

FLIGHT FROM GOD

Another rattletrap bus carried us toward the end of our journey. Jerusalem faded in a saffron sandstorm. The walled city stood shrouded in dawn's haze while I watched Venus settle into the dust of time, thinking of the shepherds' vigil on their way to Bethlehem for the miracle. Another momentous star had risen in the West with its chemical messiah. The evolution of an entire generation was at hand, but I didn't know it yet.

The Manger where mans' Saviour was born would be our next short stop on the sandy trek to Egypt. Perhaps we'd find a clue left by someone in that virtual cradle of civilization, maybe an unsprouted seed I could germinate carefully at home. Reality told me we came with this built-in itch that couldn't be scratched, and my chance of finding its solution was near zero.

Down through layers of rock we did arrive at the very spot where baby Jesus had lain. It was all very ceremonial, and a guide assured us of the site's legitimacy, pointing out different periods of civilization in the crumbled brick and mortar as we stood surrounded by clumps of visitors, bathed in the glow of candles and popping flashbulbs. I was not as affected as I'd been on the Mount in His garden, and watched the tourists with their simple, pay-as-you-go, Kodak-oriented reality...wishing by then I could be one of them and outta the line of fire.

Some of the religious rigor mortis settled as we traveled, scenes of desert life and glimpses of the Mediterranean catching my interest. Crossing the Nile, we saw the great pyramids of Giza looming in slurried heat waves that warped the horizon...another monstrous monument to who knows what. It was getting a little old by now. I just wanted to go home and "turn on" with Kela.

At our deflated rate of currency, we could afford the Nile Hilton and so checked into an upper floor room with a view of those historic grave markers burning in a dust-fire sunset. We dined like kings, toured Cairo Museum's mummies in the morning, and by late afternoon were climbing, block over giant block, up the biggest of the three.

All that starry night on its flat top we smoked the chillom like mad hatters, finally curling in our sleeping bags, stoned out of our gourds, dreaming of Pharoahs, Cleopatra, and the hookah-smoking caterpillar from Wonderland. Trying to pee in the moonlight, laughing at the grand scope of mans' endeavors, religions, and explanations of existence, I almost fell off the pyramid.

In the morning, skateboarding past the Sphinx I pulled a classic B.A. and thought I saw her wink. It was time to

wrap it up. I was pained by overexposure, like a beachgoer who's had too much sun. We visited more ruins, rode some camels around, and argued with turban-clad thieves all the way outta there. You could have the whole Arab world on a hotplate! Leaving those wretched camel jockeys in their dismal dust ball, we split for civilization.

In Greece, we scurried to American Express for our first mail in ages. We jumped a bus to the the Acropolis, looked over Athens like two statues of the Thinker, spread out our trove of communiques, and regained touch with our past. Kela's most recent letter, artfully embossed with "MAGIC" and "LOVE," hinted at major changes in our world. She didn't exactly spell out LSD, but I knew this was gonna be the shortest tour of Europe ever.

I walked through the Parthenon and admired the spectacular columns and vistas, reflecting on the genius that could sculpt such a dramatic set, but kept coming back to a basic wish to be in magic, and love, and Hawaii. Zander agreed, and right there in the Greek Senate of Plato's Republic, we plotted to sell the hash in Paris and fly away home. We changed our plans from Athens to Paris, New York, Los Angeles, and Honolulu. Less than seventy-two hours later, we were sitting with our girls on Waikiki Beach.

We got ripped off for the smuggled contraband--probably a result of our haste to be elsewhere. In the Latin Quarter of Paris, a dapper Nigerian offered \$2,200 for what had cost us fifty bucks, so we were stoked when he escorted us to meet "Mr. Big." While we waited outside a fancy restaurant with his briefcase, he stepped out the back into a taxi and was gone. The valise was worth fifty dollars, and breaking even we hauled ass for the airport, giggling the whole way. A great relief broke over me as we lifted off the continent. As we turned west, I felt the first real smile in a long while. It was over...

High in a midnight sky, I shook once like a cat after a close call and leaned against the window staring through hollow eyes. I wondered if I'd ever be the same again. Was there a way out...a way to escape from God? Little consolation was at hand, save the few truths which had held firm, like the one-liner "Everything possible shall exist," and another I'd picked up: "The only constant is change." With almost nothing else to believe in, I'd have to hold forth with them as thin armor against an uncaring world and a God I couldn't reach. Why, I wondered, would he create a paradise in which everything ate itself? It didn't seem perfect at all. In fact it was distinctly flawed.

The millions I'd seen and met had offered their various explanations and beliefs, but my rebellious nature had rejected them all. I was not a revolutionary, and had no desire to change society or even fit in...but no scriptures satisfied me, no ritual could redeem my soul, and with no structured basis to fall back on, I was scared and alone as

never before. Zander slept as usual while I wrestled with the riddle of existence. My stomach growled and I thought about the forty star sapphires we'd got in Ceylon. Sorting through my doo-doo would provide some diversion to concerns with immortality.

Oh, I'd met holy men all right. There were souls on the path who'd found peace in their minds and outside themselves. The old Shinto priest at the fire festival had pointed to rocks and trees and rippling reflections in the temple pool and muttered, "Here, here, and here." Honoring nature and your ancestors seemed reasonable enough, as did total submission to the Tao--moving force of the universe. I'd wholeheartedly joined in the Australian and New Zealanders' worship of surf, sun, and sand. But the waters had deepened. A vast morass of religious dogma brought the shiver over me and it wasn't going to simply fade away.

Giant granite faces loomed above the forest at Angkor, turtles hissed in silver mist from Ipoh, and the smell of burning ghats at Benares rose once more. Egads, what to do? Most people brought home snapshots of their trip. I was dragging along a five-thousand-year-old nightmare. The Juggernaut, a giant wheel pulled by thousands, rolled along cobblestone streets covered with blood as Hindus threw themselves under its five-story crush to meet Brahman in Nirvana. Wow, I'd never get that faithful!

My reel wound back to the twinkling eyes of monks turning the wheel of time on the Monkey Temple. Buddha's smile flickered in candlelight, saddhus defiled their flesh, fatalistic Mohammedans waited for death to enjoy life, while Hebrews wailed to Jehovah, and I skateboarded by them all with that Mad Magazine grin on my face. It wasn't funny. I was terribly affected having seen, felt, and tasted this stuff. It was growing in me now like some quantum cancer.

I was still a young surfer from the windward shores of Hawaii, searching the world for the perfect wave. But the sideshow I'd previewed wasn't gonna be as easy to set aside as my skateboard. It was my style to get all the way into things...everything to the max! I was even proud of my partial assimilation of these cultures and my own shallow research into divinity. I only wished it would comfort me.

Maybe I'd gone a little too far. If my partner hadn't pulled me out, I woulda wandered the mountain passes into Tibet, in Egypt followed the jackal-headed Anubis into the Khem underworld. Who knows where I'd have ended up if we'd taken LSD? I didn't just view this all like a tourist. I'd gotten totally into it...what did I have left to lose?

I'd done my research by braille, touching and feeling my way across the globe in every temple, ruin, and museum on the path. Unsnarling some of the loose ends at home might be possible, but I held serious doubts. I hadn't wasted my time. It just needed sorting out. Like a pack rat, I'd grabbed bits and pieces from tedious chronicles and stashed

rare gems in corners of my mind.

I valued days spent on the Old Testament by candlelight in Jerusalem, but couldn't buy this crap about a jealous god lording his power over some peanut pharaoh with locusts, plagues, frogs, and hailstones. Why would disciples and prophets of later times put such wanton exaggeration down as fact? Most of it's concerned with the greatest bloodbath in literature, the star character a god of vengeance who's quick to anger and not to be disobeyed. He follows these chosen people, led by his friend, Moses, delivering up their enemies, and massacring all the uncircumsized bozos in the land, while they keep him appeased by sacrificing thousands of bulls, rams, lambs, and he goats, flinging their blood against a portable altar they cart around in this tent.

It's OK reading if you're real bummed out, and anytime I felt dejected, I'd think about Job's festering boils or some of the others who'd suffered personal purgatories. Even kings were subject to His wrath--like Joram who got fatal diarrhea and his "bowels prolapsed," or King Uzziah who was slapped with a mean dose of leprosy right on his forehead for lighting some incense in the temple. You just didn't wanna piss this god off...but I couldn't take any of it seriously and kept cracking up as they never learned, screwing up over and over again until He'd douched about fifty generations as they wandered around the mid-East for forty years looking for a home.

I got pretty bored with the repetition, and almost ill during some of the sacrifice and battle scenes. A million of 'em died in one day, while all their poor horses got hamstringed. Then they sacrificed twenty-two thousand oxen and a hundred-twenty thousand sheep at their temple's grand opening. It's certain no one from the Humane Society said a peep. I just couldn't believe the garbage they mixed in with God's varied truths, and figuring it was probably a media mistake, wrote most of it off to rumor mongers and old wives.

The Koran was even worse, with Allah, their sublime and compassionate lord, waiting to catch man in his wicked and fornicating ways. I wondered at the compliant beliefs of the Arab world. They'd bought the biggest promise ever peddled, living in constant fear of eternal damnation, holding firm to some perverse sham that the whole pay-off's in the afterlife with no fun now. It's no wonder the Crusades, Jihads, and all that blood-letting had occurred, what with these hysterical zealots running around cutting off hands and veiling women.

I studied every word of their prophet's work, and must say, he's one hell of a salesman and writer, although he resorted to extensive plagiarism after getting his hands on an early Bible. Get this: in return for not drinking or diddling any girls, men are promised an exceptional reward in the next life. Rivers of wine flow by, and raised on high backed couches with personalized drinking goblets placed in

readiness, the graduates pick from an unending lineup of eighteen year-old virgins who never grow any older! How's that for a deal?

On the other hand, if you don't swear total fealty to Allah, getting down for praise in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca at every muezzins' call, you choke on Zaqqum, the fruit of the eternally damned, in hell fire and brimstone forever. What else is there to opt for in their fanatic and barren world? Besides, what happens to the old women? It wasn't my problem, but sure had a funny smell.

Most of Mohammed's story is a direct take from the Bible, and some of it's actually stimulating. At the end of the world, two great blasts are sounded on the Trump of Doom, the first so loud it shatters everything. The second raises the dead and flattens the earth, so there's no place to hide...then ushers in the judgment! I could just see the Ayatollah licking his greasy lips, having waited all his wretched life for his wine cup and a little of the old "in-out" with some virgin pussy. I wasn't buying into this "bear with it" shit for any afterlife payoff! It was a mega-crock, that's what!

The best words Mohammed wrote concerned man's creation, not put better anywhere. God said, "I was a hidden treasure, desiring to be known, so I made the creature that he might know Me." Whoa, now that sounded reasonable to me! The ego has landed, no?

So, holding dear to the few truths I'd gleaned from what seemed a lifetime of sifting through spiritual quagmires, and horrified by the enigma, diversity, and endless maze of my quest, I tried desperately to turn it off in hopes this silver bird would deliver me from evil, the night skies of my mind, and back to reality...whatever and wherever that might be. I should've considered the lessons of history adequate, for what I walked into next with LSD was gonna make my world tour and quazi-religious witch hunt seem a simple thing.