

The Wing Nut

April 1994

Hangin' Loose in Zombie Town

by Chris Dichtel

I finally wake up around noon. Open my eyes; pinch them shut again. Sunlight is gushing through the windows; glorious, but it hurts. God, I slept well. I could just roll over and keep going... Then again, hell, no. Got a day off and I want to see some of it. Roll out of bed instead, knowing precisely what I want to do: *Nothing*. That is, throw on some clothes, drag myself down to the local cafe, and hunker down in some beat-up-but-cushy chair with the newspaper and a double-Mocha. Watch the world go by. Vegetate.

Out on the street, even the sidewalk seems too bright. The big city day's in full swing around me like some pesky insect. My body aches, I need a shower, and I've got these splinters worrying around in my fingertips, but I'm happy. I've got the entire day—or what's left of it—to myself.

Make it to the counter. Great: Jay's there. He knows how to handle an espresso machine, and I need a stiff one. Jay greets me with a "Hey, dude. Double mocha?" He's not psychic; I'm just that predictable. "You're lookin' kinda gnarly today, man," he adds as he flips a glass into his hand.

"No shit. I just worked 8 a.m. to midnight four days in a row."

"Jeez, so what *do* you do for a living anyway?"

So I tell him. Or try to. You know, conventions and all that. Labor. Union. Etcetera.

"Good job?" (ah, the comforting hiss of steamed milk...)

"Yeah, actually, great job. Good pay, medical coverage. But sometimes you gotta put in long hours. Sometimes you've got to get up at 5:30 in the morning, drive down to San Jose, work late into the night, drive back, and repeat the process several days in a row. Stuff like that."

Jay winces at the notion of a 5:30 wake-up call. "Forget it. No way I'd do that. We played a gig in Sacramento last night. Didn't get back here until 4 a.m. I didn't wake up until ten this morning, and I was still a half-hour late

getting here to work."

"Well, that's another thing. Like, if you're working for Greyhound..."

"Greyhound?!"

"Yeah, Greyhound is the biggest employer in the local industry. And if you walk in even a couple of minutes late, you might get sent right back home. So you've gotta be there on time."

Jay straightens up and lets off on the steam handle. "That *really* pisses me off, man!"

"What are you talking about? Don't get mad at me, pal; I *need* that mocha."

"No, it's just that, like I said, I just got in this morning from Sacramento, and here you're telling me that if you're two minutes late Greyhound will send you home, and I just got through waiting two-and-a-half hours for a stupid fucking Greyhound bus, and that *really* pisses me off, man!"

Never thought of it like that. Now here's a guy who sees the big picture, albeit in a weird sort of way, which I'm really not awake enough to get hold of. I'm still trying to get hold of the fact that I don't have to do anything today.

ZombieTown: it's that first day off after a really long stretch, where you're so wasted from long hours, lack of sleep, and no time to yourself, that you're for all practical purposes incapable of doing anything productive at all. You're just a basket case; and you know from experience that it's going to take a day of being really out-of-it to even get to half-normal again. And since there's not much point in fighting it, the best thing to do is just give in, zomb out for a day, and then get back to whatever it was you were trying to do with your life, if anything.

And the truth is, though I don't recommend it as a life-style, there's something genuinely pleasant about being a zombie now and then: that muted, narcotic luxury of allowing oneself to blunder through an entire day without accomplishing a thing, plodding through one's routines, and utterly ignoring all the pressing items waiting to be done. Moving through the day



with that molasses-like sluggishness sometimes experienced in dreams. And workaday bothersome absurdities take on a delightful who-gives-a-fuck quality.

"You're alright, Jay. You're weird, but you're alright." I trade him some green paper for my caffeine juice, plopping down in a window seat, popping the rubber band off the *Chronicle*, and proceeding to kick back. Traffic zooming by, people dragging duffel bags to the laundromat next door, sunlight streaming in through the window. Even the newspaper seems too bright. Usual grab bag of one-liners. Republicans Now Think Special Prosecutor a Neat Idea. Charles Manson Could Earn Thousands from Guns 'n Roses album. Calvin tells Hobbes, "If it were up to Dad, leisure would be as bad as work."

Jay's got some garage band stuff cranking out of the speakers. Out the window, a passing Muni bus loses its antennae, which go twanging up into the air. Powerless, the driver brakes, blocking traffic, and gets out to reattach to the grid. You can tell from his face that this isn't the first time today he's done this routine. Some yuppie in a sports car behind him lays on the horn. The driver casts a surly look over his shoulder, and goes on with his job.

Damn, it's good to be alive, half-conscious, and not *doing* anything. ZombieTown: If You Lived Here, You'd Be Home By Now. Applications Now Being Accepted. Requirements: Zilch.