Together we are my mother's worst nightmare, for whatever good sense I might retain Evans mutes. He is my Puck, my devil's advocate, I am his Oberon. I lead, but all too often he stands at the tiller and doesn't know the stars.

I must not bring the car to rest. I barely brake to slow. To stop would rob Evans of his moment. He is amazingly agile for a man of his proportions. As I pass by Billy sprints along the sidewalk and leaps into the air tucking his legs beneath him, defying gravity with his bulk, rising gracefully into the heavens, hovering, hovering, until at last his hyperbolic curve and the Coriolis effect plop him into the shotgun seat and off we roar. Shock absorbers top my Christmas list.

The drive from Scottsdale to the ASU campus in Tempe takes about a half an hour. Evans and I seldom talk on our commute. Convertibles traveling in excess of Mach 1 do not lend themselves to quiet conversation. Besides, my stereo puts out a decibel level the Federal government has labeled lethal. FBI rumors abound these levels of sound will raise the grateful dead. But we've never found a cadaver around who believes a word they've said. So we crank the radio to the max, kick back, and live the dream.

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Ten o'clock and the evening's heat had just begun to dissipate. The desert landscape trapped hours of sunlight and now a shimmering ivory moon danced on undulating waves of radiant heat returning energy to the stars. Convection currents stirred up a breeze. The ambient temperature remained well above ninety degrees but this warm wind evaporated the sweat from my skin leaving me feeling cool and tasting salty. How bitchin is that?

"You're late," Evans called out from the darkness, "late and a six pack down." He sat on the bridge, his favorite place to hang out on these late summer evenings. The bridge is a monochromatic rainbow spanning the width of University Avenue. The street itself, a river of asphalt always in chaotic motion, separates fraternities, sororities and college dorms on its north bank from the halls of academia lying to the south. Night brings the bridge to life. Streetlight winking through the swaying palms mixes with the angry glaring headlights of passing traffic, teasing this grayscale palette into tones of silver and onyx. Shadows creeping across its ribs give movement to the structure's being. This cold inanimate entity speaks to Evans, as the volcanoes of his homeland spoke to his ancestors. The pounding vibrations of passing automobiles become its heartbeat; noxious vapors of exhaust its expelled breath. The bridge speaks in screeching blasts of horns and brakes, radios and ribald calls passing from vehicle to vehicle. Sitting at the keystone of the arch Evans senses all of this. He feels the pulse, the power, and has the perspicacity to extrapolate the messages. He descends from a line of holy men who perceive the universe through its primal forces, predicting the future by sensing minute changes in their environment. He is a wizard, a shaman, a singer of dreams. I have learned



to trust his visions, hear out his explanations and drink his beer. Evans is a package, all or nothing. "Where have you been?" Evans asked draining another can before I can answer.

"What's the bridge tell you" I responded. He fished two beers out of a brown paper sack, tossed one to me and opened the other for himself. The aluminum can was a warm, brown and white, Buckhorn Beer. It sold for 89 cents a six-pack and tasted like it. After a long pull he wiped his mouth and stared at the stars.

"You were hitting on BJ's puzzle ring girl."

"Her name is Susan. She is not BJ's girl. I wasn't hitting on her." I protested my innocence.

"I rest my case," Evans said belching and breaking wind, "great beer."

I couldn't argue with him, not even about the beer. Free beer, even Buckhorn, rates great on anyone's scale. Great being a ratio of cost to flavor with cost being weighed against the fact that neither of us ever had any money and after a couple of cans nobody can tell the taste of one beer from another anyway. So I could argue but it would be futile. He knows me too well. And he was right. I was hitting on BJ's puzzle ring girl, so named because of the mysterious ingenious Chinese puzzle ring she wore on her left hand. She was from California and therefore strange and exotic to those of us local born.

"Shouldn't do it, bro; you know our code: Finders Keepers." Evans lectured.

"And Losers Weepers if I remember right," I complained.

"You'll find a dozen like her next week, but for Bobby J. this is the one. Be cool. He'd do the same for you."

Perhaps he is but a poor man's prophet; still, he is correct. A few more beers and I will acquiesce. Evans never gloats when he is right. He allows me time to save face. He offers no opinions. This is no debate, no clash of egos or battle of wills. Evans simply states what is true. It is not his truth. It is the truth of the Universe as told to him by the bridge. Who could argue?

"Anything on for tonight," I asked taking a seat next to him?

"Rush week. You feel like slumming? We could crash a fraternity party and pretend to pledge. Or we could sneak over to Kappa Kappa Gamma. I hear the sorority girls over there are a wild and friendly bunch."

"Let's just sit a while." I said sipping my beer. "I'm not sure my stomach is up to another night of serious partying."

Jumping to his feet Evans almost knocked me over the railing. "Oh my God! I think I'm in love. Look at the way she bounces." Following his line of sight I saw her, an auburn haired beauty trotting across the campus. Wearing a tight white tank top tee shirt and blue running shorts, she ran in perfect measured strides, and as if in answer to our prayers she turned and jogged up the bridge.

"Hey, babe, how about a beer?" Evans offered as she approached.

"Are you addressing me?" she answered in a musical accent I couldn't immediately place.

"Yeah, sit down and have a drink with us. I'll teach you the traditional Hawaiian greeting spoken when two lovers first meet; the Hawaiian Love Call."

"You are Hawaiian then?"

"Half, on my mother's side; my dad was Navy."

"So how does this ritual greeting go?"

"Listen real close and repeat after me. Comon iwan tooleya."

About half way through his little phonetic joke she caught on and moved off.

"Hey, where are you going? Wait up. It's just a joke. Come on back. Don't you even want the beer?" Evans called.

"Bug off, you big obnoxious twit," trailed behind her.

"I don't believe it. Did you hear what that bitch called me? Wasted a perfectly good beer too. Damn, what a bitch. I can't believe she'd say something like that.

What's a twit anyway?" he asked handing the open can to me. "Looks like you get this one."

"Don't call her that."

"What?"

"Don't you talk about her that way."

"What's with you, bro?"

"That's the girl I'm going to spend the rest of my life with, so knock it off. I'm not kidding around, Bill. Don't you ever say another bad word about her. That chick is going to be my wife."

"How the hell you figure? You just laid eyes on her, same as me. You get ESP all of a sudden?"

"The bridge told me."

"Oh, okay. Sorry, man. I mean, if you got it from the bridge. Wow. That is so cosmic. So, did the bridge say anything about you drinking that beer? I mean it'd be a shame to let it go to waste."

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Forty thousand bright young souls attend Arizona State University. How is one to find a single brilliant star amongst the Milky Way? I have few clues, but dogged determination and over-active adolescent sex drives. This fair colleen with glowing skin as luminescent as ... as ... Damn. Times like these make me wish I'd stayed awake through freshman composition. I might find the words. But her... how do I find her? The eyes - green eyes that have haunted my every thought since last I gazed into them... Okay, so that was ten seconds ago. Relatively speaking, an eternity... I still have to find her. I could go around the campus putting up fliers:

**LOST: NAMELESS GIRL. HAVE YOU SEEN THESE GREEN  
EYES? REWARD!!! REWARD!!! REWARD!!! REWARD!!!  
REWARD!!!**

I have no idea where, when, why, who or how. Wrong major, should have tried Journalism. These concepts elude me. Should have stayed awake during Logic 101 too I guess. Wait... Logic; might that really work? What would Columbo do? Criminals always return to the scene of the crime. She stole my heart - right here on the bridge, Officer. Ergo, my dear Watson —

I shall stand the watch. Ever vigilant this sentinel shall man his post every second of every day and night until at last I find her. It's like, I'm a college man, and what else have I got to do? "Neither wind nor rain nor dark of night shall..." do whatever the rest of that thing says. You get my drift. Evans will keep me company. I'll need burgers and beer for about a week. If I don't feed him he gets restless.

What am I thinking? I can't feed him. I can't even feed myself. I am a waif; broke, busted, bankrupt, destitute, indigent, jobless, penniless... Well, jobless isn't so

bad... But I'm lost in lust with a woman I just met and I desperately need cash. Maybe I could sell a kidney?

Okay, breathe, Davey Boy, breathe. Om, muni, muni maha, muniye svaha. I am in control. The hell I am. I don't know what to do. Where is your mother when you really need her? SHIT... Okay... Okay. I can't leave here. I know that much. If I leave this spot I will miss her when she returns to the crime scene. No can do, Danno.

Yet staying here with a sober, hungry Evans is an EXTREMELY dangerous course of action. The Hawaiian shamans were cannibalistic and yon Evans has a lean and hungry look. I can hear his stomach rumbling, see his attention wavering as he forages through the empty cans inspecting each in the hope that one or more might still contain a drop of nectar. He is not an alcoholic, merely frugal and insatiable of appetite.

I haven't faced a dilemma like this since I had to pick an acne cream. So many choices. So few clues. Such lovely eyes. She did bounce profoundly. Point me in a direction, Lord...

"David?"

"Susan?" I reply to BJ's puzzle ring girl. Her long straight blond hair is parted in the middle. She loops it back over her ears to keep it in place. Tonight she wears a pale paisley print halter-top brazenly displaying what Mom would call "her assets". The khaki walking shorts show off a tiny waist, rounded hips and muscular tanned thighs. Anyone meeting her is immediately reminded of Peggy Lipton from the Mod Squad TV show. When she flashes her perfect orthodontia the smile spreads slowly across her face allowing time for the viewer to warm to

every facet. Blond eyebrows rise and fall to punctuate her moods. The Beach Boys must have known her, for it is Susan Burke they immortalized in song, the perfect California Girl.

"Why didn't you say you were coming this way?" she remarked brushing gently against me. "We could have walked together."

"Walked?"

"Earth to David," she laughed. "What's with our Desert Surfer here, Evans?"

"Love," Evans replied ringing a final drop from a recalcitrant can. "I saw her first, but I think he's smitten."

"Saw her first? Her, who?" Susan asked with somewhat dampened enthusiasm.

"Who," echoed from my sub consciousness?

"A redhead," Evans answered squeezing another drop. "She sounded Irish or Scottish; someplace foreign like that. Athletic too... Great build."

"You must mean Martina McCarthy. She lives next door to me in Manzanita Hall. Is he going to be okay? It's like he's in shock or something. Does he even know we are here?"

"You know her?" Evans asked with his excitement building. "Could you, like, you know, introduce me?"

"Bug off, you big obnoxious twit," I shouted grabbing Susan's arm and setting off for Manzanita.

I was unaware that a woman scorned increased her density ten-fold. Susan refused to budge. "You didn't seem interested in anyone else an hour ago, David Stone. I was your Aphrodite, your Roxanne, your Helen of Troy. Don't I remember

something about soul mates?"

"No, Susan, you don't understand. It's not that I'm not interested anymore, because I am. I mean I was. I mean I would be except its finders keepers, you know. BJ found you. On an original basis I mean. So you're his. Or at least he thinks you are. So I have to too. Code wise that is. Okay? You know? I mean if you weren't then I would be. But you are, so there you go. Fate, huh? Go figure. So... her name is Martina and you really know her? That's pretty groovy. Want me to walk you back to the dorm?"

"I don't think so. That might be a code violation and BJ wouldn't understand. You know?" Susan spun on her heels and set off at a brisk pace.

"Nice work there, Davey Boy," Evans said looking up from the night's recyclables. "You do have a way with women."

"Shut your face."

"Bite my ass."

"Why, is pineapple the flavor of the month? Shit! Billy, what am I supposed to do?"

"If you white people still believed in arranged marriages this wouldn't be a problem; but no, you gotta have love. You gotta get all hot and bothered salivating over each other 'til the cows come home."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Hawaiians used to get all the 'slap and tickle' out of their systems when they were young promiscuous children. By the time a boy and girl reached our ages their moms and dads had arranged something with the fellow down the beach and you had a



wife for the rest of your life. No problems. No regrets. Shame you white people had to come and fuck it up."

"You know, you only pull this arrogant Hawaiian shit when 'us white people' fuck up. So, where did you learn this gem of wisdom? Did the bridge tell you?"

"No, my mom made us watch a lot of Hawaii Five-O. For somebody that is supposed to be so smart you really can be one dumb pain in the ass, David. Not everything in life has to be cosmic. Treat everything and everyone around you with respect and the world becomes a pretty simple place. White people... There's no cute saying in Hawaiian for 'when first we practice to deceive...' Why don't you people try being honest and open? It makes life a whole lot easier."

"What should I do?"

"Ask for help."

"I just did, you ass."

"Not from me. Ask the puzzle ring girl. Be straight and right up front. If you are honest, she won't get her feelings hurt. And don't be afraid she might hurt yours. Shit happens. When and if it does, deal with it. Until it does, don't worry about it. Tell her how you feel about this new chick. Let her know you need her on your team. Don't lead her on. Don't play games. Understand?"

"When did you get so damn smart?"

"Oh, my man, I've been smart. I just had to wait for you to grow up enough to appreciate it."

"Fuck you."

"No thanks. But since you're through with the puzzle ring girl you might

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