54. BAND WITH THE RUNS . . . ER . . . "ON THE RUN," I MEAN

Yeah, well, so, we were on the run. We ran and ran for forty days and thirty-six nights, never stopping, always hiding and running, running and hiding, and by the end of that time, we had only gone about a mile and a half, and we realized that we weren't going to get very far running, y'know, expecially having to push Paul's iron lung and EKG monitor, so we stole a moped. That wasn't a whole lot better, but we disguised Paul's iron lung as a small trailer and pulled it behind us.

Speaking of Paul's iron lung (or, as we jokingly referred to it, "Paul's iron lung"), its batteries were starting to run down, so we took it to Aunty Claire's Critically Acclaimed Canned Candied Eclairs and Clandestine Cranial Cryogenics and EKG Machines, Incorporated, Conglomerate, Corpus Christi, on the outskirts of Yakima, to see if we could get it recharged. When they found out who we were, they said they couldn't help us, but recommended we check out a facility called Three Mile Island.

That turned out to be not such a good idea, seeing as how Paul died in the ensuing partial nuclear meltdown and all. Well, he was clinically brain dead - I mean, what <u>else</u> is new? We got him the best rubber-band powered life-support system we could afford, and we headed for the Negeb Desert.

So, we headed for the Negeb, and . . . uhm, I'm trying to think of the best way to describe what happened next, 'cause it's pretty integral to the story, you know? So, after we "headed" for the Negeb, what happened next is that we actually "got" there, okay? I suppose that's the best way to put it. So, we "headed" there first, and then we actually "got" there, after a long period during which we were "heading" there.

Yeah, well, okay, so we were sitting in our cornstarch . . . er, "quonset" hut one day, and someone knocked at the door.

"Who in God's Green Acres could <u>that</u> be?" wondered Annette aloud.

"Probably those darn Jellybean Volkswag - er, Jehovah's Witnesses," I figured alouder.

"Beep. Beep. Beep," agreed Paul.

"Who is it?" demanded Annette.

"Beep. Beep. Beep," added Paul.

"Uhm . . . it's . . . Aunty Claire's Critically Acclaimed Canned Candied Eclairs and Clandestine -"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," I interrupted and opened the door. "Whaddaya want?"

And before me stood . . . er, "sat," actually, a multiple amputee victim in a wheelchair with dreadlocks, one green and one brown eye, and a waffle-iron burn scar across the whole left side of his head.

Annette burst forth, "Aren't you Jeff Lageson?"

The Jamaican invalid looked cautiously from side to side, beckoned us closer, and whispered conspiratorially, "No."

I was just about to smack Annette when the mysterious stranger continued.

"I am, however, named 'Jeff,' as you say."

"You mean you're -"

"Yes. I am he."

Annette fell to his knees.

"O Mystic Prophet Of The Tavehead, please minister unto us, that we may -"

"Yeah, well, just what on God's Green Herbs is going on here, man? If you don't have any eclairs, you can just get -"

"He's, He's, don't you understand? This is Jeff Henderson, mightiest Prophet Of Jason And The Tavehead! He is come to prophesy to us!"

"Yeah, well, actually," began Jeff, "I just wondered if you had any food."

Annette gaped. "You mean you followed us out here, smack dab in the middle of Hell's Half Acre, the Negeb Desert, just to bum some chow from us? You worthless little false prophet, why, you . . . you can just get right out of -"

"Oh - a prophecy - yeah, I've got a prophecy - sure, why didn't you say so? Yeah, I got a great prophecy! You'll love it - I just . . . need some food to get the juices flowin', ya understand - I haven't given a . . . uhm . . . prophecy in quite a while - I'm a little rusty. If I could just have a, a Ding Dong or, yes, even some Vienna Sausages would be fine, thank you."

So, after he ate all of our Ding Dongs and Vienna Sausages, we asked him again about the prophecy.

"Oh, yeah, the . . . prophecy. Right. What . . . specifically were you expecting a prophecy about?"

"You're supposed to tell us, you little creep," snapped Annette.

"Right. Right. Well. So. Prophecy Time. O-kay. Whew. Here we go. On with the prophesying. Getting ready to prophesy. The clouds are parting. Oh, yes! It's . . . coming to me now! Here we go -"

"YEAH, WELL, GET ON WITH IT!"

"Sure. Sure. Yeah. Okay. Here goes. Time to prophesy. Let's get ready. Here it comes. I'm -"

I was starting to get angry.

"JEFF, IF YOU DON'T START PROPHESYING RIGHT NOW, I SWEAR ON MY MOTHER'S SOLID BRASS BURIAL URN THAT I WILL PERSONALLY DO SOMETHING THAT . . . IS EXTREMELY . . . . UNNATURAL . . . AND PAINFUL . . . THAT YOU WON'T REALLY . . . LIKE . . . TOO MUCH, DUDE! I MEAN IT!"

I could feel the seams of my clothes splitting, and noticed that my skin was sorta turning green.

Annette interceded, "Don't make He's angry, Jeff. You . . . wouldn't like him when he's angry."

"Beep. Beep. Beep!" threatened Paul.

Jeff glanced around the room worriedly and, like, began to prophesy.

"I have seen . . . I have seen . . . things . . . that no mortal man before me . . . nor since, mind you, either . . . hath, um . . . seeneth."

"JEFF -"

"And these are the things (ahem) which I have, ah, seen. Eth. Seeneth. These two things - two things haveth I seen before mine eyes. One thing and one thing and yet a third, yes, three things have I seen and shall I now repeat unto yourn ears, you bet. Say . . . are there any of those Vienna Sausages, left, 'cause I -"

"JEFF!"

"Ah, the . . . first, the first thing, of the three, of which there are two remaining after the first is complete, is this: I stood before the mighty . . . uhm . . . the mighty . . . "

"Gates?" Annette offered.

"Mighty gates, yes, and I saw, and, look! Before me was THE GATE, and imprinteth upon the Gateth, uhm, I mean, 'Gate,' was a name - the name being Ge'-hin-nom-bo-ho-reth-shu-bu-geth-mu-el, the meaning of which was . . . the meaning of which was . . . "

We all leaned closer.

"The meaning of which was . . . a complete mystery to me, frankly. The second thing of which I have spoken, second of the three, after which there remains only one -"

"Wait a minute!" protested Annette.

"Yeah, well, hold on there a minute, Jeff!" I Zoroastrianated . . . er, I mean, "expostulated." "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Hey, back off, layman, I call 'em like I see 'em! I'm a prophet, not an interpreter! Anyway, the second vision is this: A man - let us call him 'Leslie' -"

" 'Leslie?' That's a stupid name for a guy!"

"It doesn't matter, brothers, it's . . . 'allegorical' - you know, a 'metaphor.' "

"A 'metaphor' for what?"

"Oh, I don't know - moral weakness, sexual confusion -"

"Yeah, well, hold it right there, Jeff, 'cause I'm not -"

"Look. Do you guys want me to prophesy, or what?"

"Yeah, well . . . okay. But enough with this 'sexual confusion' crap."

"Okay, okay. So this man, named . . . 'Leonard' -"

"I thought you said his name was 'Leslie!' "

"I changed it, because I thought it made you angry!"

"So, 'Leslie' and 'Leonard' are two different dudes, right?"

"No, no, no. Look, my spirit vision is getting sorta . . . foggy. Do I see one more Ding Dong over there?"

"Yeah, well, 'Leslie' and 'Leonard' aren't, you know . . . 'queer,' are they? 'Cause if they are -"

Needless to say, dude, it took quite a while for Jeff to convoy . . . er, "convey" the profit-sharing program. Uhm . . . "prophecy." I wish that Pat, The Main Man Who Can Surely Be Held Accountable For The Birth Of He Who Is Called Jason, could've been there to explain it to us, but He was too busy dredging out the sewage tanks behind the Little Nickel Want-Ad Offices.

Anyway, by the end, we understood clearly what we had to do.

Move to Florida and start recording our next album.

ANNETTE AND JEFF HENDERSON

JEFF HENDERSON, ONE TRUE PROPHET AND SCRIBE OF HE WHO YOU JUST BETTER GET USED TO CALLING JASON, YOU BET

55. IN THE STUDIO AND WHAT SMELL . . . ER, "BEFELL" US THERE, DUDE

Yeah, well, as soon as we got to the studio, in Florida, things started turning weird. I mean, let's face it - Joey had (as far as we knew) been blown up in the Challenger space shuttle disaster, Paul was in an irreversible coma, besides being irradiated to the point where he glowed in the dark, we were wanted by every major governmental agency in existence, we hadn't written any songs, I had basically forgotten how to play the guitar, and we all had sorta painful sunburns. One day, after winding the rubber band on Paul's life-support system, I cried out to the sky, "Yeah, well, this sucks! We'll never be able to record this album! It's impossible! I can't do it!"

Suddenly, the room filled with the smoke of men's nightmares . . . or else someone had let off a stink bomb or something. When the room was completely filled with smoke, I thought I heard a door open and shut, but I was probably hallucinating.

And, then, like, a voice (that could only have been the all-powerful and mind-consuming voice of an unearthly creature . . . or else someone was holding their nose and shouting through a Radio Shack Space Voice Megaphone) spoketh unto mine ears, verily, and . . . oh, sorry . . . anyway, I heard this voice, okay? And somehow, through my keen insight and woman's intuition (not that I'm a woman, mind you), I knew that it was the Voice Of Jason.

"This is the Voice Of Jason," it said, " and you better listen up, you bet! My Father, Pat, would've been here, too, but He has to finish His Seattle Times Motor Route. He's doing it on His scooter, with all the papers stuffed inside His down-filled vest, so it takes Him quite a while. Anyway, I'm none too happy about your lack of faith, bub. Now, you must be punished. I had a great punishment all worked out, but someone already used my idea, plus there are no whales around here this time of year. So you're going to get an even worse punishment! Heh, heh, heh!"

"Yeah, well . . . like what?"

"Heh, heh, heh, ha ha ha ha HA HA HA HA HA! Oh, HO HO HO HO HO, HOO HOO HOO HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE - YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LIKE IT! AH, HA HA HA HA, TEE HEE TEE HEE, A HA HA HA HO HO HO (gasp, pant) HAW HAW, OH, HA HA A HA, HO HO HEE HEE HEE -"

The next, like, day, I awoke with weeping boils, scaly eyelids, pinkeye, an ingrown nipple, a yeast infection in my armpits, a receding lip, a cleft esophagus, a larynx-stone, athlete's bladder, a sprained optic nerve, a deviated aorta, astigmatism of the colon, a perforated prostate, and a really bad cold.

This did not Bo Diddley well. Uhm . . . "bode" well. It . . . did not.

PAT, THE JANITOR, FATHER OF JASON, DISPLAYS HIS UNEARTHLY POWER

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ANOTHER STUDIO THAT WE RECORDED AT, THEREBY GETTING OUR NAME, FIFI, PRINTED IN THE PAPER! COOL, HUH?

56. THE SHORTEST CHAPTER

He's wept.

57. LIKE, REDEMPTION, DUDE

Yeah, well, I was in the hospital for forty days and twenty-seven nights. Finally, when I was watchin' the news one day, they were talkin' about the Challenger space shuttle, and I started to really listen hard, even though that kinda hurt my dislocated eardrum. They were sayin' that some ambergris . . . I mean, "debris" from the Challenger was gonna fall on parts of southern Florida all that week. At that moment, I was, like, healed! I leapt from my sickbed, and ran back to the studio, where everyone was sitting around waiting for me.

"Where in the -" began Annette.

"Yeah, well, back off me, man! There's no time for that now! Get me a guitar!"

"He's? What's going on?"

"Trust me, dude! Grab a mike and just start singin'!"

"He's! We still don't have a bassist!"

"Sure we do!"

"Not one who's among the living!"

"Beep. Beep. Beep," protested Paul feebly.

"Look," I explained, "all we gotta do is plug Paul's EKG monitor sound into this amplifier like (click!) this - turn up the volume like this -"

"BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!" exuberated Paul.

"- turn the treble wa-a-ay down, and the bass wa-a-ay up, and -"

"BOMP! BOMP! BOMP!" grooved Paul.

"- there's our bassist!"

"Well . . . okay, but we still don't have a drummer!"

Just then, we heard a loud "BANG!" then another, even louder "BANG!" followed by a sort of "KEE-RANK!" type of noise on the tin roof of the studio. We ran outside and saw an endless stream of metal debris and human body parts crashing and clattering down onto the roof of the studio. And, as we watched, we felt Joey "The Filler" Enbom's presence. He was more rhythmic in death, falling from outer space onto the tin roof of our studio, than he was in life, when he was actually playing a real, like, set of drums.

Yeah, well, we were a band once again.

So, anyway, we recorded for forty days and thirty-two nights, non-stop. We just sang and played whatever came to our heads. And, all the while, pieces of Joey and the Challenger fell on the studio roof, all in perfect time. When it was all over, we had over fifty-two thousand hours of tape, so we called in Phil Spector, and he kinda sorted it all out into about three good songs, and a bunch of other worthless crap. In fact, all of the rest of our albums up to "Begging With Dignity," including "Everybody Should Love Each Other And Live In Peace And Harmony" and "Night Of The Living Masking Tape," came from these tapes.

I guess there mighta been more than three good songs, then, 'cause we wouldn't've released them otherwise, dude. It wasn't until much later, after the "soccer-game to the death" and our final "High Noon"-type showdown with the Four Tricyclists Of The Apocalypse, that we realized it just might be the last time we would record together.

Anyway, here are some of the lyrics for the albums, "Everybody Should Love Each Other And Live In Peace And Harmony," "Night Of The Living Masking Tape" and "Begging With Dignity."

THE SOUND OF ONE HAND CLAPPING
(SWEATING ZITHERS)
(FROM "EVERYBODY SHOULD LOVE EACH OTHER AND LIVE IN PEACE AND HARMONY")

Movement 1: The Complete, Total, Absolute, Utter Obliteration And Destruction Of Everything That Is, Was, Or Ever Will Be, Or Ever Won't Be, Either

In the valley of death, we have no life
In time, Charon will come
The clash of swords against metal
Will strike the people dumb

Up in the mountains, there is no sound
There is no war above

Movement 2: Woman

But all that you can ever do
Is say, "She is a bunch of poo."
(POO: A synonym for "DOO-DOO")
She makes a sound known as "MOO."

Movement 3: Stanley The Cat's Colonic Phantasm

Dashboard decals absorb cosmic cat food
Garage door openers slaughter toilet paper spools
Empty beer bottles wincing in pain
Sucked through my tape deck; X-raying fools

Movement 4: To Cudgel (One's Brains)

I think that it would be neat
If someone gave me a beet
I would sit here in my seat
Sadly facing my defeat
Llama flying overhead
Gamma rays: Zap! You're dead
I can't see anymore red
Just what Momma must have said

Movement 5: And Now . . . Annette's Anti-Anathematizational Analysis

It would be beautiful if we could be
Free to be . . . you and me
Everybody should love each other
And live in peace and harmony

Can't you - Whooo, baby now
Can't you - I said, my baby
Can't you - can't you see?
Whooooooooo! Oh, yes, I feel it

Movement 6: Blind Man In A Revolving Door

"Hey! What's going on? Get me out of here!
I'm stuck in here forever! Aauuuuuuuuggghhh!"

Movement 7: Slumbering Somnolence While Sleeping (Reprise)

Watch me, friend, when I sleep
Don't make even a little peep
My, the oceans are so deep
Through the ceiling rain does seep

Movement 8: Cozy Malevolence; "Distended" Geese

Please wear undergarments while trying on swimwear
Children's brains controlled by laser bricks
Morty the Mission Meatball hijacking escalators
Coatroom, Hatcheck, and Walking Stick

Movement 9: Soliliquy For Two People

You know, boys and girls
Your elbow is your friend
"You call these cookies squirrels?"
Hierarchists invade North Bend

Movement 10: Bob Barker's Infamous Cannibalistic Rodential Veterinarianism

Would you look at these mice?
They're infested with icky lice
They look just like yummy rice
I'll eat them - for the right price

Movement 11: An Important Message From He's

Arbitrations
Infestations
Decapitations
Ken-L-Rations
Underestimations
Can't we make any sense?

Damnations
Figurations
Indications
Battle Stations
Congratulations
Why must we be so dense?

Space
Grace
Ace
Mace
Can you be a big man now?

Race
Chase
Face
Place
Can you pluck your left eyebrow?

Movement 12: O Heed The Exhortations Of FIFI, Yea, The Prescient Pooch

When all this is said and done
It'll be over - you'll have won
Never look up at the sun
It looks like a HOT DOG BUN

AFRICAN DISEQUILIBRIUM
(FROM "EVERYBODY SHOULD LOVE EACH OTHER AND LIVE IN PEACE AND HARMONY")

Millions of people
Living only on bananas
Families of 47
Living in one-room mud huts

They can't speak English
Cry for the Dark Continent
If only for this
And that they do not have MTV

Weep for Mother Afrika
And her Pseudo-Euro-Afro-Quasi-Communism
Hate and prejudice reign as dictators in Afrika
And they lack modern sewage disposal systems

Don't look for Fotomats in Afrika
For this is a symbol of purity and righteousness
A deity not recognized by native heathens
For, though they own the Suez Canal, they know not of Yamaha Jetskis

Weep for Mother Afrika
As she weeps for you
And holds out her trembling hands, waiting
For you to proffer the gift of non-stick Teflon frying pans

Weep Weep Weep A Lot
Weep Weep Weep A Lot
Weep Weep Weep A Lot
Weep Weep Weep A Lot

REBELLIOUS COTTAGE CHEESE
(PART XXXIX OF "EVIL DAIRY PRODUCTS")
(FROM "NIGHT OF THE LIVING MASKING TAPE")

Man lived in peace with his cheese
Many, many years ago
Havarti, Colby, Cheddar Cheese
Edam, Gouda . . . and Samsoe

To the younger, spunky teens
Mighty fine were all of these
But all that satisfied these teens
Was their favorite - COTTAGE CHEESE

But one day, a book was found
Told of when yogurt ruled the land
Cottage cheese formed an underground
They felt their time was at hand

"The age of the curds has come!
The time is done for the Czar!
Yo, ho, ho and a bottle of rum
Let's blow up a person's car!"

Cheese attacked the people's forts
And pillaged their tiny towns
They were contempt in all the courts
Killed horses at Churchill Downs

"Onward, my dairy warriors, ONWARD!"

"Cheese, HEIL! Cheese, HEIL!"

"We will go on to the end. We will fight in the dairy sections of 7-11's and other convenience stores. We shall defend our homes against the cheese hordes, whatever the cost may be . . . We shall NEVER surrender!"

Then the final face-off came
Men pulled out machines of death
Shot avocados all the same
And told this story as a myth

MY TOENAILS TELL ME THINGS
(FROM "NIGHT OF THE LIVING MASKING TAPE")

When life is weighing me down
And I start to get confused
I lock myself in the closet
And then, I take off my shoes

CHORUS:
Lo and behold, my toenails glow
Just like those plastic vampire fangs
I ask them questions, and, hey!
MY TOENAILS TELL ME THINGS!

Who will be the next pope?
What's really in Spam?
O Wondrous Toenail Oracle
Can you tell me who I am?

Do pigeons really take aim?
And where does Ralph Nader shop?
What does baby oil come from?
O Toenail Seer, don't stop!

Toenails, look upon my clothes
And tell me if they're right
Do these things go together?
Or is this shirt too bright?

CHORUS

These little piggies are my buddies
And I wanna treat 'em right
So I've made them each wool caps
To keep them warm at night

My girlfriend just left me
But that's the way it goes
I'm just glad that my foot
Is still attached to my toes

I recommend that everyone
Listen to their toes
Just have an open mind
You might learn something - who knows?

CHORUS TWICE, THEN FADE

I'M NOT NEIL DIAMOND (I'M HE'S)
(FROM "BEGGING WITH DIGNITY")

Hey! I'm not Neil Diamond
This ain't Las Vegas
Ain't got no floor show
With dancin' babes

I ain't Wayne Newton
Ain't got no skinny moustache
Don't call me Julio Iglesias
(The greasy little rugrat)

CHORUS:
'Cause I'm He's!
(He's, He's, He's!)
I do as I please!
(Please, Please, Please!)
Come on back, baby!
(Whoo - oo - ooh!)
I got over my disease!
(Whoo - ooh, Disease, Disease, OW!)

I was never Lawrence Welk
My clothes are never clean
My fans really dig it when
I douse myself with gasoline

Slim Whitman is not my father
Boxcar Willie is not my mom
I'll steal your car, dude
If you say this song is dumb (I'm serious)

CHORUS

If you think I'm Roger Whittaker
Yeah, well, all that I can say
Is I'm a serious musician, dude
Just listen to me play - whoo, look out now!

GUITAR SOLO

I don't wanna be Tom Jones
Don't throw your clothes at me
I might not know how to play guitar
Yeah, well, it doesn't matter, dude . . . I'M HE'S!

CHORUS

58. REVELATIONS

Yeah, well, this is when, like, stuff totally started, like, happening . . . to us, dude. I mean, what with the glorious appearance of He Whom We Have Gotten Used To Calling Jason; the "soccer-game-to-the-death" between Paul DeVoid and Jeff Lageson (The Anti-Jason); and plenty of other weird stuff copulating . . . er, "culminating," I mean, dude . . . (ahem) . . . culminating in our final journey to the fabled "Salad Bar Of Eternal Life" in the "Promised Taco John's" spoken of in the Book Of Toews (pronounced TAYVZ), it turned out to be a busier week than we thought it was going to be, previously, like, before all that stuff happened.

But I don't want to give away too much of the story, dude.

So, like, this is the way that the end started to begin commencing to finish. This is the part where we had to move, like, beyond the realm of normal reality and into . . . something else, other than "normal reality," dude. When we had to stand up for our beliefs and take the bull by the tail, man. This is when we had to, like, cross the Rubik's Cube, just like a Caesar Salad. I mean, you know, "Rubicon," yeah, you know.

Yeah, well, anyway, we finished mixing our next three albums and stuff, so we were pretty elastic, and we were sitting around the studio, gettin' real rowdy.

Oh, man, I meant "ecstatic." Yeah, "ecstatic." Sorry.

So, we were sittin' around, gettin', you know, radical. We were watchin' our "special" movies, drinkin' lots of hard stuff, like Triaminic and Listermint, takin' some recreational decongestants, and a few diet pills and stuff, and, later on in the evening, some high-potency "special" stuff that we saved for those wild times when there was nothing else to do, man. You know the stuff I'm talkin' about, dude? Stool softener? Daily fiber supplement?

Let's face it, man, we were gettin' pretty wristwatched. Er . . . "debauched."

Plus, we were eating all kinds of sugary breakfast cereals and whispering dirty words and then laughing. Also, we each had a couple of chicks there.

Unfortunately, our spiritual leader, He Whom We, For The Sake Of Argument, Refer To Simply As Jason, chose that exact moment to appear to us in all of His glorious . . . glory, I guess, dude.

There was a loud rumbling, like the opening of some celestial portal, or else someone was rattling a piece of sheet metal. Then, there was a blinding white light, which probably signalled Jason's entrance into our dimension. Either that, or else someone was shining an arc lamp at us so we wouldn't see Jason coming in the front door of the studio. It could've been that. Anyway, Jason was there, and was not at all pleased with our generosity. Er . . . "degeneracy."

"WHAT in the WORLD is GOING ON HERE?" He demanded.

"Yeah, well, uhm, you see, the uh . . . thing is, dude, er . . . Jason, that, uhh . . . " I began.

"SHUT UP, MORTAL! YOUR UNCLEANNESS IS JUDGED TO BE TOTALLY . . . UNCLEAN!" Jason thundered.

"Doo-doo. Pee-pee," Annette was whispering in a corner, snickering.

"Annette! Quit it, dude! Can't you see that Jason is -"

"BOTH OF YOU SHUT UP! I CANNOT BELIEVETH MINE EYES, YOU BET! DEFILING YOUR BODIES WITH UNHOLY FIBER SUPPLEMENTS AND . . . WHAT IS THAT STUFF? CAP'N CRUNCH? YE-E-E-E-EECH!"

"Yeah, well, uhm . . . Jason, sir, we can quit anytime, man -"

"SHUT UP! AND PUT ALL THOSE POOR LITTLE BABY CHICKENS BACK IN THEIR INCUBATOR! WHAT IS THIS YOU'RE WATCHING? IT LOOKS LIKE . . . LIKE . . . A HIGH-SCHOOL PRODUCTION OF 'HARVEY!' IS THAT RIGHT?"

"Uhm, yeah, well . . . yes. It is. Yes."

"AAAAAAUUUUUGH! IT IS TRULY AN ABOMINATION! IF THERE'S ONE THING I JUST CAN'T TOLERATE, IT'S HIGH-SCHOOL DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS! NO-TALENT, HORMONE-DERANGED . . . " He spat the word out, "TEENAGERS! DELUDING YOURSELVES WITH VISIONS OF FAME AND ROMANCE! UGGGGH! THIS IS THE WORST SIN OF ALL, I TELL YOU!"

"But, Jason . . . master, in the Book Of Toews, it says that the greatest sin is -"

"I CHANGED MY MIND! LOOK, I DIDN'T COME HERE TO ARGUE! I HAVE SOME WORDS OF PROPHECY TO SHARE WITH YOU, PUNY SERVANTS! MY FATHER, PAT, WOULD HAVE BEEN HERE, TOO, BUT HE HAD TO FINISH FUMIGATING THE MASSAGE room OVER AT THE APARTMENTS HE WORKS AT! ANYWAY, I'M HERE, SO CLEAN THIS PLACE UP! NOW!!"

Yeah, well, you can bet we started cleaning.

"BY THE WAY," continued Jason, "where's the john in this place? I really gotta go."

Later on, when we had finally caught all the chicks and picked up all the scattered drug packages, Jason told us what He came to tell us.

He told us of many coming trials and decapitations, er . . . "tribulations," that we would most surely -have to face - soon. He told us that, like it or not, one of us would eventually have to do battle with Jeff Lageson (The Anti-Jason). According to what Jason said, Jeff Lageson (The Anti-Jason) would have the traditional right to choose his opponent - as well as the mode of battle.

"Boy, I hope he doesn't challenge us to a soccer game. Jeff Lageson (The Anti-Jason) is supposed to be really good," Annette observed.

"Yeah, well, I doubt it, dude, since it's supposed to be a battle to the death. You can't play soccer to the death. Unless you just played until one of you dropped from sheer exhaustion. Or, I guess you could play with a soccer ball that was, like, covered with spikes, or else -"

"SHUT UP!" Jason roared, holding His ears.

Anyway, Jason also said that we would eventually have to face the Four Psychologists . . . I mean, Four "Tricyclists" Of The Apocalypse. He reminded us of their awesome, otherworldly powers and crustacean knowledge. "Omniscient" knowledge, I mean.

Annette asked Jason if they were so powerful, how come they rode around on little kid's tricycles, but Jason swiftly boxed his ears, so Annette didn't ask anymore questions.

"AND KNOW THIS, MEASLY EARTH-BOUND PEONS, WHOSOEVER SHALL PREVAIL AGAINST MINE ENEMIES, NAMELY JEFF LAGESON (THE ANTI - ME) AND THOSE DARN FOUR TRICYCLISTS -" He glanced meaningfully at Annette, who was silently holding an ice pack to his head, "- OF THE APOCALYPSE, SHALL I LEAD, OR 'I SHALL LEAD,' DEPENDING ON YOUR TRANSLATION, TO THE PROMISED TACO JOHN'S OF LEGEND -"

We gasped loudly, our mouths agape.

"QUIT THAT!" bellowed Jason. "AND SHUT YOUR MOUTHS! DIDN'T YOUR MOTHERS TEACH YOU ANYTHING? ANYWAY, THEY I SHALL LEADETH UNTO THE PROMISED TACO JOHN'S, WHERE THEY WILL PARTAKE JOYOUSLY OF THE SALAD BAR OF ETERNAL LIFE! GOOD LUCK, FOOLS! HA HA HA HA HA HA! OH, DEM BONES GONNA RISE AGAIN, DEM BONES GONNA RISE AGAIN! HA HA HA HA HA HEE HEE HEE, OH HO HO HO HA HA HA -"

With this, the arc lamp was turned on again, someone pumped dry ice into the room, and Jason vanished.

"What did He mean by that - 'Dem bones gonna rise again' - He's?" asked Annette.

"Yeah, well, I don't know, man. I just . . . don't know. He spoke to us of many mysterious and wonderful things, dude. His ways are truly, like, sacred and duplex king. Er, I mean, 'perplexing.' "

"You bet they are!" added Annette.

"Beep. Beep. Beep!" proclaimed Paul, unconvincingly.

"Yeah, well, you can just stay out of it, Paul. Let's face it, man, you're clinically dead - there's no way you'll be able to help in our coming apoplectic, er . . . 'epileptic' . . . er, 'apocalyptic' battles to come, dude. No way," I retorted.

"Beep . . . Beep," conceded Paul.

"You know, Annette," I began, "there's still one thing that's bothering me . . . "

"What's that?"

"Beep!" urged Paul.

"Jason, like, proclaimed unto us many mysterious and soul-stirring things. But, He neglected to tell us one thing, dudes . . . "

"What, He's? Tell us!"

"BEEP!"

"I want to know . . . " I began, " . . . who's paying at the Salad Bar Of Eternal Life? I mean, I'm not gonna bring any money if I don't have to! And, anyway - I paid last time, didn't I? If anyone should pay, it should be . . . Paul! I mean, he can't do anything else for - hey! Where are you guys goin'? Come back here, dudes! I'm talkin', man! Shoot!"

In the distance, a poodle with brightly-dyed tufts of fur howled incessantly as the pink satin bow around its tail got caught in the rotating tines of a wheat-threshing machine.

**PAT, THE ONE TRUE JANITOR,
CONTEMPLATES TIME AND SPACE
WHILE WATCHING A"PERRY MASON" RERUN**

59. GOALIE OF THE GODS

Yeah, well, the next morning, Annette and Paul came in to breakfast looking bedraggled and groggy.

"Dudes! What's the matter? You both look bedraggled and groggy!" I greeted them heartily, as I gulped down my usual breakfast of Spaghetti-O's and Pez, washing it down with a large glass full of steaming-hot Gatorade.

"Oh, man - I didn't get any sleep last night," complained Annette. "There was a poodle somewhere outside my window yelping and screeching all night. It also sounded like someone was running some type of heavy machinery, like a . . . a . . . "

"Beep. Beep?" offered Paul.

"Yeah - a wheat-threshing machine! What was that all about?"

"Didn't you dudes read the end of the last chapter?" I asked incredulously.

"No, we were too tired - we went to bed while you were still writing it. What happened?"

"Beep?"

While I explained to them the necessity of melodramatic plot devices and recurring motifs for generating reader involvement and aiding in cohesiveness, I noticed that Paul was beeping frantically over by the kitchen window. I went over and pushed his iron lung out of the way so I could see out the window, and what I saw terrified me to my very soul. That stupid yelping mutt had tipped over our trash cans and strewn our garbage all over the place.

Paul continued to beep frantically, however, so I figured there must be something else, and then I saw something that was really scary, dude.

Standing in the midst of the eerie morning fog, with an unholy glow surrounding his muscular body, was -

"Hey, He's! Isn't that Jeff Lageson (The Anti-Jason) standing out there in -"

"SHUT UP, ANNETTE! Can't you see I'm writing? Now, where was I? Oh, yeah -"

- surrounding his muscular body, was . . . Jeff Lageson (The Anti-Jason).

And in his hands, we saw immediately, he was holding . . . a soccer ball.

We went outside, and cautiously approached him to see what he wanted, with Paul wheeling along behind us in his iron lung, beeping incessantly.

I spoke first.

"Hey, dude, did you, like, tip over our garbage cans? 'Cause if you did, you're gonna have to -"

"I CHALLENGE YOU FOLLOWERS OF JASON TO A BATTLE - A BATTLE TO THE DEATH!" Jeff intoned.

"Yeah, well, Jason told us this would happen, dude. We're prepared, man!"

"We are?"

"Beep?"

"Shut up, Paul and Annette! Yeah, we're prepared to fight you in any way you choose, as long as it isn't -"

"SOCCER! SOCCER IS THE GAME THAT I CHOOSE! I HAVE ALREADY SET UP GOALS AT EACH END OF YOUR YARD, AND NOW, I WILL CHOOSE MY OPPONENT!"

We gulped.

"Yeah, well, dude," I began, "any one of the members of FIFI will accept your challenge. Except, of course, Joey "The Filler" Enbom, who met a fiery death on the Challenger space shuttle, or Paul "The Void" DeVoid, who, as you can plainly see, is -"

"I SELECT PAUL DeVOID AS MY OPPONENT - IN A SUDDEN-DEATH (HEH-HEH!) SOCCER-GAME-TO-THE-DEATH! HA HA HA HA HA, OH HO HO HO HO, HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HA HA HA HA HA HA -"

"But that's not fair!" protested Annette. "Paul DeVoid is already . . . dead. Um . . . okay, uh . . . you're the boss. Yeah, Paul's a good choice, Jeff. Um, I guess you won't be needin' me or He's, then, right? We'll just, um, go . . . clean up the garbage over here . . . yeah, we'll, uh . . . "

Annette starting tugging at my sleeve.

"GET BACK HERE!" ordered Jeff. "POSITION PAUL AT THE GOAL AND PREPARE TO BECOME MY SLAVES! HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HO HO HO HO HO HO HEE HEE HEE!"

Annette and I reluctantly wheeled Paul over to the goal-net and centered his iron lung between the posts.

"BEEPBEEPBEEPBEEPBEEPBEEP!" fretted Paul.

"Don't be a weenie, Paul - you're already dead! Well, pretty much, anyways. Actually, you're not a whole heck of a lot different than you were when you were alive. How much worse can total death be? And, besides, you'll be dying for a (snicker) good cause. (Heh, heh) Jason will be so (chuckle) proud of your (guffaw) valiant efforts. Besides . . . better you than me!" Annette encouraged, slapping Paul heartily in the chest.

Paul was visibly moved.

"Beep," he agreed, his courage, like, restored.

"ARE YOU DIMWITS READY DOWN THERE?" shouted Jeff. "GET OUT OF THE WAY, HE'S AND ANNETTE - THIS IS JUST BETWEEN (heh, heh) PAUL AND ME, NOW!"

"Beep," muttered Paul sarcastically.

"I'LL, UH, TAKE THE BALL FIRST, JUST TO, UH, GET THINGS STARTED!" we heard Jeff Lageson (The Anti-Jason) say as we took our places on the sidelines.

Jeff began bringing the ball down the field expertly. Paul wisely held his position, not wanting to move too soon.

Jeff kicked the ball into the air and caught it on his knee, then continued to bounce it up and down on his knees, then on his head, still coming steadily down the yard toward Paul.

Paul kept holding his position, awaiting further developments.

Jeff let the ball roll down his back, and then caught it with his heel, not letting this maneuver, however, slow his inexorable progress down the yard, toward Paul.

Paul waited to see what Jeff's next move would be, and calmly held his position.

We were gettin' kinda anxious for Paul to do something, but then we remembered that Paul was, after all, clinically dead, besides being held immobile in an iron lung and life-support mechanism.

Yeah, well . . . things did not look so hot for our side.

Jeff positioned himself about thirty feet from Paul's goal (approximately the length of an adult male's intestinal tract), and prepared to shoot.

Paul, meanwhile, held his position, not wanting to make any rash decisions.

Jeff shot. It was, like, a perfect shot, calculated to fly right over Paul and into the net.

We held our breath.

The hellish black-and-white ball, sent from an evil, cackling demon standing thirty feet down our lawn, arced straight for the goal.

There was no way in the world it could miss.

Our doom was sealed.

We watched, dumbstruck, as the ball glided silently, effortlessly through the becalmed stratosphere, as if in mocking slow motion.

"Look at meee!" the ball said to us. "I'm going into the net! There's no way I can miss! Wheee! You guys are losers! Your last album sucked! All your albums sucked! Your puny efforts were all for nothing! You guys aren't a real band! You can barely speak to one another! You're all . . . ugly! No one can help you now, fools!"

"Oh, the humanity!" cried Annette.

Choking back tears, I put my hand on Annette's shoulder and spoke.

"Annette, I'm sorry for all the . . . the bad stuff I, like, did to you. You're not really a bad guy, I guess. I suppose I'm just . . . insecure. Annette, you're my . . . best friend, man. You're my . . . only friend. You're the only guy who ever got to know me, and still would hang around with me. I just thought that I should say that, dude, now that we're all going to die, or worse, become Jeff's eternal mind-slaves."

The ball, taunting us, streaked toward the net and Paul.

Annette, wiping his nose, replied hesitantly.

"He's . . . that's beautiful! I forgive you, man! I knew you were just jokin', most of the time. I guess I could've been nicer to you, too. Wow . . . I never realized how crappily we treated each other 'til right now. And you know what else? I remember the words to 'Thrash On You!' "

Ten yards now . . . eight . . .

"Yeah, well, Annette . . . if we get out of this situation, which we won't . . . but if we do, I promise to never pick on you again, man."

"Okay. Same goes for me, He's. Shoot, I can't believe things are going to end like this, with Paul losing a . . . a lousy soccer game to our sworn enemy, Jeff Lageson (The Anti-Jason). Well . . . it's been an experience, I guess . . . what else could you call it?"

"Annette, I love you . . . I love you like you were . . . someone I knew, man."

The ball of our fate streaked toward its destination, unencumbered by gravity or other natural laws.

"Goodbye, He's."

"Yeah, well . . . goodbye, Annette. I just wish . . . I wish we could be a real band again, all of us here together. Oh well."

And that was when the shadow hit us.

A big shadow.

Like the shadow of . . . a falling piece of wreckage from the Challenger.

Just as the ball was about to fly past Paul, the twisted piece of wreckage fell on the foot end of his iron lung, and Paul's stretcher lurched upward, causing Paul to passively head-butt the ball back toward Jeff at an incredible speed!

Jeff, stunned, prepared to block the shot, and he would've, too, if it wasn't for the second piece of wreckage that fell - on him. The ball streaked over his inert body and into the net on the other side of the lawn.

"WOW!" I enthused. "THIS IS THE MOST . . . INCREDIBLE MIRACLE I HAVE EVER WITNESSED! JASON BE PRAISED -"

"Hey . . . would you guys help me get out of this thing? What - what's going on, Annette? He's? Where . . . where's my dog?" mumbled Paul groggily (his normal speaking voice).

"PAUL!" Annette shrieked. "THIS IS TRULY THE MOST . . . INCREDIBLE MIRACLE I HAVE EVER WITNESSED! ALMIGHTY JASON BE -"

"Yeah, well, you guys haven't seen nothing yet. You're not going to believe this," I said. "Look."

All around the yard and the studio, the small pieces of Joey's body were swirling around, glowing, finding their way to the center of the yard, re-joining, until Joey, whole once more, stood before us. He was a regular Lasergun. Uhm . . . "Lazarus."

"Hi, guys!" shouted Joey. "I told you I wasn't gonna let you write me out of the book! Ha-hah! How's my dad . . . AMADEUS MOZART? Did you guys know I invented the toaster as we know it today? Ha-hah! It's just like my wife . . . CHERYL TIEGS, useta say -"

"Oh, give it up, Joey! You didn't write yourself back into the book! You were resurrected by Jason! Hey, so that's what he meant by 'Dem Bones Gonna Rise Again!' "

"Beep. I mean . . . yeah. I guess so, Annette," agreed Paul, shaking his head, as if he was trying to shake his brain loose, or something.

Yeah, well, I couldn't believe it. We were all, like, there. Together. But . . . what now?

The clouds parted, and a voice spoke to us from heaven. Or maybe he was just up on the roof, speaking through a megaphone. Anyway, what he had to say was pretty . . . amazing, to say the least.

"GO TO DENNY'S!"

"Say what?"

"I didn't quite catch what he said there . . . "

"Beep . . . I mean, is he kidding?"

"I SAID, 'GO TO DENNY'S!' THERE YOU WILL FACE YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE - YOUR FINAL CONFRONTATION WITH THE FOUR TRICYCLISTS OF THE APOCALYPSE!"

"Uhm . . . " I wanted to know more, but I didn't quite know how I should start to begin, "yeah, well, uhm . . . which Denny's? I mean -"

"IN LYNNWOOD, WASHINGTON. JUST OFF 44TH ON 196TH. NOW GO!"

"Is that the one that's right near a big Sears store?" asked Annette.

"I WISH MY FATHER, PAT, WOULD'VE COME ALONG - HE COUD'VE EXPLAINED IT BETTER. UNFORTUNATELY, HE'S BUSY MOPPING UP THE DOG KENNELS OVER AT THE APARTMENT WHERE HE WORKS. YOU SEE, YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT THE DENNY'S ON AURORA, DOWN AROUND 175TH OR SO. I'M TALKING ABOUT THE DENNY'S IN DOWNTOWN LYNNWOOD. NEAR FRED MEYER'S."

"But Fred Meyer's is on Aurora," Joey persisted.

"NO, NO - THERE'S A FRED MEYER'S ON 196TH IN LYNNWOOD, TOO! LOOK -"

"Are you sure you're not thinking of the Denny's on Northgate Way? There's a Fred Meyer's near there," I offered.

Annette disagreed, "Fred Meyer's is way over on Lake City Way, He's. That's a good two miles from the Denny's you're thinking of. Now, if you're taking I-5 -"

Eventually, Jason climbed down from the roof of the studio and drew us a map. When we finally had it figured out, we bought some scooters and headed for Washington, eager for our date with obesity. Er . . . "density," I mean. No . . . "destiny" . . . yeah, that's what I mean. "Destiny." At Denny's.

60. ARMAGEDDON AT DENNY'S

Yeah, well, we eventually found our way to the Denny's in Lynnwood, Washington at about two in the morning. Seeing as how we had just driven our scooters all the way from Florida to Washington, we were sorta hungry. So we all gave our orders to the waitress, who looked kinda . . . familiar . . .

"Okay, will that be all? Fine. I'll bring your coffees in just amoment -"

"Don't forget my horseradish," Annette interrupted.

"Right. Right. Okay, it'll take me a couple minutes to heat up the Gatorade, and the 'Grits 'n' Guacamole All-You-Can-Eat' plate will take a little extra time, alright?"

"That's fine," I commented, "but please, can you make sure the dill sauce on my tapioca pudding is fresh? The last time I came here, it was kinda . . . stale."

"Sure. Oh, by the way, you're all GOING TO HELL!!"

We were stunned. Could it be . . . ?

"Enjoy your meal!" she urged cheerfully. Then we knew who it was.

"Beep! I mean, hey! That was Grace Lord!"

"Man, if my brother, CLINT EASTWOOD, were here, he'd know what to do! You know, me and Clint -"

"Oh, quit it, Joey! Stop trying to write yourself a bigger part in the book. We're pretty close to the end, anyway!" snarled Annette.

"That's what you think, man. I could change this whole book, if I wanted to. Just like earlier, when I wrote all the lyrics and music to all of our albums -"

"YOU DID NOT! He's and I did! You and Paul were always too busy taking Nyquil, hanging around in prosthetic limb outlets, pretending you were mannequins, and stowing away on space shuttles!"

"DID NOT, DID NOT, DID NOT! Annette, you'll be sorry when I call up my best friend, GEORGE BUSH -"

"OH, LIAR, LIAR, PANTS ON FIRE -"

Yeah, well, I couldn't tolerate this childish bickering anymore, so I got up and left the table. Also, I really had to take a whiz.

As I was walking toward the bathrooms, I heard someone calling my name, and I looked over the counter into the kitchen, and saw someone else I recognized. Phyllis Navidad.

"He's! He's! Hi! Long time no see! How ya doin'? Great! Say, did Grace mention to you guys that you're all GOING TO HELL?"

I nodded and gulped loudly.

"She did? Good! Okay - enjoy your meal! Ha ha ha ha ha ha, hee hee hee hee -"

As she began to hoot and howl maniacally, twenty-foot flames shot up from the fry-vats, obscuring my view.

Now I really had to take a whiz.

When I got back to the table, things seemed to have calmed down. Apparently, Annette and Joey had settled their differences and agreed to pool their energies into solving more immediate problems.

Also, Annette had shoved four or five napkins into Joey's mouth and sealed it with duct tape.

I told them about seeing Phyllis, and we all got real quiet. Especially Joey.

Just then, Grace returned with some of our food.

"Okay, who had the Cream-of-Wheat with vinaigrette dressing, the, uh, hot Gatorade-and-milk -"

"That's mine."

"Okay, and the, uh, hot apple pie with brown gravy -"

"Mmmmph! Mmmmmphh!"

"I think that's Joey's."

"Mmph-mmmph."

"You're welcome, Joey."

"Oh, and by the way, guys," Grace added gleefully, "the Four Tricyclists Of The Apocalypse should be here at any moment to bring your eternal destruction and utter damnation!"

We were silent for a moment, then Annette broke the silence.

"Miss - I mean, Grace - can I have some hot cayenne sauce for my cheesecake? Thanks."

As we ate our meals, we discussed our coming clash with the Four Rye-Krisps Of Acapulco . . . er, "Four Tricyclists Of The Apocalypse." After all, how could we hope to, like, defeat them? Their powers were unholy and unnatural, plus they commanded the elements with a snap of their fingers, while we could barely figure out how to play that riff from "Smoke on the Water" two times in a row.

Once again, things did <u>not</u> look good.

We began seeing signs of the Four Tricyclists' imminent arrival. The wind began to howl, the lights in Denny's started to flicker on and off, lightning struck our scooters, cars in the streets were being flipped around by the tornado-winds, a swarm of locusts began buzzing through the parking lot, some UFOs flew by, the foundation of Denny's started to shake and crack, our food levitated before our eyes, and the sun began to rise . . . in the West. All the while, Grace and Phyllis cackled evilly in the background, stirring this big iron cauldron full of Cream-of-Wheat, or maybe it was the Soup of the Day.

Still, there was no sign of the Four Chiclets Of Acupuncture . . . er, you know what I mean. We were getting really worried, but we didn't actually have a plan or anything, or anyplace else to go, so we just waited. Plus, we were still hungry. After we talked about it, we realized that the last food we had eaten was the Aunty Claire's Canned Candied Eclairs Jeff Henderson had brought to us in the Negeb Desert. Man, no wonder we were hungry. Annette said that it was my fault, because I had forgotten to write about us eating. I tried to explain to him how ridiculous that was, but it was no use.

Metro buses were thrown through the plate-glass windows by the monsoon outside. Myriads upon myriads of frogs had begun infesting the non-smoking section.

We ordered another round of Hot Fudge Brownie Delights with sides of hot hamburger relish and swedish meatballs to put on top of them, plus a couple of lard omelettes. Then we noticed that Grace was talking to someone on the phone. When she was done, she conferred with Phyllis, and then, they came over to talk to us.

Grace, looking ashamed, spoke first.

"Uhm . . . you guys?"

"Yes . . . we guys. You girls? Wantum make whoopee? Heh-heh-heh."

"Shut up, Annette! Grace obviously has something she wants to say! Go ahead, Grace."

"Thanks, He's. Um, well, I was just over there talking to the Four Tricyclists Of The Apocalypse on the phone -"

"Mmmmmph! Mmmmn-mmmn, mmmph!"

"Beep! I mean . . . no, you can't have the rest of my hot Gatorade-and-cream, Joey! You should have ordered a 'large!' "

"Anyway," Grace continued bravely, shifting nervously from one foot to the other, "it, uh . . . doesn't look like they're (ahem) going to be showing up today."

"Yeah, well, great! We have recieved a, like, reprieve from heaven," I exclaimed. "Goodness and righteousness always triumphs in the end, dudes!"

"Well . . . actually, they would've been here, but . . . " Grace paused, staring intently at her shoes, "they got stopped at the Kingston ferry dock. I guess they tried to pay the walk-on rate, but anything with more than two wheels . . . you get the picture. Anyway, they wanted me to tell you that they have realized the error of their ways, and they're thinking of converting . . . to Toewism."

"Pronounced TAY'-VIZZ-UMM," I added helpfully.

"Yeah, either Toewism, or some other religion, called . . . what was it? 'Jellybean's Volkswagens?' I didn't quite catch that part," Grace continued.

I noticed that the wind had stopped, and the locusts had moved on - to the Baskin and Robbins ice cream shop next door. Grace continued to continue.

"And, anyway, they wanted you to know that they apologized for all the trouble they caused you, and, by the way, they really like 'When I Was A Porcupine' and 'Yogurt From Another World' - I guess they listen to your tapes all the time."

Annette, Paul, Joey and I looked at each other and grinned. The frogs started hopping out of the restaurant, and it looked like they had put out the fry-vat fire across the street at Burger King. It was going to be a Special-K Morning, and an Edmonds Kind Of Day. Grace, continuously continuing, continued to continue one last time.

"Also, you guys? Phyllis and I have been talking about it, and we realize that we've been really . . . self-righteous lately, and, well, when we told Mr. Karnofski to gouge out your eyeballs and fry them in a skillet, we . . . we were just . . . <u>kidding</u>! We didn't <u>mean</u> it! We also <u>really</u> didn't mean it when we told you guys that you were going to hell, and when we implied that He's was the Son of Satan or Beelzebub, depending on your translation, that was pretty much a joke, too. We've grown a lot since then, and our hearts have really . . . matured to the point where we now realize just how wrong we were before."

"But you told us that we were going to hell not -" Annette checked his watch, "- five <u>minutes</u> ago! There's no way that you could've undergone a complete spiritual and emotional transformation in that limited amount of time! You two are hypocritical <u>liars</u>!"

"Mmmmnnphh!"

"Beep . . . I mean . . . YEAH!"

Phyllis burst out crying, "You guys just don't <u>understand</u>! We love Jason and recognize Him as being the Only Son Of Pat, The Janitor, yet also being one part of the Holy Triune Tavehead -"

"Pronounced TAVE'-HEDD," I injected.

"- which includes equal parts Jason, Pat and Bob Barker, which three are one and yet three, in much the same way as 1 + 1 + 1 equals 3, yet 1 x 1 x 1 equals 1."

"Beep - um, whoa! Hold on! What is she talking abou -"

Grace, getting into the spirit of things, interrupted, simultaneously shoving Paul under the table. "Yeah, yeah! That's right! Just like water can be a gas, a liquid, or a solid, Jason can be Jason, Pat or Bob Barker, yet still remain Jason, being equal in knowledge, power and wisdom to the other two, in all things, eternally, without fail, except sometimes, when He's not."

Annette fumed, "WHAT? What are you talking about? That is the most . . . spurious reasoning I have ever heard! What about the part in the Book Of Toews -"

"Pronounced -"

"Shut up, He's! The part that says, 'In no way should any person ever think that Me, Pat and Bob are a Triune Toewhead (pronounced TAVE'-HEDD), or anything of that sort, ever. Pat, Bob and I rarely agree on anything, including what movie to go to, or how steak should be cooked. So don't ever get confused and call Us any sort of "Triune" anything, because We aren't, and won't ever be, you bet! O Yea, O Yea, Forsooth, Forsooth, Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa.' Well, how do you explain that, Mizz Smartypants?"

Grace and Phyllis conferred for a moment, and then Phyllis spoke.

"Well, I think that's just the translation you're using. The passage seems pretty open to interpretation, as far as I can see. Maybe Jason is speaking . . . symbolically."

And Grace added, "I don't know much, but I do know, in my heart, that Jason is part of a Triune -," she glanced at me, "- a Triune . . . You-Know-What -"

"Pronounced YOO - NO - WUTT' "

"- and that's all I need to know. Also, I know in my heart that lettuce worship is no longer required, because -"

"WHAT?" Annette screamed. "Why, you -"

At this point, I felt it would be good if I stepped in.

"Yeah, well, look, you guys. Let's, like, accept Grace and Phyllis at face value. You know, there's room for all in the Love Of Jason. Remember what Jason said in The Sermon In The Hoagy's Corner Parking Lot: 'Let He Who Is Without Aim Throw The First Stone.' Grace, Phyllis, are your motives, like, pure? Why do each of you feel that you want to become Tavists (pronounced TAVE'- ISTS)?"

"Mmmnnphh!"

"Beep?"

Grace and Phyllis looked at each other, and then whispered in each other's ears. Finally, Phyllis spoke up.

"We want to become Tavists because we believe, in our hearts, that it's the right thing to do. We feel in our very souls that we need to bring our lives into line with Jason's Four-And-A-Half Commandments, in order to feel the true happiness and spiritual satisfaction spoken of in the Book Of Toews. Um, (pronounced TAYVZ)." she added hurriedly.

"And what about you, Grace?"

She bit her lip.

"Well, yes, definitely, I feel that way, yeah. Plus, there's something else . . . "

"Yes?"

"Well, you know, I mean . . . you know . . . everybody else is doin' it, so, why not? I don't wanna be left out."

Yeah, well, I could see that Grace and Phyllis had truly undergone a total spiritual regeneration in the Eyes Of Jason, so we welcomed them into the fold.

After we ordered another round of rhubarb quiche, we sat back and awaited the glorious arrival of He Who You Might As Well Get Used To Calling Jason, and the final leg of our lifelong journey to the legendary Salad Bar Of Eternal Life.

Somewhere, out in the street, we heard a poodle whimpering as it scampered from beneath one of the wrecked Metro buses.

61. THE SALAD BAR OF ETERNAL LIFE - AT LAST!

Yeah, well, as we finished our third helpings of carrots au gratin-in-a-blanket, we noticed that the parking lot had filled with a heavenly, supernatural fog. Either that, or someone's car had a really bad exhaust problem, dude. The sun came out from behind a cloud, the unearthly . . . fog - or whatever it was - parted, and there, in the parking lot of Denny's (on 196th, just off of 44th), was He Who We, For Lack Of A Better Name, Call Jason, resplendent in his Holy Datsun 310 Of The Gods.

We immediately sprinted out to the parking lot to meet our fate. I thought I heard Grace behind us, shrieking something that sounded like, "Who's gonna pay for all this food? Get back here!" but I couldn't be sure.

Jason beckoned for us to enter His Holy Datsun 310 Of The Gods, and so we did. Jason spoke.

"Sorry about that exhaust smoke, guys. I've gotta get that fixed here pretty soon, I guess. Yeah, you can just move all that stuff off the back seat - I haven't had a chance to clean out the car recently. My Father, Pat, was gonna be here, but -"

"That's okay," grunted Annette as he struggled to fit in the back seat along with Joey, Paul, and a big pile of old newspapers and boxes full of cassette tapes, "He wouldn't have fit in here, anyway - OW! Paul, get your darn elbow out of my - OW!"

"Well, congratulations!" Jason began again, as He put the Holy Datsun 310 Of The Gods into gear, creating a gut-wrenching, high-pitched buzzsaw noise, accompanied by thick, billowing clouds of white smoke. "Whoa! If you can't find it, grind it! There she goes - hack, hack, cough! Anyway," we started to move, "I heard those chicken-weenie so-called Four Tricyclists Of The Apocalypse didn't show!"

"Yeah - hack, hack, hack," confirmed Annette, "that's true - I guess they - hack! - just were too afraid to go up against FIFI! COFF, COFF, HA-A-A-ACK!"

"Beep! I mean, I thought they just got stuck at - OW! Quit it, Annette!"

"Well, it doesn't matter now - all that matters is that you've won, and you are all now fully eligible to enter . . . THE PROMISED - HACK, hack, hack, coff, coff!"

"The Promised Taco - coff, coff, gulp - Taco John's, Your Mightiness? Aaa-tchooo!"

"Yes, Joey, that is correct - ha-choo! Hack, hack, hiccup, coff! You now may enter the Promised Taco John's, and partake of the - ha-ha-ha-chooo! HACK! Salad Bar - coff, coff - Of Eternal Life! He-e-e-e-chh!"

We looked at each other in stunned silence. Actually, the smoke was so thick, it was more like we looked for each other in stunned silence. I mean, yeah, we were silent. We were awe-struck, and filled with, like, glorious wonderment at the godly prize which we were about to receive. Also, though, our lungs were pretty much filled with carbon monoxide. We could barely breathe, much less talk, dude.

"O Mighty Jason -"

"Yes - coff, coff, HACK! - Annette?"

"There is but one - Hack! - question that I still must ask you - coff, coff!"

"Yes, Ann - coff, ha-chooo! - ette?"

"What is - COFF, coff!"

"Gulp, snort, He-e-e-ech! Yes, Annette?"

"What is - he-e-e-ech! Hack! - What is that weird . . . grinding noise?"

"Oh, that? He-e-e-echh! That's, um . . . I'm having a little trouble with the transmission there. That's all. But don't you worry about it, though. Nothing can stop us - a-tchooo! - now from fulfilling our destiny! Coff, coff - OH MY STARS, WHERE'S THE ROAD? WHOA! Are your eyes watering, or is it just Me? Coff, coff! Anyway, as it says in the Book Of Toews -"

"- pronounced - HACK, HACK, He-e-echh! Coff, ahem, He-e-e-e-e-e-e-chhhhh!"

"- yes, thank you, He's - as it says there, in that book - which book I have just mentioned, therefore there is no reason to repeat the name of that book at this time - anyway, as it says there, 'It is truly impossible for -' "

"JASON, I THINK ONE OF YOUR WHEELS JUST FELL OFF -"

"No matter - as it says, 'It is truly impossible for me to lie about stuff of that sort, you bet, O Yea, O Yea, Forsooth, Forsooth, Addis -' YIKES! What was THAT?"

"Jason, when was the last time you checked to see if your engine was securely, like, attached to the frame of your car?"

"These concerns of mortal man cannot worry us now, my - WHOA! I'VE NEVER SEEN A HOOD GO FLYING OFF LIKE THAT! ALMIGHTY PAT! Anyway, where was I? Oh, yes -"

So, we headed west, into the rising sun, secure in the knowledge that our journey was about to end.

62. EPIDERMIS . . . ER, "EPILOGUE," DUDE

Yeah, well, boy, was it ever about to end. We nearly suffocated from the gas fumes and smoke, and, finally, Jason's Holy Datsun 310 Of The Gods shot its transmission tie-rod out through the engine block and into a nearby fire hydrant, flooding two or three city blocks.

Eventually, we had to walk the rest of the way, and we sorta got lost. But, we finally got there, although Jason wasn't even sure it was the right place, until He saw the sign in the window that said, "Salad Bar Of Eternal Life - 1.99 A Plate!" I was glad I hadn't brought any money, 'cause otherwise, I would've ended up paying for everyone. Jason finally had to convince them to take a check.

So, we each partook of the Salad Bar Of Eternal Life, and we were, like, filled with a strange sensation which suffused our bodies with an otherworldly glow and a subtle rumbling of newfound power.

Later on, when we all got over our food poisoning, we heard an interesting announcement on the radio:

"The Ayatollah Richard Mente, recently under investigation for tax fraud, impersonating a prophet, weasel molestation, and shooting the top off a can in Spades, Indiana, died this morning under mysterious circumstances. Police say the only clues found at the scene of the crime were a rhinestone dog collar of a type and size normally worn by pedigree poodles, and a tuft of pink fur found underneath Mente's fingernails. In other news -"

Wow.

We also heard that Grace and Phyllis had travelled to the Phillipines to start up the first "Tavist (Pronounced TAY'-VIST) Mission and Bingo Palace."

I didn't hear too much about John Burton and Porpuse, but I heard a rumor that they changed their name to Stryper, and were becoming kinda popular in Japan.

We were eventually cleared of all the legal charges brought against us, which included negligent manslaughter, inciting race riots, willfully causing a nuclear meltdown, experimental antihistamine possession, sabotage against a governmental space vehicle, operating an iron lung without the proper permits, expired reqistration tabs on our scooters, and shooting the top off a can in Spades, Indiana. The court ruled that we could not be held responsible for these acts, since I had been declared "Legally In Spain," which was weird, because I had never really been to Spain, or even to Philadelphia, but I figured I shouldn't kiss a gift horse on the mouth.

But the weirdest, most unexpected thing to happen was that our albums started selling like nobody's hotcakes. I guess when the American public found out we had been wrongly accused of untrue crimes that we didn't commit, at least not on purpose, anyway, they felt sorry for us, and wanted to help us out. Either that, or they just bought our records as a big joke. I don't know.

Kelly, the love of my life, eventually left me for a midget cellist, so I went back to Who's, who had left her unsuccessful basoonist husband. We decided to put our wealth to good use, and donated a lot of it to Greenpeace and The International Society For The Prevention Of War. I also joined the Army.

One time, I appeared on "Wheel Of Fortune," but I got kicked off when I told Vanna I wanted to buy "two bowels . . . er, 'vowels.' " I guess Pat Sajak didn't think that was too funny.

Paul decided to follow his own path to spiritual fulfillment and enlightenment, and became a freelance mannequin full-time.

The last I heard of Joey, he was teaching "Pizza Delivery As A Life Career" at some local community college.

I don't really know what Annette is doing now - I heard that he became a male stripper, but I'm not sure.

Hydrant Records decided to re-release all of our old records, and they all went platinum at the same time. However, after settling out of court with the families of those unfortunate Split-Pea Festival volunteers who got trampled, and paying to re-build the Three Mile Island nuclear plant, and repaying Mountlake Terrace Senior High School for the tables and other, uh . . . damage, making the last payment on Paul's old iron lung, settling a libel case brought against us by Dan Carnahan (our sub-human roadie) for always calling him "our sub-human roadie," plus buying new registration tabs for our scooters, and buying back all the saliva we had sold to the saliva banks in our less-successful years, and then hiring ghostwriters to write this - I mean, er, buying . . . hang gliders, yeah, hang gliders, we wound up with a net year's profit of three hundred and twelve dollars.

I miss Annette.

I was walking along the street the other day, carrying my Army-issue Magnum .357, when I saw Annette. I waved at him, and the gun accidentally went off. Apparently, he didn't feel like talking to me, because he ran away. I chased him, still yelling and waving my arms. The gun accidentally went off two or three more times, and he ran faster, so I never caught up with him.

I should call him and apologize, I guess. Maybe we could, like, get together and write some songs or something . . .

What would my spirit-animal do? Wait a darn minute - what is my spirit-animal? Oh, well. And another thing - were my tiles showing? Are they now? I would ask Pat, but He's too busy scouring out the dumpsters behind Echelbarger's Real Estate office.

Anyway, who I really need to talk to is Annette. Let's face it, dude. FIFI was the greatest. And we worked together as a team, man - a creative unit, working together. Even though I wrote all the songs, played all the instruments, produced all the albums, and was basically in charge at all times, we really were a team, me and Annette, like two lone wolves, that are together, yet still being alone, like lone wolves.

Last night, I was hanging in my inversion boots, eating some Cheeze, Pleeze! Cheezy-Flavored Chunks of Chocolaty Chitlins (I've given up eclairs), and I, like, heard a dog yipping fervently in the moonlit distance as its tail was sucked up into an industrial-strength vacuum cleaner, and I was so shocked that I, like, snorted one of the Chitlins up into my sinuses, dude, and that's when I knew that I had to call Annette.

Yeah, well, this time, man, I tell you, things are gonna go right for us, dude. No more lawsuits, no more bickering, no more hiding out in the Negeb Desert, no more selling our saliva so we can afford a small package of Froot-Loops, no more "Psychedelic Marmoset"-type albums, no more hitching rides on Jacques-Yves Cousteau's ship, the Calypso, no more stowing away on the Challenger space shuttle, no more sacrificing sexually promiscuous porcupines (at least not at Mountlake Terrace Senior High School, anyway - I mean, we're not stupid), no more trampling innocent Split-Pea Festival volunteers, no more pig branding, no more underarm deodorant testing, no more Nyquil or Pez abuse, no more lying to Paul about his deceased dog, no more gross-out contests with Alice Cooper, no more electroplating of helpless animals, no more saying, "We're not half as popular as Jesus Christ, dude," no more getting mistaken for a gang of renegade Girl Scouts, no more having our drummer get grounded, arrested on a DWO, or abducted by the FBI, no more beheading what appeared to be Paul, no more pencils, no more books, no more teacher's dirty . . . well, you know what I mean.

Yeah, well, this time, we're gonna rock the world. We'll be the ultimate rock gods, dude. We'll be kickin' butt and takin' names. We're gonna run for the roses, we're gonna go for the gold, we're gonna get that Golden Cheese. Er . . . "Fleece." All over the world, men and women and insurance salesmen will know our names - our music will be, like, the soundtrack of a new generation, and we will be adored, loved and worshipped as the ZEROES WE TRULY ARE!

Yeah, well, I meant "HEROES," dude. Yeah, that's what I meant.

HEROES.

FIFI AND JUST, LIKE, A VERY SMALL, ALMOST INFINITESIMAL REPRESENTATION OF THEIR MANY MYRIADS UPON MYRIADS OF RABIDLY LOYAL FANS