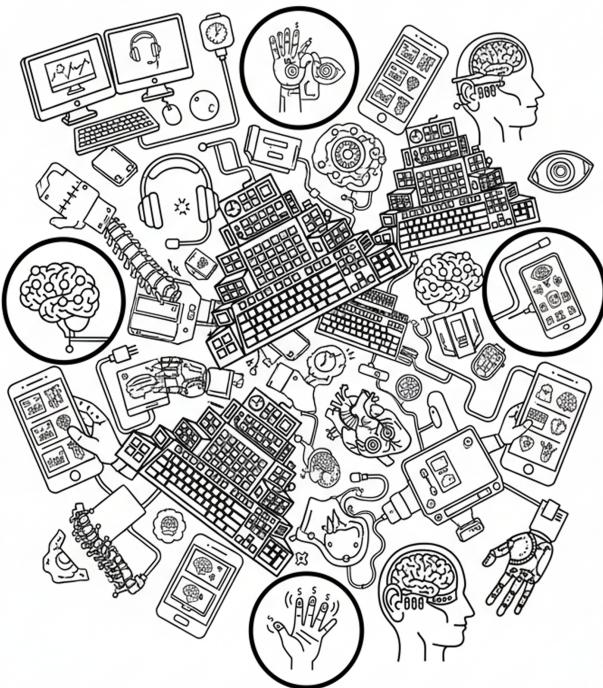


# ***DISRUPTIFICATION***



BY SCOTT BLASZAK

## **Unmotivated Writing**

An Imprint of Compiler Films

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Philadelphia, PA 19147

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## **PROLOGUE**

The Black Rock Desert stretched endlessly beneath the merciless sun of 2036, its sand sparkling with peculiar glitter. Dex Larson's lanky frame cut a solitary figure against the vast expanse, his casual stride belying the gravity of his mission. At fifty-something, his height—6'6" in his playa dusted boots—made him stand out even more against the stark landscape, though his laid-back demeanor suggested someone more suited to a beach than this harsh environment.

He was rich as hell and he didn't need to be doing this.

Behind him loomed shapes on the horizon—massive, otherworldly forms of metal and iron which defied easy categorification. They might have been art installations, buildings, or even techno-punk robots. Dex felt like they were watching him.

As if he weren't stressed enough.

Dex approached a sleek office trailer, its metallic surface reflecting the desert's harsh glare. Locked.

"Hey, man, let me in!"

"Not gonna."

"Come on, Linus. We got to move."

"I'm thinking this might be a bad idea."

"Well, we don't have much of a choice."

“Maybe we should kick it around a little more. Maybe there’s another way. Like, the plan we have, it’s just, it’s pretty out there.”

“I think we’re passed the point of planning.”

“Okay, yeah, but, with respect, you know. I’m kind of the genius between the two of us.

“I mean, yeah, you are smarter than me.”

“Well, I’m sure there are ways you’re smarter than me. It’s just not the important ones.”

“Right,” Dex said, quietly trying to pry the door open.

“Great. Let’s circle back with those FBI guys and see if we can —”

“Hey, I think you’re just using mindless tech business speak because you’re afraid.”

“No, not at all. I just think we should blue sky this and —”

CRACK! The door flew open.

Dex stepped inside.

The trailer’s interior offered little respite from the surreal scene outside. In one corner, perched on a stool like some cyberpunk prophet, sat Linus Dibley. His entire body wrapped in skintight, mirrored Lycra, face painted an unsettling shade of silver, he embodied the intersection of genius and absurdity. At sixty-something, Dibley carried himself with the gravitas of a disgraced tech mogul—brilliant beyond measure yet prone to spectacular lapses in judgment that could, at times, endanger the entire world.

“Hey, man,” Dex said, trying to ignore Linus’ earlier excuses. “It’s go time.”

Linus remained motionless, stewing in his own self-importance. The silver paint on his face caught the fluorescent lighting, creating an almost holographic effect.

“Listen. If I die today—” Linus began.

“You’re not gonna—”

“You know damn well it’s in the cards,” Linus shot back.  
“And that’s why I made this.”

From somewhere in his Lycra suit, disconcertingly close to his groin, Linus produced a small orb-shaped solid state hard drive. The device pulsed with a soft blue light, like miniature deathstar holding untold secrets.

“It’s a neural memory bank of my entire life. Every experience. Every victory. Every defeat. Every moment.” Linus continued, with small philosophical pauses. “Every major tech development of the last fifty years, I was there for it. The boom. The bubble. The apps. The AI hype cycle. It’s all on there,” he said. “Except,” Linus added quickly, “for a few embarrassing sexual encounters which, um, wouldn’t fit.”

Dex’s eyebrows rose.

Linus’ expression was kind of, like, I’d rather not go into detail.

“Okay, cool,” Dex said, willing to move on. “Um, what’s it for?”

“Well, you know, everyone hates me.”

“I mean,” Dex said, becoming exhausted in the way Linus Dibley exhausts people, “I don’t think that’s totally true.”

“I’m despised by the whole world, Dex,” Linus said dramatically. “We both know it. But, see, I think people might hate my guts a little less if people knew the true story of Linus Dibley.”

“Except for the embarrassing sexual encounters.”

“Right. Except for them.”

Dex nodded solemnly. He placed the drive on a nearby shelf with deliberate care, tapping it once—a silent promise to protect its contents.

“We should get to it,” Dex said, clapping Linus on the back.

As they headed toward the door, a monitor in the corner caught Linus’ eye. It was CNN—some talking head discussing

the global crisis, the AI that had begun infiltrating the global defense system. A chyron scrolled: “ROGUE AI THREATENS MILITARY INFRASTRUCTURE — DAY 4.”

Linus stared at the screen.

“Come on,” Des said, pulling Linus from the monitor. “Time to save humanity.”

As they went out, Dex snagged two things: a shiny bird mask and a bag of coffee beans. The mask caught the light, its metallic surface temporarily blinding in the artificial lighting.

Once they were gone, the trailer fell silent, save for the quiet hum of electronics. The hard drive sat on its shelf, its light pulsing. A digital heartbeat. The blue glow intensified, and in that light, in that soup of zeroes and ones, was everything. Every memory. Every mistake. Every moment that had led to this.

The complete and comprehensive history of Linus J. Dibley.

# 1

*Gary, Indiana. 1985*

The suburban landscape sprawled out in all its mediocre glory. A paperboy glided down the sidewalk, his Sony Walkman providing a personal soundtrack to an otherwise unremarkable day. The Dibley house stood as a monument to middle-class decline, its cheap, low-pigment paint peeling in the boring Indiana sun.

Inside, Maud Dibley occupied the living room couch, her knitting needles clicking away as she attempted to defy her seventy-some years through questionable fashion choices. The front door burst open as young Linus—fourteen, overweight, his face losing a battle to acne—bolted toward the stairs.

“Linus! Get your skinny butt over here!”

The boy reversed course, approaching his mother with small steps, hands sheepishly behind his back. A fresh bruise bloomed across his forehead.

“Ma, I’m fine,” he said. “Me and my friends were playing Kick Linus’ Face again.”

“Why do you play this game, son?”

“Well,” Linus said, softly and sincere. “It’s a nice break from the swirlies.”

Maud's needles stopped. "The way them boys pummel you. It makes me so sad."

"It's okay, Ma. Really."

"I worry about longterm damage."

"I'll be fine. See, the knowledge of my loving family and my place in it gives me the strength to endure even the worst abuse."

"Oh, Linus," she said, anticipating he was about to say his thing. And then he said it:

"A boy without a family is like a fish without water," Linus said, trying for eye contact. "Right, Mom?"

"That's certainly something you say a lot, Linus," Maud said. Then, just a bit too quickly. "And I'm definitely your mother."

"Wait," Linus said, confused. "Why would you—"

"Time for school," Maud reached down by her feet. "Chop chop!"

The Trapper Keeper whizzed past his ear. She'd thrown it at him. Like so many times before.

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Upstairs, Linus's bedroom offered a window into his developing psyche. A Yellowstone Park poster dominated one wall, while the floor disappeared beneath a sea of toy circuit boards. He sat cross-legged in this electronic maze when Jodie Dibley appeared in the doorway. At thirty-four, she dressed like someone half her age, as if trying to recapture something forever out of reach.

"Come on," she said. "I don't have any tardies left."

Linus remained focused on his circuits, shoulders hunched.

"You're having a tough time with them bullies again, huh?"

"Only the ones who bully me," Linus mumbled. "Other ones are okay, I guess."

Jodie crouched beside him.

“Well. The world sucks,” she offered. “If only there was a way to make it better.”

Linus nodded, his young mind already spinning with possibilities. *If only.*

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The boys’ restroom of Gary Junior High echoed with the splash of toilet water and the clatter of dice against tile. Sam—even more of a social outcast than Linus, if such a thing were possible—balanced on his knees beside his best friend as their tormentors alternated between throwing dice and administering swirlies. Sam was Linus’ friend of sorts. They shared a few things in common. Mostly pushed around.

“I like this bathroom,” Sam said between dunks. “Tile’s easier on my knees.”

Linus emerged from the bowl, water cascading down his face. “And they clean the rims pretty good.”

“Yeah, not as much urine smell.”

“I do appreciate it.”

“Still, it’s a shame we get picked on so much.”

“We’re weak-chinned and we like electronics,” Linus said. “Our kind have been beat up since the beginning of time.”

“Maybe someday that’ll change,” Sam said.

“I doubt it. I think this is our lot in life.”

The bathroom door creaked open, revealing Mr. Clark—middle-aged, blessed with the kind of looks wasted on a junior high teacher. He scowled, dropping his voice to an authoritarian octave. “What’s going on in here?”

The teenage bullies scattered from Linus like cockroaches in the light. Mr. Clark strode forward, his eyes meeting Linus’s with what appeared to be a gentle and genuine concern.

Hope bloomed in Linus’s waterlogged chest. Here, at last, stood an adult who would end their constant torment.

Mr. Clark reached into his pocket, extracted a crisp ten-dollar bill, and slapped it onto the tile. His snatched the dice and flung them. As they clattered across the floor, the lead bully shoved Linus's head back into the porcelain depths.

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After school, in Vice Principal Stigler's office, Linus dripped toilet water onto institutional carpeting. Maud occupied the chair beside him, while Stigler—forty-seven years old and radiating the enthusiasm of a deflated balloon—thumbed through an AutoTrader magazine.

"Linus's not a bad kid, but academically he's the worst eighth-grader we've ever had," Stigler said without looking up. "We keep thinking he must have some splinter skill, but no, he seems to be remedial at everything. It's truly remarkable."

"Some boys are stupid, I suppose," Maud offered.

These meetings happened every semester or so. Adults would discuss what's wrong with Linus, and Linus would try not to listen. He didn't know what was wrong with him either. He'd just sit there and count the dandruff flakes on Stigler's shoulders.

The sharp squeak of wheels drew Linus's attention as a janitor pushed in a cart bearing a hulking beige computer.

"Put it in the corner," Stigler waved vaguely, still searching for a reasonably priced Toyota Celica. "Don't mind the ruckus," he said to Maud. "The PTA gifted us this contraption and we can't even figure how to turn it on."

"What is it?" Maud asked, annoyed by the size of it.

"A computer," Stigler's said, saying it like it was a foreign word.

"What the devil is a computer?" Maud exclaimed.

"Exactly!" Stigler sat up, energized. "These kids need something which can help them learn, like razor-sharp lawn darts."

As Maud and Stigler began to discuss their opinions on education, something stirred in Linus's mind. He rose from his chair, approached the machine. His fingers found the power cord, plugged it in. The screen flickered to life beneath his experimental keystrokes.

As Maud and Stigler shifted their discussion back to Linus unfocused affect, Linus leaned forward, transfixed by the green text on the black screen.

"It's possible his grades would be better if not for the swirlies," Stigler mused. "I mean, he often misses tests because, you know, his head's in a toilet. The tests he attends, the toilet water drips on the paper, blurring his answers."

Linus's fingers flew across the keyboard with precision. For the first time in his young and pathetic life, everything made sense.

"And just the general thought of toilet water on his papers, well that probably makes the teacher give low scores," Stigler continued. "Because that's pretty gross, right?"

"Oh, of course," Maud said. "Who could blame the teachers for being repulsed by that?"

"Still, between you and me, this school's kind of a mess," Stigler continued. "We fired half the teachers because the parents were convinced they were the spawn of Satan, but it turns out it was one of them, what do you call it, unfounded moral panics based on false memories," Stigler paused a moment, considering this. Then he moved to the next Auto Trader. "Oh, well."

Linus grabbed a budget sheet, and started recreating the sheets' figures into his software. The printer whirred to life.

"One of the lunch ladies steals from us constantly," Stigler went on, "but the budget's so cocked up we can't figure out who."

“A real shame.” Maud said, wondering if she agreed enough with Stigler’s inane chatter if maybe they’d give Linus some free tutoring.

“Yeah, we’ll probably have to close soon,” Stigler said.

Linus popped up, walked over to Stigler, and showed him his printout.

“Holy hell!” Stigler said, grabbing the page from him. “You fixed our budget. How?”

“With the computer, sir,” Linus said proudly. “I ordered textbooks for next year and I created a database for recess injuries. Also, this quarter Mrs. Hatch charged you 2.4 million dollars for sloppy joes. I contacted the police.”

Stigler and Maud stared at Linus. As if seeing him for the first time.

“The boy’s not a moron,” Maud said. A tear in her eye.

## 2

The next few months were a whirlwind. Maud bought a computer with money she didn't have, and Linus perched it on the living room folding table. From that point forward Linus spent all non-school hours working at the machine. Over weeks, the Dibley family room slowly transformed into a shrine to computing, with monitors and keyboards colonizing every available surface. Linus, sporting Coke-bottle eyeglasses, conducted a symphony across three keyboards simultaneously. The rapid-fire clicking of keys filling the silence day and night.

Maud and Jodie couldn't even understand what he was up to. And his behavior was even more of a mystery. He wouldn't eat. He wouldn't sleep. He'd just type. Sometimes a modem would shriek. Or a dot matrix printer would zap. And Linus himself, he was changed. This was a new version of him. For most of his short life he'd been mocked and bullied, but now he had found something he was good at. His purpose used to be not getting his head flushed four times a day. Now his purpose was accomplishing tasks fast and efficiently with digital help. Maud and Jodie didn't know what he was up to, but they got hints when the headlines arrived every few days from the local newspaper:

**“Whiz Kid Creates Messaging Program for House He Calls ‘Linus-Net.’”**

**“County Braniac Wins Science Fair.”**

**“Nerd Child Fixes Town Traffic Problems With Mysterious ‘Computer Program.’”**

**“Acne-Covered Dork Wins MacArthur Genius Grant.”**

**“Pencil-necked Geek Child Saves Town From Nuclear Disaster With His Computer Box.”**

**“Local Newspaper Writer Fired For Unnecessarily Mean Headlines.”**

Maud was picking up dirty dishes from Linus' desk when she say the latest news: "Indiana Boy Graduates High School at 14."

"Linus," she said, folding up a used pizza box, "I'm so proud of what you've accomplished these last months."

His fingers paused mid-keystroke. He turned toward her, suspicion darkening his expression. His mouth doing that weird quiver when he was upset.

"What's the matter?" Maud asked.

"I was looking for another extension cord and I found this." Linus produced an old Polaroid photograph. It showed a nerdy man, gangly and more than a little walleyed, in his thirties, wearing a lab coat, posing next to Big Ben.

Maud's muscles tensed.

"This is your handwriting," Linus said, his voice small. "And it says 'Here with Linus' parents.' But you're my mom. So how's that make sense?"

The dishes clattered in Maud's hands. She sat them down carefully. "Well, that's simple, Linus," she said. "I was on drugs."

"Drugs?"

"Designer quaaludes. I wrote all kinds of things. Poetry. And

erroneous photo captions.”

Linus stared at the photo. Focused on the scientist next to Big Ben.

“Is this guy in the lab coat my dad?”

“What? No,” Maud was incredulous. “That man’s still alive. Your father died in a superbolt lightening strike. Just how I told you. With just enough detail to make it seem believable without trying to be persuasive.”

“But if this is my ‘parents’ and you’re my mom...” Linus’ fingers trembled on the photo. “Am I adopted?”

The silence stretched. Maud’s face did something complicated.

“Are you really my mom?” Linus pressed.

“Of course I am.” She moved toward him. Then stopped. “Why, if I weren’t your mother, then that would mean your real parents gave you up because they didn’t want you. Because you’re unworthy of love.”

Linus’ stomach dropped. He felt something crack within his chest. The photo slipped from his fingers.

“But it’s not like that at all,” Maud added quickly, seeing his face. “Because I AM your mother. Got it?”

Linus wrestled with this explanation, then forced himself to accept it.

“Okay, got it.”

Maud smiled at him.

“A boy without a family is like a fish without water,” he said quietly.

“That’s right,” Maud said, “You repeat that weird saying as often as you need to.”

Maud dusted her hands. “Now get your bruise cream. Them bullies are waiting on you.”

“I’m not going.”

“Young man,” she scolded him, “what did you just say?”

“I’m not going to high school,” Linus said, with a sly grin, “because last night I used the computer to get into NWITU.”

Maud’s anger shifted to pure elation. “Oh my god! You got into NWITU!?!?!”

---

North-West-Indiana-Technical-University sprawled across its modest tract of former soybean land, dotted now with young Maple trees and student hacky sack circles. As Maud drove him onto campus, Miles was a bit nervous about how this would work. He’d watched a popular sitcom about a child doctor who had gone to college when he was just a kid. Linus figured he could use that as a model. But then, through the Oldsmobile Omega window he saw how old the other students were—the height, the body mass, the lack of violently blooming acne—and he got nervous. A JVC BoomBox saturated the quad with Tears For Fears. Those boomboxes were everywhere. And they were all playing the same song. He was so excited to get started. So excited to be here. He was ready to soak it all up.

In the dormitory hallway, Maud and Jodie watched their boy struggle with moving boxes, their pride barely contained.

“High school degree at fourteen! Oh, Linus. You’ll be the first Dibley to take college courses.” Maud beamed. “While not in prison.”

“I’m so excited to learn,” Linus said, not unlike a golden retriever with language skills.

The door closed behind him. Maud and Jodie exchanged proud glances—a moment shattered as Linus emerged carrying a box in the wrong direction.

“Wait,” Maud said. “Why are you carrying that outside?”

“I’m putting it on the car.”

“What? Why?”

“I’m dropping out, Mom,” Linus said, ripping the bandaid right off.

Maud was shocked. “What are you talking about?”

Linus brandished a Time magazine, its cover featuring a computer beneath heavy text proclaiming: “The Gray Boxes That Are Changing the World.”

“Big things are happening,” Linus said, flicking the magazine with his fingers, “and I can’t waste any more time here.”

“You’ve been here five minutes!”

“Five minutes I’ll never get back!”

“Oh, Linus, no!”

“You just don’t understand, Mom! You’re a luddite!”

“I don’t know what that word means, but I don’t like it.”

“The world’s changing,” he said. “I can’t be here slowly following the rules. I need to move quick and disrupt things.”

“How?”

“I need to start a start-up.”

“A what? Is that some kind of cult?”

“It’s a business.”

“But you have no money.”

“Not true. Yesterday I made a website called PunchMyFace.com which ranks people by how much you want to sock them in the mouth. It sells ads, and the click thru numbers were very good. The became viral. And last night it made nine grand.”

Maud was dumbfounded. “What’s a website?”

“It’s called the Internet, Mom. And for the first time in history it allows dweeby people to interact with attractive people on a level playing field.”

“Linus, that’s foolish. This Internet thing’s a fad.”

“No, Mom, this is a tipping point. And if I’m going to truly

use technology to make the world a better place, I have to go.”

Maud could tell her boy’s mind was made up. Linus strode toward the exit as Maud hurled her “NWITU Mom” shirt into a nearby trash can.

---

In the parking lot, Linus finished loading his car, which was precariously loaded with his most prized possessions. A cardboard sign proclaiming “Just Dropped Out” in the back window. As Linus secured another bungee cord, Maud approached.

“Oh, Linus, sometimes I wish you’d never discovered that computer box.”

“But I did, Ma. And it’s shown me things I never could’ve imagined—like other ways of living. And other ways of learning. And tentacle pornography.”

“What in god’s name is that?”

“Pretty much what you’d expect,” Linus said, starting to regret his chosen example.

They stood in silence for a moment, the silence that inevitably occurs when a parent and child discuss tentacle pornography.

Then Maud moved on.

“But where are you going?” she shouted.

“A wonderful land, where nerds are not only not beat up, they’re respected.” Linus tossed an office chair atop the pile of stuff on the car’s roof. His face brightened. “Northern California.”

“Is this about your obsession with Yellowstone?”

“Not at all. Yellowstone’s for families. Once I make a lot of money, I’ll fly you and Jodie out, and we’ll do the Beartooth Highway together. But not until I’m a big success.”

“Well, if you have to go, take these.” Maud pulled from her

tote four AAA California map books. She thrusts them at her son.

“Mom, I don’t need those!”

“Of course you do. They’re map books. How else will you find California?”

“There’s maps on the Internet,” he said.

“Maps on the Internet?” There was pity in her voice. “Oh, Linus.”

“Goodbye, Mom,” he said, starting the car. “You foolish, simple lady.”

As Linus pulled away, Maud pelted his car with more books.

“Please! Take these map books. Please!” Her voice carried across the emptying lot. “Then I’ll save them for you, boy! I’ll save ‘em in my house for the next forty years, because I know that, once this ‘Internet’ fad’s over, you’re going to want these map books!”

She sat on the street curb. Tears streaming down her face.

“I’ll keep ‘em in the attic just for you, Linus. Even though they’re old and dry, and a fire hazard, and will probably lead to my sad fiery death.”

---

The open road beckoned westward. Linus navigated with a desktop computer improbably installed in his passenger seat, his face glowing with optimism and promise.

It was 2200 miles to San Francisco, and he was freaking wired. Filled with gas station cappuccinos and professional dreams. He estimated he could drive there in 3 days. That is, if he slept at rest areas when needed and maybe peed in a plastic bottle in his car a few times. Then, once there, he figured he’d need about six months until his new company would be on the NASDAQ. Weeks after that, he’d play bridge Warren Buffet.

His foot pressed harder on the gas pedal. He was flying through the Nebraska cornfields. His mind raced even faster than the Oldsmobile.

Maybe a year or two, and he'd be on Time Magazine as the most important businessman of the century. Four years later—if he worked hard, if the world proved to be the meritocracy he believed it was—he'd have devices in the hands of everyone on the planet. They'd filter their thoughts through the architecture of his operating systems. They'd breathe the digital air he provided. They'd find and extinguish love through their messages via his gadgets. He'd have thought leaders and politicians at his beck and call. The world would no longer have problems because of his technology. Like, you wouldn't need 400 square feet to store your work files, missed phone calls, and beepers, and maybe you could communicate with little pictures of faces to save time and for laughs, and if someone was writing you you'd see three little dots so you'd know a message was coming, and cars wouldn't spark as they slid down the road or catch on fire...

Cars wouldn't spark?

Huh, that's weird. He thought to himself, as he saw, in front of him, the car's tires drive perfectly over skid marks. And it was then he realized the car was skidding, creating those skid marks. And then he realized he was in the middle of a three-car-pileup that he'd caused by mindlessly drifting off the road's shoulder in front of a dairy farm west of Omaha.

From here his internal monologue becomes all crunch of metal and screaming of brakes. Cars spinning across two lanes of Highway 80 like air hockey pucks.

Three police cars and an ambulance later, Linus stood on the shoulder getting lectured by a state trooper. The other driver—a trucker named Bill Clenhaw—sat on a gurney,

his collarbone shattered like an eggshell.

“Son,” the trooper said, “you could’ve killed someone. Or some cows.”

But Linus barely heard him. He was already calculating how many hours this delay was costing him. How far behind schedule he’d fallen.

As the paramedics loaded Bill Clenhawk into the ambulance, Linus approached him. “Hey, sir? I’m truly sorry about your collarbone.”

Clenhawk’s face clenched with pain. “Kid, you drove right into my lane.”

“I know, and that’s bad,” Linus said. And then he explained how he was going to start a company that was going to make the world a better place through its technology, and so really his unfortunately destroyed collarbone didn’t really matter that much in the grand scheme of things.”

“Grand scheme?” Clenhawk shouted from his gurney. “I can’t work for six months.

“Right, but...” Linus pulled out a sheet of paper. “What if I gave you stock? In my company?”

“What’s your company?”

“Well, it doesn’t exactly exist yet.”

There was a long pause.

“Get the hell away from me,” Clenhawk said.

What an insipid fool, Linus thought to himself, as he pressed down on the gas pedal, screaming down Highway 80. Just 2000 miles away from the start of new life.

Along with so many others, Linus thought to himself, Crushed-Collarbone would one day rue the day he underestimated Linus Dibley.