

EVERYTHING POSSIBLE SHALL EXIST

I wasn't fully immersed yet, as Ankor's a tourist sideshow compared to where we were headed. I'd dozed off when a subtle gloom settled over me. Grave and menacing faces, turning above the jungle's mantle, glared as if I'd personally mocked them. I struggled in their grip. A stewardess, holding my shoulders, asked if I was OK, while Zan snored peacefully in the next seat.

Whoa, the nightmare seemed ages long but must've lasted only seconds. Running back over it I found myself mumbling, "Why me?" as if I'd been singled out by guardians of a long-kept secret one shouldn't meddle in. I prodded myself to ease off the philosophical stuff. Through a thin layer of clouds below us lay that breeding bed of billions, India, awash in the bizarre like some three-ring circus of sorrow.

From the outset I didn't feel like skateboarding through its suffering and squalor. This wasn't a dream at all. The brahma bulls plodding through starving masses, beggars crying for "baksheesh," saints, gurus, and snake charmers were within physical reach now. Miracles appeared right before me on the altar of the karmic wheel...life, death, and more. It spun and I helplessly followed each rotation.

I was unable to turn it off. Its magnitude began building in quantum leaps, extremes standing out blatantly, pieces of that enigmatic puzzle I'd felt early warnings about. I wondered if I'd just become oversensitive, or reached some stage when everything is soaked with meaning but makes no sense whatsoever. Zander bopped along as our guide. I was in a state of near paralysis, struck dumb by sensory overload just from observation, not something I'd smoked.

Carts picked up the dead in the streets, as they'd done when Gautama Buddha had walked here. Reflected in the beauty of the Taj Mahal's marble, a scrawny dog chewed at an abandoned baby's carcass on the opposite mudbank. Wizenod addicts drank their "bhang" opium water by the Old Fort's red wall in New Delhi, and coughing tubercular clots, curled in the gutter and died at my feet.

Horrified, I found out the crippled children I'd fed lychee nuts had been mangled at birth by their parents to beg better from tourists! A creeping dis-ease filled my soul, but I marched on at my partner's side as best I could. From the burning ghats in Benares, funereal remains floated downstream to bathers on steps in the river, past cooks drawing their midday draughts, and to laundry ladies pounding their wares on flat rocks at its edge. So the river of life absorbed death and flowed on...or vice versa as you wished for the day. It worked both ways.

India grew on me like an urge to vomit that wouldn't

pass. Deluged by impressions beyond my limit, I prayed for simple understanding before its miasma swallowed me whole. I prefer to recall the beauty and mystery just beyond its incessant strife. It did exist: Holy men, mystics, temples and art dedicated to the Almighty, and billions with their eyes staring in adoration at the ongoing miracle of creation.

What else could they do? Every possible religion was represented--from sex worship to idolatry and animal sacrifices. It was simply more than I could grok at that stage of my development, I guess, for most flashed by like film unclear in exposure. There was one of everything and someone to believe anything. The Jains wore gauze masks, as all life was sacred they tried to avoid swallowing insects. Fire walkers and siddhus mortified their flesh, dervishes danced in frenzies for days on end, and others sat motionless for decades. There seemed no finale in sight. "Everything possible shall exist," I muttered then, and it became one truth I could cling to.

Trying to add a touch of humor to the plethora around us, we took to our skateboards zipping through railway stations and crowded marketplaces, dodging beggars and bull turds. These folks needed something to divert their attention. A full moon shone on the Taj Mahal the night we hid in its rose garden and skated on marble paths past reflecting pools as we pleased. I was happy for a moment there, although a great eye peered down on our childish antics...in wrath at first, but slightly amused.

Turning the Indian banking system upon itself, we went into business with Wolfgang Von Eischweid, "the greatest smuggler in all Germany," devising a scheme to exchange blackmarket money in the thirteen states at profitable rates. This brilliant plan made us a small fortune and some 'round the world air tickets. It dawned on me that one could make a living at this travel game.

We flew to Ceylon, changing money at ten to one and shopping for star sapphires. It became exciting enough to take my mind off the spiritual dilemma, and pushing three-hundred carats of precious stones up my rectum, I sensed the intrigue that motivates the true smuggler. It didn't muffle my calling. Neither profit nor worldly stimulation could hold my attention, for I marched to a distant drummer, unclear to me, and certainly unheard by Zander and Wolfgang.

If Singapore was my initiation into heightened realms of thought, and India my tutelage, Nepal became my trial and test of fire. Here in tiny coffee shops gathered the "farthest out" of our earliest seekers. Psychedelic prophets preached from the Tibetan Book of the Dead, while the first hippies aum'd in a veneration and transcendental awe one could not simply dismiss. Surely my peers at home would be on to this soon enough...

The level of thinking I found there was beyond anything I could relate to, yet seemed strangely familiar. It was so connected to a true source, I could only watch and listen. Like conspirators in some universal plot, Austrian, German, and English nomads traded drugs and secrets, drawing maps to sanctuaries in Katmandu, Tibet, and the mountains beyond, which held either secrets of life or tools to get there.

This wasn't Kansas, Toto, but I was a firm believer from my very first glimpse of that yellow brick road forming up before us all then. Feeling unworthy, I couldn't cut up the act and be a wise guy anymore. That mask I'd hidden behind seemed ridiculous now. Even speaking became a major chore. One might've guessed this outcome, following the story thus far. Zander was losing patience as he realized my confusion wasn't gonna pass, and I tried hard to stick by him. Without contact, I'd surely be lost in the Himalayas with no bearings whatsoever.

As it was, I shaved my head, leaving a long tassel down the back, and took to monks' robes, trekking from temple to temple through the Katmandu Valley and out stony passes toward Tibet. It was the best I could do, appearing in tune with some inaudible beat. I pretended to be "with it," all the while knowing I was more a loose cannon on their deck.

Chanting "aum mani pad my aum," auspiciously I ascended the thousand steps, past offering stations laden with sweets for the chattering chimps. The Monkey Temple, shining in the first rays glinting off Mount Everest, was undoubtedly where it all began...ancient monks feeling the pulse of an eternal heartbeat. With gongs and twenty-foot trumpets they rang in the dawn of life.

Numbed by it all and covered with goosebumps, I huddled close to watch decrepit souls file from caves to turn hundreds of prayer wheels that seemingly geared time itself. The path around the summit's monolith was worn from centuries of shuffling, a deep groove where they padded rotating gilt cylinders and chanted a litany that probably began with creation and certainly would never end.

Awestruck, I crouched in the cloying fumes of incense, rotting offerings, and molding robes. They continued filing to ablutions on the wheel. My God, they were like ghosts! Eyes blinking from hollow sockets, they streamed through filtered light mumbling a cacaphony of unearthly sound that grew in crescendo to fill the morning with an urgent holiness that took my breath away. Flutes from human bones punctuated the dirge with staccatoed burps, as gongs measured the metronomic pace of their parade to call the cosmos forward into another day.

I'd heard this all before! It seemed to beckon from another lifetime, like music our souls depart by. I didn't know what to do with myself. No one paid me any mind, and as the first rays of sunlight warmed cold walls the worshippers withdrew like a record playing slowly backwards,

into chambered recesses from whence they'd come. Whoa, I caught myself breathing again, panting in a swoon, and sat numb most of the day trying to piece it all together.

I'll be the first to admit our young traveler was becoming a madman atop that granite altar on the roof of the world. Yet madness seems an integral step on the path of the seeker, who, if true to his quest, can leave no stone unturned. Alone, crying in the wilderness, he must trust the universal order and basic resilience of his Godgiven mind. Would we possibly be dealt more than we could handle?

Without basic faith, the step of a madman is not traversed, and many of my generation are still there, lost in time, muttering tidbits and nonsense, clutching at pieces of shattered visions. I couldn't even defend my position. Zan wanted to leave, and I knew it wasn't because the roads were too bumpy for skateboarding. Fear of losing my sole touchstone with "reality" coerced me to follow him out of there...but Nepal's message lingered. A seed had fallen on fertile ground, and I knew I wouldn't be long returning.

From those snow-covered mountains, we scurried like Hobbit Bilbo and his dutiful Gollum, through choking masses of India, across Kashmir, and over the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan. Everywhere was now abuzz with word of the new sacrament--LSD. We met Donovan's brother who was packing a Bible, like a holy medicine man, with ten-thousand hits dotting its stained pages. Peering at the spots, a chill rushed over me.

Whether it was simple fear, my disturbed state of mind, or a desire to try this with our friends is unclear, but we passed it up, and I'm glad we did. I would've come patently unglued then and there--a fullblown meltdown--and never made it home, another casualty of our age, abandoned like roadkill on a freeway. God, there were so many, now that I think of it.

We moved faster, partly to escape its coming upon us prematurely, but more in eager anticipation of joining with our peers...for some virulent revolution was sweeping the land, driving us onward like winds of war. Travelers verified it had reached Hawaii, and in the excitement of international conversation, news of a brave, new world gripped us. Our star had risen in the West, a new religion born, and a shift in the center of spiritual awareness catalyzed. I was eager to be baptized!

Existence droned on, seemingly unaware of these great events. Artisans squatted on animal hides, pounding and tooling precious metals; gunsmiths carved exquisite pistol grips from ivory and lapiz lazuli; women embroidered silk on leather as they breastfed new souls to carry on. The snow melted unnoticed, and an icy river gushed through Kabul as it had when Ghengis Khan gathered his hordes here for soccer tournaments with human heads.

It had always been this way. The snowy ranges somehow

found their way to warm seas; man played his insignificant games; and life renewed itself without our assistance. Zander and I moved more quickly now, like last-minute window shoppers through a varied bazaar, picking souvenirs to mark our passage--vests of sheepskin laced in gold, and hats sewn from the soft fur of unborn lambs.

A subtle urgency beckoned from afar. Our generation had been "turned on" to the very meaning of existence, and we hurried without formal acknowledgment to join in this awakening, follow a pied piper none would ever meet, and believe what we'd always thought possible...that a better life was ours simply for the taking. Ask anyone who was there! This was the clearcut promise heard, yet I can't say who told us it was so.

In the countryside to the north we spent some days in a village where the inhabitants produced hashish; wearing leather capes they ran through fields of hemp collecting resin and pollen from the flowering plants. Women scraped the capes and kneaded its gooey, golden residue into "toulas," fingered gobs of a potent narcotic to be sold in the marketplace. Much ritual and ornamentation went into smoking this legacy of the Mongol "hashashin" warlords.

Crouched in a domed clay hut around a sunken fire, the head man passed his pipe through a silent circle of old men like Don Juan's peyote shaman, and their eyes glittered with knowledge, while wrinkles of age warmed the room. Euphoric visions laced the night sky, and stars shimmied into patterns forming an unfinished message--possibly one of the keys I sought. Impressed with their product, I set about stuffing almost seven pounds into my hollow pack frame.

We scurried on through the varied peoples of central Asia, smoking as we went. In Persia, women began to look better, at last. Some were near-blonde redheads, and carpets from the colorful bazaar leapt right off pages of The Arabian Nights. Humanity's diversity with its overwhelming beliefs, products, and pastimes hardly phased me now. If the food and people across the planet weren't enough to keep one absorbed, the cultural charade of sensual and spiritual experience would take you in. Smoking hash seemed a little of each. It brightened everything, and kept my spritual confusion at a steady crescendo.

In Iraq, women veiled their faces, so we were back to zero there. Criers kept a steady call to the faithful five times a day, hardly an ideal spot for skateboarding. Harsh in climate too, wind and sand reduced even mountains to rubble. It was awful! Whatever these followers of the Koran were doing out here, I was glad they liked it and hoped none of them planned on migrating to Hawaii. They were even anti-American, which I couldn't follow at all! It really didn't matter anymore. I was driven now...on a mission from God.

We moved swiftly through Syria and the tortured heart of

the Arab world, arriving at long last on the coast of a pale green sea. Praise the Almighty! Such relief came over me at its mere sight, I immersed myself fully dressed, then washed the dust of seeming centuries from my bedraggled body and, hopefully, my soul as well. The beaches of Lebanon were so welcome we camped like kids in the sand, even drinking some beers and laughing a few times, as we realized how soon we'd be home. Comforted by the ocean's presence we listened to lapping waves and breathed deeply in the freshening salt air.

Recuperating in a hotel, we planned the last leg of our world tour in a separating silence. We were like witnesses to some grave travesty, ones who'd conspired not to testify...two once-young innocents who'd set out together on a voyage of discovery, and now avoided each other's eyes at the scope of what they'd found.