

## The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper



Episode 102: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, get wired. Sort of.

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Some say there should be limits to free thought, that freedom of thought is unthinkable because it's...well...free. Who makes money off free thought? Who cares to even listen to, read or fantasize thoughts that come without a price that can be artificially discounted when there are so many thoughts that can be conceived for the sole purpose of discounting them?

If you think about this long enough, you'll go crazy.

Which is why Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, shied away from any sort of thought, being of the opinion that too much thinking hurts, especially when it contains more than three syllables and two vowels.

"You can't hear that?" said the dog, Sidestepper. "Some kind of crazy narrative pushing its way through the air?"

Crazy Man tweaked his ears so hard they almost flew off the sides of his head. He stood still with his arms by his side and turned slowly, tweaking his ears further as he turned, until he'd made a full circle at which point he scratched his head, smiled and said, "Nope."

He often wondered about the mental stability of his travel mate and thought that maybe being cursed with having to walk sideways was having a nasty effect on his self-esteem.

The dog, Sidestepper, was well aware that Crazy Man had dreams of committing him to some place where he'd spend a dog's life making baskets and talking to time stains on walls and he did everything he could to avoid the subject so that he wouldn't have to shoot his travel mate with a gun that he didn't have.

"Be careful what you think," said a section of barbed wire tied to a tree.

Well, how about that...talking barbed wire.

"Take it from me," said the talking barbed wire, "there's a price to be paid for fearless thought."

"And what is that price?" said the dog, Sidestepper, who managed to squelch an urge to ask the barbed wire if it was his mother because that would be downright crazy.

"It's a price to be paid in dollops of misery," said the barbed wire.

"And what does that mean?" said Crazy Man with a touch of mockery in his voice.

"You will be attacked on every horizon by those incapable of free thought," said the barbed wire. "They'll point at you and make you cry."

"They better not," said Crazy Man. "I might have a kitchen and I'm thinking about buying a flame thrower."

"That won't do it," said the barbed wire. "Think of me wrapped around your head tight and getting tighter every day of your life. No flame thrower can burn away the scorn once it gets into their minds."

"I don't get it," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"They stop thinking for themselves," said the barbed wire.

"But why would anyone want to do that?" said the dog, Sidestepper. "How will they get into any kind of trouble?"

If a piece of barbed wire could stare in distain at an awfully mutated dog full of dumb questions then this particular piece of barbed wire was definitely staring in distain at the dog, Sidestepper, and the dog, Sidestepper, wasn't impressed. In fact, he was deeply offended and was about to demand an apology but he forgot what, exactly, he was offended about. Was it something about pointing and crying? Was this stringy piece of metal going to point at him and make him cry?

Not today.

"I had a thought once," he said, "and nobody made me cry."

"Was anybody there when you had your thought?" said the barbed wire.

The dog, Sidestepper, had no idea if there had been anybody there, but he knew that nobody had pointed at him. Maybe.

"Ah ha!" said the barbed wire. "That's me...me...or something like me...tightening around your head, squeezing out any thoughts that don't fit between my barbs. I am the prison you wrap around your own mind that first time you say something that makes everyone stare and smirk and laugh at the fool who has such weird thoughts. And then they point."

The dog, Sidestepper, was emotionally demolished. The barbed wire had thumbed the tack right on the head and posted the dog, Sidestepper's, personal angst onto the bulletin board of eternal shame. The dog, Sidestepper's, eyes widened like saucers sprouting out of a chocolate cream puff as steam shot out of his eyes and ears and nose. This amused the hell out of the barbed wire, especially when he saw steam coming out the dog, Sidestepper's, mouth in the shape of steam rings.

Both Crazy Man and the barbed wire were impressed. This dog, Sidestepper, was full of surprises. The steam rings turned into steam squares and steam triangles and steam octahedrons. A circus of mathematical steamy wonders danced around the dog, Sidestepper's, head in perfect marching precision until they started transforming into steam rabbits and steam dragons and Crazy Man and the barbed wire stared in wonder as the dog, Sidestepper, created a carnival of roiling steam stuff. This lasted approximately ten seconds before a gust of wind shot out of the deep dark scary woods and scattered the steam stuff into shards of mist that dissipated into the air.

If a piece of barbed wire could have applauded, then the piece of barbed wire would have applauded but it was a piece of barbed wire and, in spite of the fact that Crazy Man didn't like the piece of barbed wire, he applauded for both of them...a strange gesture involving disturbing images of arms and legs doing things of an unnatural nature which lasted three minutes, give or take three minutes.

The dog, Sidestepper, smiled. This was a disturbing sight for Crazy Man who was chased by a toothy snarling dog when he was just a baby...assuming that he'd been a baby at some point. He looked away, but the barbed wire was taken by surprise and, even without the terrifying childhood memories, the sight of those pointy teeth and leather-like skin dripping with dog drool shook it to the core of its barbed wire being so deeply that its barbs pointed inwards and stabbed the barbed wire to death.

It was a slow painful death with the barbs striking inwards like a swarm of pissed off wasps on the sting. Days later, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, emerged from the fog of horror as the wire lay on the ground, barbs sticking into its lifeless core.

"I think I'd rather be pointed at," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"And laughed at," said Crazy Man.

"I guess it just didn't get the point," said the dog, Sidestepper.

Laughter resounded between the walls of the deep dark scary woods and down the path of adventure and new meanings, where far ahead, something of a very strange nature awaited.

To be continued...

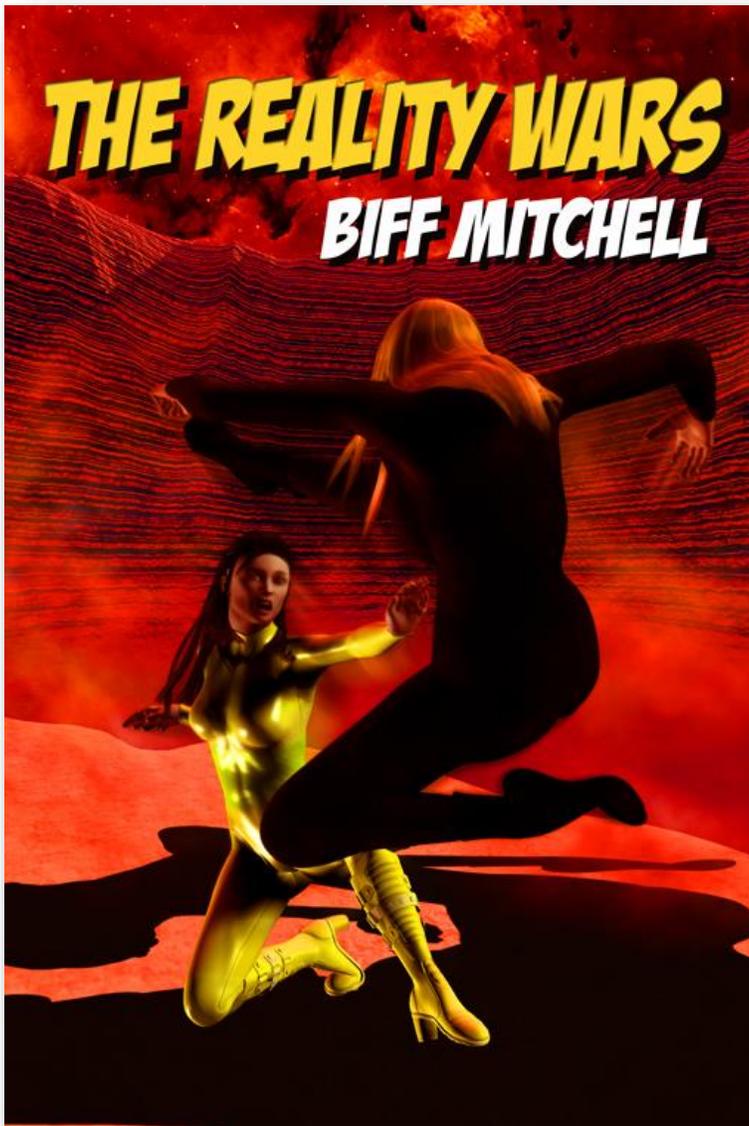
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BTW.....

# The Reality Wars



Cassie Hayes is the idol of the universe. For a thousand years, she's been triumphant in the Reality Wars, a deadly series of real and virtual games played every 100 years and broadcast throughout the galaxies. But Cassie, a sentient software program, is tormented by the death of her virtual mother after her human father abandoned them 2000 years earlier. Now he's back...just in time to abandon her again as he goes off to save the universe with the help of a computer virus that thinks it's Buddha.

But to really rain on her day, the genetically supercharged warrior Clans unleash the perfect weapon, the beautiful and deadly Loac, to destroy Cassie and billions of other virtual humans. The Reality Wars pit woman against woman as they fight to the death in virtual and real worlds against the backdrop of an intergalactic war that will change the very nature of the universe.

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