

FEAR & LOATHING IN HAWAII

The Unauthorized Travelogue of
Hawaiian Short (Horror) Stories* by
Dr. Michael "Coyote" Snopes

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PREFACE

"In America only the successful writer is important, in France all writers are important, in England no writer is important, in Australia you have to explain what a writer is." -- Geoffrey Cotterell

"Asking a working writer what he thinks about critics is like asking a lamp post how it feels about dogs." -- Christopher Hampton

"Everywhere I go, I'm asked if I think the universities stifle writers. My opinion is that they don't stifle enough of them." – Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964)

We all have our mid-life crises, and usually end up doing something stupid, to make it worse. In my case, I had tired of the traffic, smog, population explosion, and earthquakes in California, and at the tender age of 45 I'd decided to sail off into the sunset, figuratively, by moving to Hawaii, which I considered from past tourist visits a dozen times or more to be a land of milk and honey. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Wrong. Big, big mistake. I only lasted 18 months in the island paradise, which is one of those places that's great to visit, hell to live in. Apparently, that's about the average length of time mainlanders who move to Hawaii can stand it. "Rock fever" sets in rather quickly, and about 90% of those who move there flee back to the Mainland in about 18 to 24 months.

My miseries were not only from "rock fever," but were compounded by my developing an ulcer, caused by the *H. Pylori* bacterium (probably contracted from swimming in polluted waters) about mid-way through my sojourn in Hawaii, which drove me to writing these lurid tales of life in the Sandwich Isles – the ugly, seamy side of life, not mentioned in the glossy tourist brochures. I had often heard that one had to suffer in order to write, and found that to be true, in spades. The pain from the ulcer, 24/7, was often so intense and so untreatable that often the only way I could get my mind off it was to write, so write I did, often till the sun came up and the peacocks began their daily cacophony, screeching away insanely in the rainforest just behind my condo.

Despite the smiles and "Aloha Spirit" trotted out for visitors, I quickly realized that these fair islands are already too crowded and that they don't want any more damned *haoles* (gringos) mucking up the place. Power moves nakedly in that tropical paradise, and the powers that be and the average man on the street in Hawaii want your money, and not much else, except to get you and your kind off their island, pronto. Luckily, I escaped back to the Mainland, still more or less in one piece, and lived to tell my twisted tales. I even recovered from the ulcer once I moved to Seattle and found a holistic dentist who removed my silver/mercury fillings from my mouth, which amazingly cured my ulcer problem in about 48 hours, after nearly 2 years of constant misery.

Naturally, I've written this uncensored tourist guide to Hawaii under a pseudonym, for obvious reasons – self-preservation. The names of people mentioned in these stories (about 5% of which are true) have also been changed, to protect the innocent or, in most cases, the guilty.

Who am I, and why have I taken it upon myself to write such a sordid expose as this? I can only say in my defense that that the urge is congenital -- I come from a family of writers -- a sister who

wrote books no one wanted to read; a brother who wrote songs no one wanted to sing; and me -- I write checks no one wants to cash. Thus, writing, like larceny, is in my blood.

Also, I have my personal reasons. As a writer, all I truly want out of life are two things. One is the respect and admiration of my fellow writers with whom I talk every day. The other is money; lots of it; enough of it so I won't have to associate with those swine any more.

Dr. Michael "Coyote" Snopes, M.D., J.D.,
Ph.D., M.S., B.S., A.B., R.N., L.L.M.,
M.B.A., M.P., C.P.A., C.L.U. O.B.E.,
R.C.A., 34th-Degree Freemason, Licensed
Rebirther, R. S. O., and Certified Mid-Wife.

Arkham, Massachusetts, August, 2008

Dr. Snopes is a graduate of Louisiana State University (partying); Miskatonic University (arcane studies); the Norman Bates School of Motel Management (cutlery); and Harvard Law School (slips & falls specialist). He is a disbarred attorney (California Bar), a de-licensed CPA, (California), a de-frocked minister, an unsuccessful candidate for a Congressional sinecure in Hawaii, and a discredited author and dysfunctional software developer.

CHAPTER 9

DAY OF THE REDNECK, NIGHT OF THE WARTHOG

"If you want to live a peaceful life, you shouldn't have been born in the twentieth century."

-- Attributed to Leon Trotsky, Bolshevik revolutionary, who knew whereof he spoke. (Trotsky eventually took up exile in Mexico, where, in 1940, he was hunted down and liquidated like a sick animal by axe-wielding members of Stalin's NKVD.)

September 13, 1990 -- Night of Infamy

I'm sitting here in the dark belly of a Boeing 747, somewhere over the cold, dark waters of the North Pacific. Half crazy on speed and from lack of sleep, trying to write something semi-intelligible on my laptop computer, a Toshiba -- an excellent Japanese rip-off of the Radio Shack laptop that preceded it in computer history. I gave up trying to sleep a long time ago, thanks to the big red-faced ox snoring like a train in the seat next to me, passed out and smelling like a distillery. It will probably be another 18 hours or so before I'm finally able to get some sleep, thanks to all the "California Zephyr" capsules I crammed down my throat a bit earlier, which are the only thing keeping me going, if badly wired. "Zephyrs" are a local Hawaiian mixture of diet pills and huge amounts of caffeine, and they are capable of turning even a sluggard like me into a bottle rocket for twelve hours or so.

Fortunately, my Vietnamese diving buddy Poon Tang, who has been in the islands for awhile, (too long, in fact) was able to help me procure these beauties. Just a couple of nights before I departed on this trip, while we were riding around in his car, I happened to mention to him that I needed to get provisioned before an important spiritual journey to the Southwest.

As usual, Poon knew where to make a buy. Within five minutes after I explained my pressing need to re-supply my medicine box, he pulled the car up right in front of a police substation on the Windward side of Oahu, stopped, and killed the engine.

"Uhhhh.... What are we doing here, Poon?" I asked, nervously, wondering if my diving buddy of these last few months had been an undercover narc all along, just waiting to put the cuffs on me. "I thought you were going to help me score some powerful medication, not get us both busted."

"No problem, bra. You stay in de car, and don't let 'dem blue suits write me no parking ticket, O.K.?" He jumped out and ran inside. He was back in a little while, pushing a handcart containing a veritable cornucopia of goodies -- a half-bale of *pakalolo*, a year's supply of Ecstasy, and a couple of hundred Seconals, all for himself, plus a goodly supply of California Zephyrs for me.

I was slightly unnerved, nay, disillusioned.

"I really can't believe this s***," I said, shaking my head several times. The world was an even less sane place than I had suspected. I felt whole sections of my personal reality-tunnel collapsing about me like a house of cards. "Are you buying your narcotics from the police now?"

"Yah. Most of the time."

"Don't you think that could be kind of risky?"

"Naw, bruddah," he countered. "I'd ruther buy my stuff from da cops. This not California, you know. Dey not gonna *arrest* me for buying drugs from da desk sergeant, not here in Hawaii. I always try to buy my stuff here -- White Smoke, Dust, Ice, anything that's kinda risky to buy on da street. The police, dey always got da best quality dope, da price is always da same as street prices -- or bettah -- and dere's no risk, bra."

"Sounds right to me," I said, admiring the clarity of vision and common sense of this former Viet Cong corporal and sapper. These people adapt so quickly here in America.

"But I still can't believe we're buying our drugs from a police station, just like pulling into the local Seven-Eleven for a quart of milk. Even in Hawaii. Can you do this at other police stations here, Poon?"

"Awww... shoot -- yeah, Doc. You know, here in Hawaii, da cops and da criminals, dey all part of de same gang," he explained to me, chuckling. "Da only difference izzat some of 'dem wear blue uniforms. Some doesn't."

Wide-eyed innocent that I am, I found this to be very depressing information. I was desperately clinging to a few last shards of the many romantic illusions I had held when I moved to the Hawaiian Archipelago a few months before. Like morning mists under a boiling tropical sun, they were being dispelled rapidly.

What Poon had said rang true, though. Just the night before I heard on the radio that a wealthy *haole* homeowner in Hawaii Kai had recently had his house burgled. The poor fool had called in the police the next day, to whom he showed the \$150,000 in gold coins that he still had stashed away in a place burglars would be very unlikely to find them.

That evening, coming home from work, he claimed he saw a police car driving off with its headlights out, just as he arrived at his place. Going inside, he found that he had been burgled again, and this time the burglars hadn't touched anything but the Krugerrands in his "secret" hiding place. He filed a complaint with the police commission, but, according to the cynic who was reading the news on the radio, the *haole* had better not hold his breath waiting for action to be taken against the crooked cops. "City hall protects its own," as the announcer put it.

Hawaii, I'm quickly learning, is not quite like Jack Lord portrayed it on Hawaii Five-Oh. It is a third world country, only slightly less crooked and depraved than Mexico. I was depressed for the rest of that evening, after seeing this latest example of flagrant, endemic corruption in my beloved islands. But I was gradually learning to appreciate the almost seamless merger between the civil apparatus and the underworld in Hawaii, a fit so nearly perfect as to be unrivaled by any other society I know of, with the possible exception of a certain large island in the Mediterranean, just off the toe of Italy, a place known mainly for its exports of olive oil and violent criminals.

Everything is on rails in Hawaii -- you can't change any of it. I'm beginning to understand why so many people here don't bother to vote any more -- like me, they don't vote for the same reason I no longer bet on Mexican wrestling matches, I suspect.

But at least Poon had helped me acquire an emergency supply of excellent stimulants for my journey, which can often come in handy on long trips. Very handy, as it turned out, on this particular journey to Anasazi Country in New Mexico and Arizona.

A little earlier in this incredibly long day, no more than three hours ago, I collapsed into my aisle seat on this United Flight 203, from Honolulu to L.A., with no planned stops, tired to the bones already and hoping for a quiet, relaxing flight. I was going to try to catch a few winks on the way to L.A.... At least that was the plan at the time. After being up all night, I was not in a notably happy or relaxed mood. I had spent nearly two hours fighting traffic on the H-1 and on the Nimitz Highway to get to the Honolulu airport, then went almost berserk trying to find a place to park in one of the long-term lots, which was followed by a long, sweaty wait in the United check-in line, an endless, snaking line that reminded me of those scenes in *The Ten Commandments* of the Israelites making their way out of Pharaoh's Egypt. Then I had lugged my carry-on baggage about three miles, through the tropical heat, to a distant gate, and finally boarded a crowded, unair-conditioned airplane, where I had to fight for overhead baggage space, and then wait for another hour before the plane finally pulled away and taxied out onto the runway, where we sat. And sat.... And sat some more, breathing stale, germ-ridden air, while a team of rude, hard-faced, and ugly *stewardi* shrilly ticked off a long checklist of things that passengers aren't allowed to do on these crowded veal-fattening pens of the sky.

The America West flights I'm to catch later from L.A. to Phoenix and on to Albuquerque tonight are too short for any snooze time, so I knew that if I was going to end my sleep deficit at something short of 40 hours, it would have to be on this first leg of the trip. They would need a crowbar to pry me out of my seat at LAX, I thought, once I fell asleep.

I've always been a rack-hound, who needs about 9 hours in the rack a night to function normally, and I know from bitter experience that weird things happen when I get into sleep deprivation mode -- I get severely bent, and am capable of doing or saying almost anything -- which I frequently regret later. I become very dangerous -- to myself -- so I'm usually careful to build some rack time into my schedule, no matter what I'm up to. Otherwise I wind up relying on Zephyrs or other industrial-strength stimulants, with unpredictable results.

But the best-made plans of men and mice *aft gang aley*, as my very civilized ancestors used to say. (The ones who were still running around in loincloths, practicing human sacrifice, and painting themselves blue when the Roman legions showed up in the British Isles.) Sleep is still a good 10 hours away, I fear.

I was and still am looking forward to ten days of sybaritic pleasures in Santa Fe with my good friends Mack and Svetlana, who are flying out from San Francisco to meet me tonight at Abiquiu, a beautiful little resort area up near the Chama River, about an hour north of Santa Fe, and near a large mosque, which has inexplicably sprung up in the New Mexico outback.

New Mexico is like that -- never predictable or ordinary. I've tried Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Taoism, atheism, Shamanism and am a recovering Southern Baptist, but I've never gotten into the Islamic scene, although I have studied some of the writings of Kabir -- but he was as much a Hindu saint as he was a Sufi mystic, so maybe that doesn't count. Still, if I ever decide I need to make the switch to Islam, on an emergency or provisional basis, I've got it covered if I'm around Santa Fe. Northern New Mexico truly has it all.

I was and am also looking forward to several days, during this upcoming stretch, of hiking and exploring some spectacular desert canyons, and of making reverent pilgrimages to the exquisite

Anasazi Indian ruins, many of them nearly a thousand years old. Most of which are to be found in the strange and wonderful, nearly deserted Four Corners region, just a few hours' scenic drive across the high desert plateau from sensual, seductive Santa Fe.

So much for the travelogue. There are enough equity-laden phony liberals bailing out of California and migrating to Santa Fe already, without my being a cheerleader for the swine.

As I sat here watching the plane fill up, waiting to see who would show up to take the window seat next to me, I was fearful it would be some huge, primitive Samoan, spilling over his seat and into mine. Airline coach seats are small enough and uncomfortable enough these days, that you don't want some mutant sumo wrestler sitting in the seat next to you. And Samoans, who are a growing menace in Hawaii, are big, in case there's anyone who hasn't noticed. Not tall and graceful like Watusi, but tall and wide-bodied, like natural-born sumo champions. They are a huge, dangerous, and unpredictable people, with hearts full of malice and murder, and with no love for *haoles* (Hawaiian for "gringo").

I had already seen quite enough of these pre-historic Samoans last night, when one of the huge creatures ran amok at Club Hubba Hubba, a Korean bar I was sitting in, quietly minding my own business and having a friendly drink and an animated conversation with a frisky Korean bar girl. One with hips.

I realize that "Club Hubba Hubba" sounds like a miserable put-on, but I cannot tell a lie -- the place exists. The Korean bars in Honolulu don't always have the most inventive names. But then I guess they don't exactly need to, considering the gangbanger scum they cater to. And the Koreans, as a species, aren't exactly known for originality, anyway. They are a lot like the Japanese, who copy everything that's worth copying that anyone else has come up with. Except that the Koreans mostly copy the Japanese. And whatever they copy, they make even better than the Japanese, for whom the Koreans have nothing but loathing and contempt. They consider the Japanese to be shiftless and lazy, in the same league as Mexicans and Americans. Koreans themselves are definitely not lazy, as you'll realize if you've ever been caught on the jammed highways around Seoul at 5:00 in the morning, which is commute time for that nation of fanatical workaholics.

How in hell did I jump the tracks and just wind up in a hellhole like South Korea, I ask you, gentle reader? Forgive the incoherence, but I have excellent excuses for being a bit deranged right now. Excellent, wholly plausible excuses. We're coming to that.

We were in the midst of another tiresome digression about the virtues of Korean bars and, such as they are, of Korean bar girls, I think. And the Koreans' surpassing lack of originality.

The idea of having bar girls work the patrons for high-priced non-drinks isn't new, either. Back in Louisiana, where I come from, we called them "B-drinkers" at the Silver Slipper cathouse, right across the highway from the farm I grew up on, a place where I misspent much of my youth (and every monthly allowance of my last two years in high school). In Hawaii, they call B-drinkers "bar girls." Same thing.

But I'm still digressing. For which I can be excused. I got home from the police station last night just barely in time to finish packing and make it to the airport, with no time at all for sleep. Zero. My brain tends to turn to a grey slurry after a stressful night of sleep deprivation -- especially when I'm being interrogated. The emergency medical supplies I carried onto the plane in my

inside coat pocket are still keeping me awake, but my mind keeps wandering wildly and aimlessly, up and down the aisles of this airplane. Every time I close my eyes I see nothing but irrational, violent, hand-to-hand combat, with little yellow people being smashed to bloody pulp by some sort of huge, obscene monster with its hair worn in a topknot, like a sumo wrestler.

My mind is not in very healthy shape at this moment, and my body is in even worse condition, I fear.

I can't stop thinking about last night. Ever since I moved to Hawaii after the San Francisco Quake (the "Monster of Loma Prieta") last fall, I've spent a lot of time in Korean bars. I should explain that the main attraction of the Korean bars in Honolulu is not the live entertainment or the watered-down drinks. It's the Korean bar girls, who will sit and have \$10 drinks of colored sugar water with you and talk quietly with you all night, or better yet, listen to you, as long as you keep buying them drinks. And, if you like, you may even negotiate a private arrangement with one for consorting the rest of the evening under more convivial and appropriate circumstances, without having to pay a referral fee to the bartenders or anyone else but the girl, usually.

Korean women are great; they are everything that American women should be, but are not; quiet, respectful -- user-friendly, even. And they seem to actually enjoy screwing, unlike too many of their American counterparts, to whom sex seems to be an ugly and painful sacrifice that, with great magnanimity, they make once in a month of Sundays for some poor lucky clod -- who had damn well better show proper appreciation and cloying gratitude if he wants to get laid again next Christmas.

Altogether, the Korean bars represent a rather sensible and civilized alternative to the American way of doing business in the sexual marketplace, and they are convenient places to go for a balding, knock-kneed and basically grotesque-looking single male like me, who still has only a few friends on the island, not one of them young, female, voluptuous, and in heat.

The only problem with hanging out at Korean bars is that it is an inherently risky proposition. Risky in part because your average Korean gangbanger in Hawaii is a vicious, knife-wielding, back-shooting, pack-running little assassin, with the instincts of a wolverine and the soul of a dung beetle. The odds of spending a whole evening at a Korean bar among these bloodthirsty jackals without seeing knives used or some kind of serious bloodshed are roughly the same as at a Saturday bullfight in Ensenada, at least in my limited experience.

And the Koreans don't just prey on each other. Anyone who has lived in Hawaii for any length of time can tell you, in hushed tones, tale after tale of brain-curdling, senseless mutilations and other mindless violence committed against innocent *haole* and Japanese tourists by the Korean gangs that run the island of Oahu by night. Don't ever let yourself get caught alone, unarmed, and on foot, anywhere around Honolulu late at night, unless you get your kicks playing survival games. The Korean gangs own the night here, and the Garlic Eaters will cut your heart out and feed it to their dogs with no more remorse than a fisherman baiting a hook with a night crawler, if they are lucky enough to catch you in a weak and unprotected situation.

I have absolutely no evidence to support this contention, but I have a strong hunch that most of the Koreans in Hawaii are former North Koreans.

Nobody talks much about the crime rate here in Hawaii, because the place is so totally dependent on tourism. Doing so would be a bit like the Australian Tourist Board keeping a running tally of

the number of swimmers eaten each month by Great White sharks or killed by deadly poisonous box jellyfish along the coasts of Australia, and posting the score on billboards every morning. Certain news is not fit to print in tourist Meccas, so most of the really horrible atrocities that are committed by the Korean gangs on Oahu go unreported in the media, with horror stories about the latest gang killings only being spread by word of mouth among the locals.

The Koreans seem to fight incessantly. It's part of their culture, as anyone who watches the world news can easily see. In South Korea, student mobs go on violent, bomb-throwing protest marches at the drop of a hat, even when something happens that they like, such as last week, when officials of North and South Korea got together for talks for the first time, a goal the students had been rampaging and killing for over the last few decades. So how do they celebrate this breakthrough? By marching and throwing more Molotov cocktails, of course. You figure it out. As a species, these people are totally inscrutable.

Fortunately, being nearly the only *haole* who ever seems to wander into any of these Korean bars, the Korean thugs have always ignored me so far, so I haven't gotten cut up or stomped yet. But I knew I was pushing my luck, hanging out in dens of these cutthroats on a regular basis. Only my innate ability to blend into the woodwork has saved me, I suspect.

However, the greatest threat to life and limb in Korean bars comes not from the Koreans, but from their chief predator, the giant Samoan. As Dr. Hunter S. Thompson has so ably reported in his definitive treatise on the cultural aspects of life in Hawaii, *The Curse of Lono*, the Koreans' only natural enemy in these islands is the Samoan, also known, somewhat redundantly, as the Giant Samoan. As the learned Dr. Thompson has observed, Samoans are the only things alive on two legs that are meaner than Koreans, and the Samoan gangs on Oahu reputedly hunt down Koreans like wharf rats, purely for sport.

The current thinking among anthropologists holds that about 2.5 million years ago, our upright ape-like ancestors, the *Australopithecines*, who roamed the great savannas and places like Olduvai Gorge under African skies, split into two major families. One, which supposedly was one of our direct ancestors, was the smaller, gracile form (*Australopithecus africanus*); the other group were their much larger, more robust cousins, *Australopithecus robustus*. The latter group supposedly didn't make the evolutionary cut, and has been extinct for some 2 million years or so. I have a better and easily believable theory -- *Robustus* didn't die out -- they just migrated to Polynesia and evolved into the present-day Samoans and Tongans.

Samoans are fearsome, dangerous, and mindless beasts, but like the great white shark, Tyrannosaurus Rex, or the apex predators in any balanced ecosystem, they serve a useful purpose. In the Hawaiian ecosystem, their function is to keep the Korean population under control. Local Japanese friends tell me the Koreans breed like rabbits and would soon be stripping the leaves and bark off the trees in Ala Moana Park if the Samoans were not around to keep their numbers in check.

However, it is best not to be present when the Samoans are performing this public service. You do not, I repeat, DO NOT, want to be in a Korean bar when a gang of berserk Samoan sportsmen come in to bag their limit and wipe up the place.

Last night was a very, very bad night. I was an unwilling witness to a pogrom. Not by a gang, but a pogrom conducted by a lone, king-sized, Crystal-crazed Samoan madman, who went utterly berserk and cleaned house at Club Hubba Hubba while I was in attendance.

Samoans grow to massive proportions, as I have already mentioned, and the prototypical Samoan male tends to resemble the Cape Buffalo in size, constitution, intellect, and homicidal ferocity. But the brute who stumbled into the Club Hubba Hubba at about 1:30 a.m. was a megazoid--outlandishly, disturbingly large, freakish even for the Samoan species. More the size of a woolly mammoth than a Cape Buffalo - -a throwback to the old days, when, as the Good Book tells us, there were giants in the earth.

This brutal seemed to have the murderous temperament of a seriously demented and unhappy warthog that's just eaten a whole patch of locoweed, chasing it with a bucketful of kerosene. He had the look of an oversized *ozeki*, or sumo grand champion, who has taken up steroids and weight-lifting to tone up his already oversized muscles. Absolutely awesome. How the NFL draft could have repeatedly overlooked this killing machine will forever remain a total mystery to me -- the man was a walking franchise for anyone who could have signed him, in any league where large is good and lethal is better.

As is always true when a raging Samoan on a killing binge storms into a Korean bar, every Korean in the place froze the minute our friend pushed the bouncer at the door to the floor and stepped on his throat. At the time, I was busy telling the bar girl I was drinking with about the archaeological wonders of Anasazi masonry styles at the Classical Period ruins in Chaco Canyon, in New Mexico, where I will be next week, a line of patter which I'm sure she found utterly engrossing. (Either that or I could have been chatting her up about retiring to the Ninety Minute Hotel next door. I don't recall the exact point in the conversation where the evening was cut short. Extreme trauma, with an overlay of California Zephyrs and a half-dozen tequila slammers, can have that effect on short-term memory at times.)

Suddenly I noticed that everyone else in the bar had stopped talking, as if on cue. They were all looking toward the door with frozen faces. From the looks I saw, you would have thought the Grim Reaper had just walked in and paged each of them by name, in Korean.

I looked up just too late to see the shirtless Samoan giant grab the 275-pound Hawaiian bouncer, who had foolishly attempted to collect a cover charge from him, by the face, with one hand, and shove him to the floor like a child. I heard the thump, and looked up just as he stepped on and over the bouncer and raced out into the middle of the floor, halting for a second or two to look around wildly, looking for his quarry and shaking two huge fists in front of him. He reminded me of a hungry grizzly that's just pushed open the gate and lumbered into a corral full of fat calves. Time to thin out the herd.

Then he let out an animal sound, deep in his throat: "AAAAAHHHHHH! Dere you are, you ugly little f***s! You da ones put da sugar in my pickup! You f***as are DEAD!!! DEAD!!!" he screamed, crazily, with spittle running down his chin, glaring at his quarry. Clearly displeased, he was pointing a finger the size of a large Polish sausage at the six Koreans who were sitting at the table next to mine, all of whom were dressed in black slacks, black shirts and black sport coats, every one of them wearing sunglasses in the dark nightclub. Scum to the core, by the looks of them.

Apparently some of these oriental gentlemen had been feeling somewhat adventuresome and had sweetened the gas tank of a certain pickup truck belonging to this ponderous Polynesian person. Sugar in your gasoline does awful things to an engine. One of the Koreans put his right hand inside his sport coat and yelled back at the Samoan, taunting, "It wasn't sugar, asshole -- It was molasses!"

Intuitive person that I am, I understood instantly that there was going to be hell to pay, and the first installment was about to become due and payable any moment. Somehow I just know these things, at times. The Samoan appeared to weigh more than all six Koreans put together, and you just don't wave a red flag in front of an enraged bull or Giant Samoan and expect to live to brag about it. Not without a fight to the death.

I glanced over at the pack of Koreans whom the madman had selected for destruction, and noticed that the bar girl I had been talking to at my table had vanished. Smart girl, I thought. A Samoan running amok in a Korean bar is not a pretty thing to see. It's a sight that has permanently scarred many people emotionally, particularly Koreans who have lost scores of relatives that way. "This may get interesting..." I murmured, to no one in particular.

The Samoan hunter-killer was clearly berserk, totally out of control. Anyone could tell that he was very, very agitated. He wore his hair in a topknot like a Samurai, and I could see a white powder in his mustache all the way across the room. *Somebody's cutting the cocaine with Clorox again*, I guessed, smugly. He was severely f***ed up, and apparently had been lathering himself up into a fine killing rage for most of the evening. This promised to be interesting, so I took the usual precaution of getting under my table. Just as I did, he suddenly charged the table the six black-shirted Koreans were sitting around, at ramming speed, like a wounded and enraged giant warthog, snorting and grunting wildly. To use Defense Department jargon, the big Samoan had found a "target-rich environment."

Out of a corner of my eye, I saw the Korean who had just taunted him pull a small low-caliber pistol, probably a .22, out of his jacket. A second Korean deftly whipped out a switchblade with a highly polished 4-inch blade, just as the kill-crazy brown rhino took a flying leap across the table and landed on top of two of the stunned Koreans, bringing them and the table down with a loud crash, broken glass and cheap liquor flying every which way.

The flying tackle was a thing of beauty, and would have made the NFL Highlights this weekend if anyone had caught it on video. The speed with which this huge savage moved across the room was breathtaking. It is still simply unbelievable to me that anything that massive could accelerate the way he did, like a jackrabbit on steroids. He had cranked up to top speed like a sprinter coming out of the blocks. Having seen a few quick NFL linebackers in my time, I estimate he could have done about a 4.5 second 40-yard dash, maybe 4.4. Definitely NFL material, but about twice the weight of the average NFL linebacker. They would have to start a whole new league if they drafted this guy.

Even so, he was on the Koreans' turf, so I figured the Samoan would be dead meat in a matter of seconds, considering the arsenal this sleazy group of Koreans was likely to be carrying on them.

I was wrong. They had only the .22 and a few knives, and that wasn't nearly enough. The hoodlums had picked the wrong night to be light on ordnance, a mistake several of them will not have an opportunity to repeat.

The Korean with the switchblade slashed at the huge beast two or three times, but the big Samoan brushed the wounds off like mosquito bites. I heard two shots as the punk with the pistol squeezed off a couple of rounds into the leviathan's side at point blank range, but that didn't faze the brute either. Ice makes you completely oblivious to pain, I'm told, and he had had a snoot full of coke plus a megadose of Ice. In about ten seconds he had disarmed the two jackals who had the gun and the knife, and was proceeding to dismantle three, or possibly four, of the Gang of Six.

There was blood all over the place, immediately. It was awful, sickening. Watching the Samoan wade through the hapless group of Koreans, I had the same feelings of revulsion that I get watching those National Geographic slow-motion flicks of a cheetah taking down a small Thomson's gazelle, a big croc ripping the head off a still kicking Wildebeest, or an angry bull elephant stomping a flock of wingless geese into *pate*; the same feelings I get when I watch a 49ers-Rams game.

The Koreans who were still ambulatory were on his back pounding away wildly, but with no visible effect, except that the Samoan was bellowing like a thing possessed and getting even madder by the second. Shooting him was a mistake and had only made him angrier, I could see. Foam was coming out of his mouth by this time. I don't know who his pharmacist was, but this boy was in *kamikaze* mode, perfectly prepared for taking on half of Korea. I could feel the fear starting to creep up my backbone and into the back of my cotton-lined mouth. There is nothing quite like being present at a fight to the death in a nightclub, seeing it live and in Technicolor, ten feet away from you, to get the old adrenalin flow into overdrive.

It'll take a bazooka or a Colt .45 automatic¹ to stop this madman, I concluded. Big mistake to shoot him with a little toy gun like that. If you're going into the bush to hunt a wounded rogue elephant or other big game, you don't do it with a .22 pistol. You need a stopper. Even I know that, and these Korean rabble were supposed to be professionals.

Everything happened very quickly from that point on.

Just as he turned on the other two or three Koreans (I couldn't see exactly how many -- I was under my table by this time, well hunkered down), three H.P.D. uniformed cops who had been sitting at the bar jumped into the melee, all of them very large and well-fed Hawaiians. The three cops laid into him with all their might, beating ferociously on the crazed Samoan with nightsticks hard enough to stun a full-grown ox wearing a crash helmet. They tried gamely, but ineffectually, to subdue the creature before it massacred the Koreans.

The Hawaiians, who are the Samoans' smaller cousins, are big, scary people, too. But these three were no match for a king-sized Samoan with a nose full of Bolivian White or on Ice, or both, and on a mission from Hell. A Samoan's pickup truck is a sacred thing, and no one defiles its gas tank with sugar or molasses and lives to gloat about it. It looked to me like nothing was going to stop this Godzilla, short of a howitzer. For a second I toyed with the idea of venturing out from under the table and trying to make it to a phone to call out the National Guard, but thought better of it. I realized the National Guard might not be up to this big a challenge.

In any case, about ten seconds after the melee started, I found myself pinned to the floor. I was already cringing under the table where I had been sitting, when the Samoan threw one of the big cops clear over onto my table, like a Joe Montana bullet pass, and the table collapsed, with cop, on top of me. Amazingly, I wasn't hurt, except for a bloody nose and some bruised ribs that I'm noticing right now as I sit here on the plane, tapping away on the dinky keyboard of my laptop. (In fact, I'm noticing that almost every part of my body hurts, now that I've been sitting on this freaking airplane for what seems like a week.)

The Hawaiian cop just lay there, on top of the broken table and me, while I covered my head with my hands and prayed. He was either out like a light, or doing a good job of faking it. The cop was one of the lucky ones, like me.

I estimate that the brawl between the six Koreans and the cops, all ganging up on the Samoan, would have been over in less than sixty seconds, except for the fact that another fifteen or twenty Koreans came to their aid, carrying all kinds of weapons, broken bottles, chairs and barstools, which they used to attack the big Samoan. These people are used to fighting in packs, and stomping their opponents to death in a fight (given the opportunity) is an important part of their culture, so they went at it with relish. But with minimal results.

With all this extra manpower, they managed to prolong the fight for what seemed like an eternity. Probably ten minutes or so of unbelievable, non-stop violence and slaughter, all completely one-sided, like watching a real-world version of a Bruce Lee action movie.

Broken bodies stacked up all around the rabid Samoan like cordwood. The guy was obviously trained in the martial arts and could kill or maim with either hand. The room was taking on the look of a World War I field hospital right after an unusually productive afternoon at Verdun. Several of the Koreans looked very dead to me, from my position on the floor. The Samoan was truly on a roll. With bells on.

Fortunately, the cavalry arrived just in time. Someone behind the bar had the good sense to call for a SWAT team as soon as the one-man pogrom began, before things got too far out of hand. The Samoan doubtless would have killed everyone in the whole slimy place, barehanded, including yours truly, had it not been for the heroes from the SWAT team.

This was not the H.P.D. SWAT team, mind you. They would have been helpless against this savage. It was the Honolulu Zoo SWAT team, a group of specialists who are highly trained in dealing with and subduing large, unruly mammals.

The SWAT team from the Zoo got there just before the police vans, and before the mad Samoan (whom I had decided by then must have been bitten by a rabid dog) could finish killing or maiming everyone in sight. At the time, the Samoan had a Korean's neck in his left hand and one of the Hawaiian cops' necks in his right, and was bashing both of them senseless up against the wall, like rag dolls, with his back to the SWAT team, oblivious to the mob of Koreans who were smashing bottles and furniture over his head, shoulders and back.

The Zoo people immediately fired two tranquilizer darts into the small of his back, to no avail.

Nothing happened; he just kept slamming the Korean and the now-senseless cop against the blood-smeared wall, now without even the minor distraction of the crowd of wharf rats who had been breaking furniture over his head. They had separated like the Red Sea when they saw the SWAT team pointing what looked like a pair of rifles at the crazed Samoan and in their general direction.

Three more members of the SWAT team popped up with their tranquilizer guns in a few seconds, and all five of the team knelt down like a phalanx of 18th-century infantry and cut loose with a couple of volleys. Their combined fire finally brought the monster Samoan down in a hail of tranquilizer darts. Even so, he somehow got back on his feet and staggered around the room for almost another minute, bellowing insults at us and knocking over the last few upright tables. Everyone who was still conscious cowered in the corners of the place or behind the bar, until the show finally came to a grinding stop.

At last, like a big bull elephant, bleeding in at least fifty places, with a half dozen switchblade knives sticking out of his back and shoulders, along with a dozen of the tranquilizer darts, he

stopped and stood still, swayed back and forth a few times, then finally collapsed in a mighty heap to the floor. The whole building shook when he crashed -- an awesome thing to witness, like the harpooning of a giant sperm whale, or the felling of a great redwood. I was there, and lucky enough to live to write about it.

Mainly because I was still under a pile of broken Koreans, who were on top of the unconscious cop, broken table and me. Nobody said a word for awhile. I just lay there, nursing a bloody nose.

The pogrom was over.

Finally, one of the marksmen from the Zoo broke the silence and walked over to the fallen giant. "Jesus God! We put enough tranquilizer in that critter to bring down a rhinoceros, and he still kept going for a minute or two. That ain't possible. Is he human?"

"Naw. Not any more. The guy musta been on Ice," someone said. It was one of the big Hawaiian cops who was slowly getting to his feet, cradling a broken arm with the other, good arm. "Nobody could keep goin' like dat witout bein'on Crystal. Damn, dey shot him, knife him, we beat on him with billy clubs and chairs, chainwhips, and all, and the sucka nevah even slow down till dey hit him with the tranks. A goddamn Ice-head, bruddah, dat's what he was. Get da van down here and book dat big f***a. Fast, befo' he wake up and I have to shoot his ugly Samoan ass."

The zoo team was already obliging, rolling in a forklift to carry the stunned brute outside and dump it in a police van, which had already arrived. I smilingly suggested to the cop that they put him in a dump truck. He smiled at my little attempt at humor, then slapped a pair of cuffs on me.

I had been in a hurry to get the hell out of there before the tranquilizers wore off the fallen Samoan, but Honolulu's Finest had other plans for me. I wound up being detained for the evening. What had already been a long, sordid night took a nasty turn for the worse. The gendarmes decided that I looked like a credible witness, as I was probably the only person in the whole joint who wasn't a known felon. So after a while they dragged me down to H.P.D., where I spent the rest of the night trying to explain that I hadn't seen a great deal from the fetal position I had been in, cringing under a table and pile of broken bodies.

I refused to admit to seeing anything, since testifying against large, homicidal Samoans in Hawaii tends to be counter-productive, a one-time thing. They always have relatives.

As a result, the police lieutenant who was interrogating me kept me up the whole night, as I denied several hundred times that I had seen anything incriminating, and explained over and over again what I had been doing at a Korean bar, drinking and consorting with a known prostitute. That was my punishment for being on the crime scene, apparently.

When nothing else worked, the lieutenant finally threatened to bust me under Hawaii's new "john" law that makes it a criminal offense to patronize or even solicit a prostitute, but I laughed at him, since the conversation with the bar girl hadn't gotten nearly that far before the Samoan rhinoceros charge interrupted our intellectual discussion. Or so I said, over and over and over and over and over.

H.P.D. finally released me at about 5:00 a.m.

By the time I got home to finish packing my bags for the flight to Albuquerque, the first early morning light was beginning to light the green upper ridges of the Koolau Range, the papier-mâché mountains I could see waking up in their wreath of clouds, across the bay from my place, looking for all the world like a Sung Dynasty rendering of two-dimensional cardboard cut-out hills. I had just enough time for a quick shower and to put on clean slacks and a long-sleeve shirt, which I knew I would need when I got to Santa Fe at around midnight. Santa Fe is already beginning to get very chilly at night by mid-September, at its 7000-foot elevation.

I finally got parked at Honolulu International just in time for my 11 a.m. flight. United 203 had already started boarding when I showed up at the gate, running hard and out of breath.

After an sickening, soul-crushing night like that, I was ready for a quiet, uneventful flight to the Mainland. One I could sleep on. My nerves were completely shorted out. So I was sitting here on the airplane, slumped in my seat this morning, hoping that I wouldn't get a big, evil Samoan for a seatmate. I couldn't have handled that, after all that had just transpired.

I didn't get a Samoan for a seatmate. Instead I got a large, ugly, Texas redneck with a beer gut and a load on. A mean, rowdy Samoan wouldn't have seemed half bad, in retrospect.

The beefy, red-faced buffoon who took the seat next to me on this flight from Honolulu to L.A. reeked heavily of bourbon, probably because he had spilled more on his clothes than he had gotten down, from the looks of him. He was obviously a Texas A & M "Aggie" fan, returning home after the Aggie football season opener with the University of Hawaii at Aloha Stadium a few days earlier, wherein the boys from College Station had done a lot of whompin' 'n' a' stompin' on our poor overmatched U. of H. Rainbow Warriors.

Aggies are usually pretty easy to spot, in any kind of crowd. In my addled condition this morning, I wasn't very observant, but this one made it easy for me; I saw his Texas A & M ring as he picked his nose, right after he climbed over me and fell into the window seat next to mine.

The other thing I noticed about him, as he fidgeted about wildly in his seat, looking for something in the seat-back pocket in front of him, was that he was wearing a filthy and whiskey-stained white dress shirt and a pair of ugly checked Bermuda shorts, displaying a couple of large, fat, and severely sunburned legs.

Even before we taxied out onto the runway, Red-Face asked the same stewardess twice when the booze service would begin. Being a well-trained United stew, she followed company protocol and barked at him sharply both times like an angry poodle. That didn't shut him up, of course. He was well beyond that point. Meanwhile, he kept groping and digging for something in the seat-back pocket, which was beginning to get on my nerves.

I was in a horrible state, but he seemed even worse. And with second- or third-degree burns, to boot. I suspected immediately that he was a dangerous lunatic, far too violent and costly to control at his last place of confinement, some cesspool like the Texas State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, doubtless some non-descript grey cinder-block complex in a bland suburb somewhere near Austin; that he was another one of those wild men that the nuthouses in cracker and hillbilly states release and give one-way tickets to Honolulu or San Francisco, offering them a free ride to the local airport and a promise that they'll get the good care they need when they get to Hawaii or California. Or at least the opportunity to sleep on the sidewalks in a warm climate.

What the hell was he looking for, like his life depended on it? He had just gotten on the plane, so he couldn't have lost anything yet, except his marbles. He had pulled all the in-flight magazines and cabin safety equipment cards out of the seat-back pocket and dumped them on the floor and onto his lap, but he was still searching, like a dog digging in a muskrat hole. I wondered if I was simply looking at an advanced case of *delirium tremens*.

"Got a little sun, huh?" I offered, hoping to get him to calm down to something like normal.

"A little? Sweet Savior, I guess so! I went to sleep on the beach out in front of my hotel in Waikiki yesterday morning. I'm fried like bacon, podnah." He continued digging frenziedly in the seat pocket. He still didn't look up.

"That's a pretty dangerous thing to do in this tropical sun we have here. Passing out on the beach here can be fatal," I said. I was thinking about the Korean gangs who stalk the beaches of Waikiki, just looking for beached whales like this Texan, or anyone else in a vulnerable condition, for fun and profit. Too damned bad they had missed this one.

"Dangerous? I reckon so. Heard about a fella, from the Midwest somewhere, who fell asleep on the beach in front of the Moana, right down from the hotel I was staying in, a couple of months back. They say he had too many of those good mai-tais they make here and passed out on the sand about four in the morning, after going in the water to try to sober hisself up.

"Well, anyway, he slept like the dead till about two in the afternoon, till finally somebody noticed him lying there. He was so sunburned that he had swole up into one great big pink water blister, about half the size of a Volkswagen, they said."

"Yeah, I read all about that in the paper," I nodded. "Those things happen to people who aren't used to this sun. You have to be careful, this near the equator."

"Anyway, the poor feller was so burnt that he died from it, I was told. Imagine!"

"That's a true story," I said, shaking my head slowly. "A hideous, awful thing, the way he died. You're never supposed to poke someone who has fallen asleep in the sun and swollen up that way, you know. But the idiot who woke him up didn't know that -- a tourist, I guess. The way I heard it, he poked the guy with a finger to wake him up and tell him to get out of the sun, and when he did, the blister ruptured. It was like sticking a pin in a water balloon. The poor bastard just exploded and died on the spot. Lost all his water, instantly. Ten gallons or so of water and pus, just spewed all over the beach. There wasn't enough left of him to feed a cat, I heard. 'Solar-induced hyper-dessication,' it's called.

"Happens two or three times a year here, always to some ignorant tourist," I added, temporarily forgetting the "aloha spirit" we're supposed to show to visitors in the Islands.

At that point the swine-faced lump with whom I was trying to carry on this inane conversation finally found what he had been looking for, a couple of air sickness bags, and suddenly went into spasms of gagging and vomiting, filling up both of the barf bags. By the time he finished filling the second one, I had hurriedly found another one in the seat-back pocket in front of me, and shoved it into his hands. He stopped hurling after filling up his two bags, but grimly hung onto the one I had handed him, just in case.

I decided right then that this 5-hour leg of my flight was going to seem a lot longer if this repulsive bastard got a few more martinis down the hatch. Especially considering that we were still on the ground.

At that point, I began mentally preparing myself to tell the stewards to stop serving liquor to the clown after he had had a couple, since the airlines aren't supposed to serve booze to drunks in the first place. Not more than two, anyway. I'm not usually real pushy in situations like this, so the thought of having to insert myself into the equation and possibly start an ugly, argumentative scene gave me a distinctly uneasy feeling in the pit of my already badly screwed-up stomach, just thinking about it. But I didn't want this ugly Texas bastard puking all over me before he passed out, so I steeled myself to do whatever I had to do.

Traveling across the Pacific these days, Cattle Car Class, is not as glamorous as it was in back in the glory days when the Pan Am Clipper proudly traversed the skies of the Northern Pacific, and passengers were treated like royalty, rather than livestock. Or so legend has it.

Red-Face seemed to be as nervous as I was. As we sat on the tarmac with the crew revving up the engines to a frenzied, high-pitched whine for take-off, brakes on, he started talking to me. Or to no one in particular: "We're all crazy to be on this goddamned airplane. Crazy as coots, you know."

"Speak for yourself," I muttered under my breath.

"It's got way too big a load! Can't they see that? We'll never get up enough speed to get this friggin' thing off the runway. Mark my words, I'm an engineer. We'll run right into the bay or the jetties at 150 knots with a full load of fuel. Ka-boom!

"Did you ever see one of these things burn, buddy? I did, in Dallas, once. They burn so hot that even the aluminum catches fire. This thing's a flying aluminum coffin! I can't believe they're going to try to take off with this many people and this much luggage on board!"

People seated several rows in front of us began to take notice of the commotion and look in our direction now. Hysteria always spreads like a fast-moving oil slick on an airplane.

"...Did you see all the luggage and cargo they loaded on this bird? It's loaded way over specs. Mark my words, this here mobile crematorium is going to blow like a god-danged oil refinery in a fire-bombing when we hit that jetty at the end of the runway."

"Are you into positive thinking?" I asked, trying to be light and conversational. No answer. Like most drunks, he appeared to prefer monologues. In any case, he seemed preoccupied with the mechanics of the upcoming take-off, pressing his swollen, sunburned face to the window glass and watching every movement of the flaps or other actions initiated by the Captain of the aircraft, with visible shudders of abject horror. His red face and thick neck seemed to be gradually turning an ugly lime green. I could see his lips mouthing the words, over and over, "We're not gonna make it...." I looked down and noticed I was hanging on to my own armrests so tightly that my knuckles had turned white.

Then, out loud again, he exploded, "Judas Priest! What's wrong with that Captain? Can't he hear the noise this damned engine's making? Look at all this smoke.... I don't like this at all...."

I didn't either.

Clearly, to him at least, we weren't going to make it. But I figured he was just a nut case, and I tried not to worry about it, turning back to my copy of the *Honolulu Advertiser*, Hawaii's most popular morning newspaper and bird-cage liner, trying my best to compose myself and ignore the grotesque ruffian sitting next to me as we taxied out to the runway.

The headline story in this morning's paper was about the massacre at a Korean night club last night. The prime suspect was a huge rogue Samoan, a 450-pound weightlifter and former professional sumo wrestler in Japan, a man whose entire body was registered with the Honolulu police as a lethal weapon. The police said he had gone completely out of his mind on Crystal (methamphetamine) and coke, and had allegedly run amok.

The Samoan suspect's nickname on the streets was "Warthog," apparently. The name fit the criminal perfectly, I noted. Except you don't usually think of warthogs weighing 450 pounds and knowing karate.

Final official body count, according to H.P.D.: 3 Koreans dead, 14 people hospitalized, including two policemen. Numerous others injured. Enormous property damage. The paper went on to say that no witnesses had come forward to testify against the suspected killer, however. Not even the injured cops. Nobody saw anything. They never do. The entire population of Hawaii is blind, deaf, and dumb when things like this happen. The Koreans will settle things their own way, and everyone knows it. So why get the state involved in a long and expensive prosecution? The Korean gangs would cancel his ticket for free and save us taxpayers a load of money.

The suspect himself was still in the hospital, in a drug-induced coma, as well as for multiple knife and gunshot wounds. I give him about a day on the streets once he gets out of the hospital on bail, before a remorseless cadre of Koreans finds him and cuts him down with machetes, just like African pygmies stalking and taking down a big bull elephant. They'll start with his Achilles tendons, and once he goes down they'll be on him like a barrel full of maggots. Island justice, they call it. The Warthog will get his, once and for all.

Serves him right. This guy was way over the limit, I thought, as I turned to the financial pages. That's a lot of Koreans for one night, even if he did have a hunting license. Besides, Samoans are dangerous enough when they're straight -- he didn't need to stoke up on crystal amphetamine *and* coke -- it gave him an unfair advantage. Even a normal-sized Icehead who freaks out on Crystal is virtually unstoppable; they just laugh at you and keep coming if you use anything smaller than a .44 magnum on them, and Samoans aren't remotely normal in size or otherwise.

The Night of the Warthog was over. The whole gruesome evening seemed far away, like a bad nightmare or a scary, barely-remembered flick. All ancient history now, just another gruesome story of life in Paradise to read about in the newspaper, and not the sort of thing that affects people in polite Honolulu society.

Our plane finally started its long run for take-off, after sitting and revving the engines up until the brakes could hardly hold the plane still. I'm usually relaxed about flying, but my nerves were shot by this time, and the panicky paranoia of my Aggie seatmate was contagious. He was bent over with his head between the legs all the way through the takeoff.

We did make it off the runway, but not by much, I'll concede. The blue waters and dead coral reefs of Honolulu Harbor flashed right under us about two milliseconds after the wheels left the pavement. A very close thing, too close for comfort.

We did have a full load, by God. The ugly cretin sitting next to me with his head between his legs (the recommended crash position) was nearly right, I thought to myself, as the aircraft groaned and strained to reach altitude -- but I said nothing to him. You don't want to do or say anything to encourage this kind of toad, particularly when he's got a snoot full of cheap whiskey and is foraging for more. Maybe the sick bastard will just keep his head down there, filling up barf bags all the way to L.A., I thought, hoping for, but not expecting, the best in a bad situation.

After the successful lift-off, my red-faced seatmate soon resumed his running aviation disaster commentary, however, while the video monitor gave the passengers our safety instructions, in case of loss of cabin pressure, landings in the water, and the other usual calamities the modern air traveler is likely to encounter.

"...Listen to that crap," he said, in a twanging East Texas accent. "An oxygen mask will drop down out of the overhead compartment in the event of loss of cabin pressure? What a crock! A body bag would be more like it.

"And landing in the water? When the hull and wings of this airplane are carrying 200,000 pounds of fuel? Who in the hell do they think they're kidding? I'm a mechanical engineer! Do you know what the odds are of surviving a crash landing in the middle of the Pacific Ocean in one of these napalm bombs with wings? *Nada, amigo*. Less than zero! It'll be a goddamned funeral pyre. A wet weenie roast, with us the weenies.

"Damn! I need a drink. When in the HELL are they going to start serving us drinks?" he snarled, voice rising. He was already slightly out of control and turning ugly, and we had only been off the ground for about ninety seconds. His good behavior hadn't lasted very long on this flight, I thought, feeling sick inside. He probably hasn't had a drink since he left the airport lounge and ran to board the plane, all of forty minutes or so, I surmised. An interruption in his alcohol supply was the main problem feeding his paranoid dementia, as far as I could tell.

Either that, or he had run out of the supply of Thorazine they had given him back at the State Home for the Hopelessly, Criminally Insane in Austin, just after they removed his straitjacket and tied him to a chair on the plane for his one-way flight to Honolulu. But maybe not. He was heading back towards Texas, and they never give that kind a round-trip ticket. Maybe Red-Face was just a harmless mechanical engineer, as he claimed, one more brain-dead Aggie fan who had been sucking up bourbon and gin non-stop since the game Saturday night. You can kill quite a few brain cells between Saturday and Thursday, if you apply yourself assiduously enough, as this Aggie obviously had.

"Do they expect us to fly all the way to San Francisco stone sober in one of these death traps? God DAMNNN!!" He was coming seriously unhinged now, and I was suddenly wide awake. I don't like flying with loose cannons on deck. Or getting caught between a thirsty animal and the waterhole. Not to mention one sitting next to me that is about to run out of barf bags.

Besides, I had been under the distinct impression that the plane was headed for L.A., not San Francisco, but I didn't want to quibble with him over technicalities. I felt he and I would be on a collision course soon enough. No need to expedite matters.

"Boy, do you have any likker on you?" he asked me. I stuck my nose a little deeper into my newspaper and tried to ignore him. He was oscillating violently in his seat now. Now I wanted to be off the plane almost as much as he seemed to. I like being called "boy" almost as much as your

average African-American does, but I bit my tongue and kept my head down. He probably has a gun, or a grenade, I reasoned. I know rednecks. They're my people. And I know that Texas rednecks, in particular, are particularly well-armed wherever they go, even to church picnics on Sunday. Never mind airport security checks by those groups of bored women on minimum wage. This clown could have walked on the plane with a bazooka and no one at HNL would have batted an eye. They *expect* rednecks to carry guns on airplanes.

I had just escaped a rogue Samoan's killing spree in a Korean bar, virtually unscathed -- so there was no percentage in pushing my luck any further and getting wasted by some drunken redneck, I reasoned. Ignore him, I thought. Maybe he'll get bored and pass out soon.

"Hey! I'm talking to ya. Do you have any booze with you, Buddy? I can't wait all day for these drag-ass waitresses to bring the hooch cart around." He was persistent.

"Waitresses? You mean the flight attendants?" I asked, suddenly feeling even more tired and depressed. I just wanted to be left alone, and to sleep. Fat chance of that.

"Yeah, *stewardi*. Whatever you call these ugly hounds. You got any bourbon in that bag, boy?"

"No bourbon," I said, finally looking up and putting down my paper. It's hard to read with a drunken, whiskey-breathed moron yammering away in your ear. The time had come for strong measures; I reached over and pulled my carry-on bag out from under the seat in front of me and slipped my hand into it.

"It's against FAA regulations to carry your own booze on an airplane," I explained patiently. "But I can sell you some heroin, legally. I've got a macadamia nut can full of good smack in here, somewhere in my bag. Certified top-grade Laotian White, barely stepped on.... Got it right off the Air America courier plane, at an airstrip on the Big Island last night. It's much better than booze -- you shoot the stuff right into your veins. Wonderful stuff.... Ah, here it is...."

I pulled out a Macadamia nut can I had filled with a mixture of salt and baking soda, which I mix up myself and have used for years, in place of toothpaste or tooth powder. It does an incredibly good job of preventing gum disease, a perennial problem of mine for years that has completely cleared up for me since I decided to heed an old wives' tale and start brushing my teeth with the stuff twice a day.

(Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut cans, with their plastic lids, make handy containers to keep it in, I've found. However, I wouldn't recommend trying to carry salt and baking soda through customs in Mexico that way. Last time I landed in Mazatlan, I had to explain why I was carrying the white powder in a food container to some curious and suddenly very excited and hostile people in khaki uniforms. Their Dobermans had me pinned to the ground like a rabbit and the guys in khaki were about one millimeter away from attaching electrodes to some of the more sensitive parts of my body for a few days, until one of them finally took a taste of the stuff in the can and waved me on through the gate. Even so, I'll take toothpaste, rather than my can of white powder, with me on my next trip to Mexico.)

I popped the brown plastic top off the Macadamia can and showed the white powder in it to the big dumb Aggie. He looked very impressed. He wouldn't know smack from beach sand or s*** from Shinola.

"I think I've got a clean needle in here somewhere," I continued, digging in the bag again. "I'll help you find a vein, if this is your first time...."

"HEROIN? Jesus, do I look like some kind of dooper, or somethin'? Forget it, boy. I don't mess around with that kind of s***. My God, you're a... a degenerate... a... a dope addict! I shoulda known it; nobody gets on an airplane in Hawaii wearing long sleeves...."

"No, not really," I said, mildly. "I don't use the stuff. I just market it. I have the distributorship for the Hawaiian Islands." I could have explained to him that the long sleeves were for the cool Santa Fe weather, but chose not to.

"A distributorship? You mean you're a DRUG DEALER?" he asked, loud enough for everyone in coach and much of the first class cabin to hear. "You could get the firing squad for that in a lot of countries I've been in, lately, fella," he shot back, suddenly looking very self-righteous, which was quite an accomplishment, considering the whiskey and vomit stains all over the front of his once-white shirt.

"It's O.K.," I said, mildly, in my softest, best-modulated tones. "I'm with the Government. It's all strictly legal, if you buy it from me. Good, Federally-inspected merchandise. Well... let me know if you change your mind." I shrugged, zipped my bag up again, and went back to reading the stock listings in my newspaper.

Red-Face was staring at me with a look of mixed disgust and new respect on his face, as if he had just noticed a large Diamondback coiled up in the seat next to him. His booze-soaked pea-sized brain was obviously not having an easy time assimilating this disturbing new information into his Texas-based world view. But at least he quieted down for a minute or two, trying his best to figure what his Government could possibly be doing in the heroin distribution business in Hawaii. I have a very honest face and people tend to believe me when I tell them these kinds of lies. Not to mention all my years of legal training and practice, which have honed my lying skills to a fine point.

I had tried to be helpful. *F*** him if he can't take a joke*, I thought. I'd gladly have swapped him a half-ounce of my homemade tooth powder for a C-note or two, though, if he had taken the bait.

We had survived the take-off by a hair, but that didn't seem to do much to calm my Aggie seatmate down. Why, why, O Lord, do I always get some Section Eight retard sitting next to me on these long flights? Why couldn't my seatmate have been that slinky looking blonde honey with the bedroom eyes, the one wearing hot pink running shorts and sitting two rows in front of us?

Instead, by the sheer rotten luck of the draw, I had to wind up with this insufferable bastard, a walking encyclopedia of knowledge about things that can and inevitably will go wrong on airplanes. Why does it always work out like this?

What have I done to so offend the gods?

Soon he was talking over me, to the gentleman in the first seat across the aisle from me, a Methodist minister from North Carolina, or so he said.

"...You know, you ought to go to the bathroom and pee as often as you can any time you're on an airplane," Red-Face gratuitously explained to the minister, who was struggling between trying to

be polite and trying to pretend he didn't hear the crude, short-fingered vulgarian who was blathering at him.

"It's dangerous to have a full bladder when you're flying. A full bladder will explode on impact in a crash landing, even if by some miracle you aren't incinerated or smashed to bits in the crash. You've got to plan ahead, if you want to survive one of these flights."

The son of a bitch had an absolute fixation on dying, violently. Was he planning something I didn't know about? Had he packed some lightweight C4 plastic explosive into one of his suitcases, which would blow a hole size of Marlon Brando or Shelly Winters in the fuselage when we descended to 2000 feet again? Was he planning to off himself and take us all with him in a blaze of masochistic, patriotic glory? For a few panicky, claustrophobic seconds, all I could think of was finding a parachute, opening a window, and somehow getting off the plane, at any cost.

Instead, the wave of claustrophobia subsided in a moment, and I interjected, weakly, "That's amazing that you know all that," trying to be cheerful, and get the Reverend off the hook. "You seem to be a great suppository of knowledge about airplane safety," I added, for good measure. Red-Face seemed to take it as a compliment.

You never want to be too rude to the asshole sitting in the seat next to you on an airplane -- you never know if he is the Designated Terrorist on your flight, ready to blow your Boeing 747 out of the sky at the drop of a hat, or the first hint of an insult. So I tend to keep quiet, keep my head down, and keep my own counsel, as long as I possibly can, when my seatmate is determined to engage me in his mindless dialogue.

Or, if the jerk in the seat next to me absolutely insists on extracting some free tax advice or a dream interpretation from me, I simply hold up my hands helplessly and say a few words in bastard Russian ("*Nyeh ponimayete po-angliskiy*"). It's about all I remember from the Russian language courses I took several decades ago as a college student when, ever the realist/pessimist, I was betting heavily that the Red Tide was the wave of the future and was preparing myself accordingly for the evil day when it eventually would engulf us all.

However, I suddenly had more immediate concerns. By this time I was looking back wistfully at the queue of thirty or so people who had already lined up to use the johns, once we were airborne and the seatbelt signs had been turned off. I grimaced and a woman standing in the aisle behind me smiled back at me, stonily. She was looking intently at my long sleeves, too. Ignorant, narrow-minded bastards, all of them. But all these people had apparently heard about the risks of crashing with a full bladder. Why didn't I know about that?

There are other kinds of accidents you can have on an airplane when your bladder is too full, and when the lines for the john grow too long, I thought, uncomfortably, suddenly conscious of an urgent and growing need. Serious, embarrassing accidents....

I finally made it to the head, with only seconds to spare, and only because I forced my way into the john at the last possible moment, ahead of the small boy who had been standing in front of me in the line for the last thirty minutes. That was probably the closest I've ever come to having my bladder explode like a water balloon with a fatal flaw. (I haven't been in an airplane crash yet, of course.)

I stayed locked in the head for quite a while, cranking up on a near-lethal dosage of California Zephyrs. I knew this was going to be a long day to go without sleep, so I needed and got heavy

chemical reinforcements. It was a powerful concoction, as advertised. Poon had been right when he bought it for me. The cops really do have the best stuff in Hawaii.

After I'd lingered about twenty minutes in the head, the flight attendants began to bang on the locked door. At last, they threatened to go get the Captain if I didn't come out immediately. At that point, I decided to go back to my seat and deal with Red-Face again, so I emerged from my place of refuge, smiling broadly at the two hostile shrews who were standing guard. "No problem," I said, buttoning up the cuffs on my long-sleeved shirt. "Just had to take my insulin -- had a hard time finding a vein." They looked at each other knowingly, but didn't say anything to me as I squeezed by them and headed down the aisle to my seat. I didn't mind their sneers. Give people what they want, and they will usually let you be, I've found. It's just a matter of catering to their prejudices. Works every time.

Mercifully, the Aggie goon had passed out before the booze service began, while I was still in the head. After returning to my seat, I chased down the Zephyrs I had just loaded up on with two small bottles of mescal, gin bottles saved from a Delta flight a few months back which I had re-filled with mescal. I've been writing like a man possessed ever since, trying to finish this before Red-Face wakes up.

So now, three hours later, I'm sitting here in the darkened plane (all the lights are off for the movie), trying to get this charming tale of the islands finished, enduring the snoring boar hog in the next seat, with my internal motor wound up and running at well over red-line.

Maybe I can sell this screed to the Hawaii Visitors Bureau, or to some other tasteless and flaccid local publication. Maybe not. Who would believe or even want to read such seditious dreck about their beautiful Polynesian Paradise? Besides, I wouldn't dare publish this seditious polemic until I'm safely out of the islands, to stay. Neither the Samoans nor the Koreans are a very forgiving lot.

Hel-llooooo, Nuevo Mexico. I've just got to manage to hold it together long enough to get to Santa Fe tomorrow and buy some of the locally grown peyote buttons down at the Plaza tomorrow morning. Down where the Mexicans and Indians sell the stuff, right out in front of the Palacio of the Governors. The peyote will get me grounded again. It always does.... That and about a liter of mescal, with worm, should be enough to re-balance my chakras....

After my friends Mack and Svetlana head on back to California in a couple of days, I have decided to hang out again for a few days at the retreat of the Redeemer, the Chosen One (a New Age Guru), also known as Guru Dave. The Redeemer has a place built around a hot spring up in the beautiful Chancre del Diablo Mountains, northeast of Santa Fe. It was the Redeemer who taught me, years ago, how to "balance my chakras," an ancient Hindoo system of knowledge which has to do with regulating and redirecting the flows of energy in the body. The Redeemer had, mercifully, found a shortcut, using mescal or tequila, a method of spiritual purification that is much more in keeping with my semi-twisted sensibilities than days of fasting and meditation.

All I need now is some space, some breathing room to get "centered" in. Got to end this thing now before battery in Toshiba laptop craps out.... Or before Sleeping Ugly wakes up again and commences ballistic barfing in my direction....

Historical Footnote:

¹ The Colt .45 automatic was first used by the U.S. occupation forces in the Philippines, back around the turn of the century, during the bloody and infamous Huk Rebellion. It was developed specifically for the purpose of stopping Hukbalahap madmen who were wont to run amok, often running right through a hail of rifle bullets and decapitating everyone in reach with razor-sharp machetes before they could be brought down. The Colt .45 automatic was brought in as a "stopper." Several rounds pumped into the chest from one of those portable cannons not only halted the largest Huk maniac dead in his tracks, but picked him up and knocked him backwards a good ten feet. The Huk Rebellion was soon put down quickly, ruthlessly, and permanently, after the introduction of the Colt .45, the ultimate crowd control hardware of its time. (A Texas Ranger was once asked why he carried a .45. He replied, "Because they don't make a .46.")

[SAMPLE: CHAPTERS 1 TO 8 AND 10 THROUGH 22 NOT SHOWN]

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