

In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

*In Brazil  
you would say,*

**'UNIVERSO  
PARALELLO'**

Bryce W James

Copyright



Intellectual Property Rights

Bryce James Wilson

2011

The right of Bryce James Wilson to be identified as the Author  
of the Work has been asserted by him in accordance with the  
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1998

In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

Special thanks

To all those who contributed to and supported me throughout the long process of piecing together the jigsaw of my memory.

Taught me grammar and offered useful constructive criticism.

The Author's whose style, word's and scope of imagination provided me with the insight required to put together a book like this.

The Beautiful Justyna

Shahna

Carina

Roberto

And of course my Brazilian Princesses, Ana Carolina and the ever smiling Melissa.

And finally all those who I mention in this tale, allowing me freedom of prose where required and an acute accuracy where able.

Bryce W James

# Part 1

# When Cultures Converge

## A PARALLEL UNIVERSE

We hit the tarmac with the usual unnerving bounce, screech of tyres and rapid deceleration that pulls you tightly against the seat belt. The sense of adventure and now limitless possibilities ahead of me seemed daunting, but I left that shit at the door and stepped outside into that hot muggy soup of a day.

Check out was simple enough as we hadn't crossed any borders. I grabbed my backpack and slung it over my shoulders, passed the official looking people and made my way out the airport into the shimmering heat on that beautiful sunny Brazilian morning.

Typical! I'd just missed the bus! What was this, fuckin London?!

There was a young couple waiting for the next coach, which as it happened turned out to be over an hour away. Fuck that.

'Do you wanna' share a cab?' I asked.

Did they fuck, I shoulda' known from the dreadlocks and the Thai fishing pants, that it would be easier getting water up a frog's asshole than a hippy to part with his cash. Oh well, I'd pay for a taxi on my own and fuck them. I had over three thousand pounds to spend during the next six weeks here in Brazil, so what the fuck did it matter.

Just over the road from the bus stop I hailed an old creamy coloured cab, a Ford Mondeo I think, and left my hippy friends on the side of the road. Enjoy ya bus ride dudes, when it finally gets there.

Fuck that, I've never really been able to be one of these travellers that lives on ten dollars US a day. Trust me I've tried, but I s'pose I get caught up in the moment and the experience, and any idea that I have of a budget seems to just fly out the window.

Hey last time I managed to spend five hundred pounds a week on Koh Tao island in the gulf of Thailand whilst trying to live on thirty pounds a day, but that's for a different story.

There are two sides of Salvador Bahia, the massive beach side which is referred to as 'Down town' due to the fact that it's in the valley, or the Distrito Historico up on the hill.

I never made it to the beach. In fact, I left Salvador the next morning, my tail between my legs, strung out, fucked up and one hell of an experience later.

I'd searched all through the internet for a guesthouse – or Pousada as you would – off the main beat. One more likely to have a bit of distance from the everyday happy go lucky travellers and clean cut students on a gap year. I had other motives for being in Brazil; I was looking for a place more likely to have smokers, drinkers, movers and shakers. I guess you could say, I prefer my guesthouses to be a little less well to do and tidy. And after hours of trawling websites and forums I came across a guesthouse that seemed me all over.

It was called 'The Nega Maluca' – The Crazy Black Lady. There was a little controversy over the name as some people on the forums claimed it to be racist. The Israeli owners had strongly denied this, and had put through a decent argument explaining that racism was the last thing on their agenda. Otherwise why would they have decided to build a Pousada in that mainly black state of Brazil? Besides hey, they had a fun website and I'm all for a bit of controversy.

I thought, like in South East Asia, I'd walk through the door and find hippies lazing about the place smoking weed, and fingers crossed, being South America, a supply of the highest quality Cocaine around, hopefully, on tap, fingers and toes crossed.

If you stick with me you'll find out that good things never come easy. But hey, such is life, as with that Pousada you can't always judge a book by the cover.

So after two nights in Sao Paulo and not having the free access to drugs that I presumed would be everywhere – apart from of course, the two grams I had scored at the Jazz bar and the joint Melissa and Ana Carolina had sweet talked outta' the two guys at the skate shop – I'd landed in Salvador Bahia full of promise and expectant hope.

Like I said; it was a fabulous Brazilian morning, and I'd left the blight of the English winter behind – it was actually snowing when I got on my plane from Heathrow. Just like in Bangkok I'd had to leave my jacket and everything in Sao Paulo.

Those of us who've travelled on their own to a foreign land know the feeling of anticipation, excitement, fear and doubt that swirl through your stomach when you first touchdown. It's all wrapped up in a ball that seems to nestle itself deep inside, sending tremors of warning through your body. What if something goes wrong, who's gonna' be there to help, or even to know if something's gone wrong? All these thoughts rush through your mind but you can't let it stop you; you can't not have this adventure.

People always have a reason or excuse to not go. I just choose to block out the reasons and ignore the excuses. On my own I haven't got someone to rely on, to reassure my doubts, to talk me out of doing something stupid. On my own, I can put myself into situations where I don't have to worry about another's actions getting us deeper into the shit that I sometimes find myself in.

When a situation is starting to go noticeably wrong and it's time to quit and bail, it's only my own mouth I've gotta' contend with, my own actions. When to rely on that sense to – how did Kenny Rogers put it? 'Know when to walk away, know when to run.'

It was on my drive into old town Salvador Bahia when I got my first taste of the real Brazil. Less the side they put in the adverts and more the side they put in movies like City of God or Carindiru.

Carindiru is a film set in Carindiru prison Sao Paulo. It's based on the tales told to the doctor of the prison at the time, by about ten different prisoners. It's a heart breaking story and if you want to get a better understanding of the lies and corruption in the Brazilian politics of the day, there can be no better reference.

As we were heading down the long motorway towards Salvador we slowly passed in to more built up areas; houses were made of orange-red brick and cement. None were plastered or painted, just the bricks and cement stacked on top of each other with a corrugated grey asbestos roof. This seemed to be the style of dwelling that I saw the majority of Brazilians living in, and as we got closer to the city it was on an ever growing scale. The houses became as stacked upon each other as the bricks themselves were.

We pulled into a gas station, the worn out suspension jarred us as we lurched over the small curb onto the forecourt.

The driver got out to pay for the gas before filling the car, something that is generally only required at night in New Zealand. I was trying to take in what was around me. We were under an overpass bridge, with what looked like a shopping mall on the other side of the road. Although I didn't recognise any of the shops names, I guess the style of advertising is recognisable anywhere in the world. A billboard visible from the motorway, a guy with his

welcoming smile, and a thumbs-up. I imagined the slogan read something along the lines of 'Trust me' and 'Spend your money here,' same thing different country.

I was sitting there on the old torn brown leather front seat smoking a cigarette with shades on and window down. The warm breeze blew on my face while the cabbie filled up the tank; I noticed a black armoured security van pull in behind us.

It had a thick wire mesh grille over the windscreen. You know the type of van, a real riot squad looking thing. The ones you see on news reels during English football violence or unrest in Northern Ireland. It even had the caging on the small viewing ports on the sides and rear.

Two army looking types crawled out the passenger door and circled round the back of the van, they were suited in camo's, boots and berets – a serious look. After a quick reconnoitre, one stood facing out from the van. In his hands was a black twelve gauge shot gun, the pump action type.

The other guy in the mean time made a quick call on a phone he'd had clipped to his belt, and then the solid door on the back of the van swung open.

Out came yet another soldier with a sturdy looking black case that must have been for a cash drop at the gas station or something. Both of the guards had their guns at the ready now, facing outwards they did another quick scan of the area before one escorted the man with the money inside.

It may not be much in our eyes, a simple thing like having change delivered to the local gas station. Don't get me wrong, they definitely have paranoia in England about these types of vans getting robbed in the same situation, but the guard is usually only protected by a riot squad helmet and a truncheon. Besides ninety five percent of the time it's an ol' fulla' cruising through to retirement.

The driver finished up and we pulled out of the station. He pointed out the fact that you can run your car off petrol or alcohol in Brazil. It turned out that in this supposedly third world country, they are years ahead of us in pollution control and caring for the environment. You don't just have the option of premium or unleaded, they have actually produced a way of running any normal petrol vehicle off of sugar cane, and we're s'posed to be the modern ones, our fingers on the pulse of environmental issues and recycling.

After about another half hour of driving we came over a hill, and I got to see the lower more modern part of the city down in the valley with its high rise buildings and massive golden sandy beach lined with tall green fronded palm trees with their long brown trunks. Further down we took a turn off and headed into the historical district.

Maybe it's my ability to not fit in, and the ability to not give a fuck about needing to fit in – although sometimes it bugs me – with whoever considers themselves, 'the cool kids' or the 'in group' at the time that allows me to be who I am. Or maybe, what I do and the way I act is the cause of the way that I am often treated and looked down upon by others when they first meet me, judging the book's cover, with their pretended open mindedness. It's funny but it often comes from all sides of the traveller spectrum. I don't dress, look or act like a hippy, so that usually counts me out of the dread locked bangle wearing squad but also I don't dress smartly, sight-see or follow the rules like gap year students, or those taking a long break from the office.

Then again it might just be my own paranoia from the drugs I like to consume.

I had not booked a Pousada on the beach for reasons I have already explained. I wanted to be away from the “normal” tourists who have different reasons to be here than me. The ones so quick to judge, and believe me; I’ve been judged.

I, on the other hand, had decided to stay in the Distrito Historico, at my apparently hippy haven away off the main streets. Run – as it says in the advertising on the web site – by backpackers for backpackers.

I could see me walking in and there’d be a few hammocks strung about the place, maybe even some bean bags and cushions and shit lying around on the floor of a sunny balcony. Some hippy cunt with dirty dreads, fisherman’s pants splayed out in one of the hammocks with his sandals kicking about on the floor beside them. Right Jesus creeper looking things, the ones some kid at school got picked on over ‘cause their new age hippy parents had bought them for Christmas.

Ya’ know, hippies lazing all about the place with an over sized spliff in their hand, people sitting around playing cards, with one or two more just chilling and reading books. If you’ve budget travelled, you know how it is, lush as.

Well, we pulled into an area with thin winding worn grey cobble stoned streets. I was amazed the car fit around some of the corners. Still; there was a bank and some cash machines, and quite a few touristy cafes around but not a large amount of tourists. Nice so far. Yes I like to get off the track but I also like a few creature comforts.

The heat of the day was getting to me and although it was only about eleven in the morning I had been able to taste the first beer of the day since I first stepped out of the airport.

One more other thing of note though was the number of police. There was one on every corner. Every corner! You would have been lucky if there was fifty feet between them.

We turned an extremely sharp bend that rolled up and around on an impossible angle – obviously designed for small horse and cart rather than large Ford Mondeo – then pulled up outside the Nega Maluca.

It was just another large doorway with a solid heavy looking bulky door and a locked black steel gate attached to the front of it.

This barred doorway thing was starting to feel common place in Brazil, so far anyway – not at all the open door policy that I’m used to in Asia.

I rang the bell, waited and finally after a couple of minutes some Spanish looking guy came and let me in. I noticed, surprisingly, the taxi driver had waited too. Once he was happy I was alright and there was someone in, only then did he drive off. I’d paid the cab driver the equivalent of ten pounds for just over an hour’s ride, not bad. Although I got better travel value later for a tenner, but that’s not quite yet.

The guy led the way off the now scorching hot street and into a lamp-less, dusky, cheap looking hallway. I let him know my name and booking reference number, and after a quick scan he informed me that no booking had been made and that the room I’d paid a deposit on had not been saved for me. Luckily I’m used to dealing with idiots running guesthouses and had a print-off of my booking confirmation. But without even an apology I was told I could take the last bed in the dorm if I liked or find somewhere else to stay.

Nice. Fucker even said he wouldn’t be able to refund my cash and I’d have to sort it out with the owner when he got back from holiday in a couple of weeks!



## In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

This wasn't the cheapest accommodation either, it certainly wasn't five dollars U.S. a night like in Asia; the scene was beginning to look and feel like a real disappointment.

He showed me around and pointed out my bunk bed, which was in a room with about fifteen other small thin beds. And fuck, although it had a window open the place must surely have been designed by a Scandinavian sauna specialist; 'cause to get it that hot and muggy can't have been achieved without professional help.

I dumped my bag, grabbed my passport and we headed up to the balcony, so he could, I guess, show me the view of the back of a broken down apartment block 'cause that's all there was, half an apartment block built of those red bricks they love. It even came with smashed up toilets with their doors missing, and to top it off it was only about twenty fuckin' feet away; madness. But, there were a few hammocks and a couple of large cushions on the white tiled floor, so that was something. Only there wasn't a single person lying about the place, no pot smoking hippies, nothing. Where the fuck were they all? I thought the pousada was s'posed to be fully booked?

Oh well.

We made our way back to the reception so I could sign in, and I checked a large sign on the notice board that – in thick black capital letters – read: NO DRUGS!! And underneath that, 'You will be instantly removed if we catch you in possession and/or using drugs'.

WHAT???!!!!!!! My blood ran cold!!!! Maybe this was just for show. You know, like a cover to keep the police in check.

The guy at the desk, fuckin' Paco here, or whatever this Spanish lookin' mother fucker was called, saw me checking the sign and – obviously noticed my pale fuckin' slack jawed face and shell shocked eyes – was then kind enough to reconfirm for me that my greatest horror was coming true. That yes, there was a zero tolerance on drug use here. Well excuse me mister but in my opinion, what the fuck are you doing in Brazil, in this slum of a fuckin' town if not for the cocaine? 'Cause by the looks of it there aint shit here to see unless you like looking at old slave markets and some rough old church. He was then good enough to sternly put to me.

'Please do not attempt to even purchase any drugs!! Or you will get yourself either robbed or arrested!!'

Well yeah, that stands a fuckin' good chance mate! That's why your average guesthouse in a place like this should supply them! For the safety of people like me. People who prefer the other side of travel, the other side of life. I'm not no fuckin' geek office worker who lands in a country and has dread locks sewn into their hair so they can fit in and live out their hippy fantasies. I'm an experienced traveller who selects certain countries for their drug culture!! I like to hang out in shithole bars with graffiti on the walls like the 'Angkor What?' bar in Cambodia or 'Hill Street Blues' in Amsterdam.

I choose countries for the hidden lifestyles they offer. That's why I so meticulously scoured through the internet looking on travellers' websites and forums for fuckin' hours before I decided upon this place right here that I was standing in. Because this place right here ticked all the fuckin' boxes, had all the correct sounding write ups.

Like Cambodia they should supply drugs for their customers' own safety because of the dangers of being ripped off, robbed, or murdered, trying to purchase them off the street. It's a fuckin' jungle out there man. I surely can't be the only traveller that doesn't want to look at

old fuckin' falling apart buildings built by slavery at the cost of hundreds, if not thousands of lives.

An ancient culture shipped over from Africa, mercilessly fuckin' worked, more than likely to death, then forgotten, or as in the case of Brazil told; 'Go live over there where I can't see you'. This has been done by the celebrated, the rich and the religious throughout history.

Those who built these monuments to time and their generations of family thereafter, either worked, gave sacrifice and donation, or died outside those walls defending them. But they sure as fuck never got to experience the opulence of living within them.

Brazil is a prime example of those old attitudes leading up to the problems seen throughout the world today. Generations scarred and lives shattered without a fair hope for centuries now, just so the rich and religious can wallow in their own glory.

So no thank you I've seen enough big buildings. If it can't top the historical temples of Angkor Watt for share scale, beauty and amazement – especially after a little acid and Ketamine – or Stone Henge and the White Horses of Britain for wonder and lost history, leading to question, 'What the hell is this doing here?' I can't be bothered. I've done it thank you very much, I've been to the Coliseum in Rome, the Acropolis in Athens. I've got all those iconic must have tourist photos for my picture album and Facebook profile. To me now it's all just overpriced tourist traps filled with rock that you spend wandering around for hours in the fuckin' hot sun. There's always children there who should be in school going, 'Hey Mister. Mister! Mister you wan' something? You wan' drink? Necklace? No? Maybe laaater?'

Some poor kid – who makes four times as much money a day as their parents could in full time employment – walking around with a five kilo basket full of books that's tied to a piece of cloth slung over their shoulder.

If you take the time to talk to these kids you usually find they are intelligent enough to barter and haggle with you in three languages at the age of five or so years old. Their intelligence and independence never fails to astound me.

So what do I want? I want to get high and drink cold beer, have a fat line and chill the fuck out. I want my money to go to the local community, be that beer man, street food vendor, local brothel owner or drug dealer.

What's the problem with that? I'm a good citizen, I'd worked seven days a week and saved up all the money I could so that I could fly to Brazil and go to this God dam rave and God dam it, this was all proving too much!!!

Greater risks would now have to be taken and besides, there was no one else there!!! The guesthouse was fuckin' empty.

I dropped my luggage, stashed anything of value in the guesthouse safe and disgusted with the situation so far, buggered off out the door.

## TIAGO AND PABLO

I stepped out the door on to the narrow winding cobbled street, Paco or whatever he was called locked the gate behind me. Something I was going to have to get used to.

With the basic hand drawn map I'd picked up at the Nega Maluca, I started off towards the beach on the other side of town.

As I passed through the main square, a young, athletic looking Brazilian kid was handing out flyers.

'Hey gringo.'

Gringo's a term which as I travelled through Brazil, I found could be used endearingly, or it could be spat at you.

'Hey gringo, you wanna' eat at my Restaurant?'

No, no I fuckin' don't.

I must have had a face like a horse eating a wasp 'cause next thing,

'Hey tranquilo mister. Hey you need something to help chill you out eh?'

Hmm that's not a bad idea.

'Actually wouldn't mind some ganja.'

The kid's eyes lit up.

'Hey no problem I can take care of anything you want. You need a guide? I get you some smoke we have a joint and I show you round town eh?'

'Nah. I don't need a guide but I'll take the weed and hey a gram of cocaine. Can you get that?'

'Nada problema mister.' Eye's even brighter.

'Hey mister what is your name? My name is Tiago.'

'Bryce, My name is Bryce, bom dia Tiago.' This made him grin even wider.

'Bryce. Bom dia Bryce. You speak Brazilian?'

'No but I try. I've come to your country. I can at least try and speak some of your language.'

'Hey nada problema, obrigado amigo, that's cool, I like that. Not many people do try. Hey just so you know obrigado is how we say thank you here in Brazil. Amigo means friend and nada problema means you have no problems, simple eh? Nada problema is easiest to remember because it's the same as your language but with the 'A' at the end. So welcome to Brazil amigo. You been here long?'

'Yeah I got to Sao Paulo about a week ago.'

I've learnt from experience things are always cheaper if it's either not your first time, or you've been in the country for a while.

He turned around waved his hand, and before you could say Shaboogan, an older guy was on my other shoulder. Where the fuck did he come from?

Tiago introduced us. 'This is Bryce, Bryce this is Pablo.' And we shook hands.

'Bom dia Bryce, nice to meet you, how can I help you my amigo?'

'He wants some ganja and some coca.'

'Nada problema my amigo,' he replied, his eyes lighting up too.

'Hey you like cracky?'

Hmm I don't mind a bit of cracky but now's not quite the time, pace myself brother.

‘Get me the ganja and coca and if I like it then maybe later we get some crack.’

My day seemed to be brightening up.

So we cruised to a cafe and Pablo kept me company while Tiago did the running around. Always the young fulla does the running, never changes anywhere in the world.

I bought me and Pablo a beer and we chatted about why I was in Brazil and I told him the little I know about Universo Paralello.

A couple of minutes and forty real (the Brazilian currency, which is about ten pounds) later, Tiago showed up with a small baggie but no ganja.

‘Hey sorry Bryce no ganja at the moment. Later is ok?’

Jesus Christ still no weed, oh well I knew how to drown that sorrow. It’s called BIG-FAT-LINE.

So I headed to the toilet which was standard but clean and opened the packet, there’s only about half a gram in it, displeased to say the least.

Oh well, at least I’ve got some gear; one big fat line later, ah fuck it two big fat lines later, I went back out and to meet the boys.

I must have the horse and wasp’s face again, because a concerned looking Tiago said, ‘Hey Bryce, everything ok?’

‘There was only half a gram in there man, I paid for a whole one. Look I might be a gringo but my amigos I know cocaine, this is not my first time.’

‘Ok Bryce fair enough. Hey we try it with all the gringos, no offence yeah?’

I couldn't help but like these two, the fuckin’ cheek of it, but it was those grins; so innocent and childish looking, fuckers.

‘Look, how about this, you get us two grams of crack and one more of coke, but make them whole ones and we’ll go somewhere together chill out and smoke it. Hey I’ll even buy some beers and you can teach me your language and tell me about Brazil. How’s that sound?’

Eyes any brighter and grins any wider and I’d have been talking to two Brazilian Cheshire cats.

‘Yeah amigo that sounds great.’

‘But look, here's how it is. All I want is fair deals and not to be treated like some rich gringo, and as a thank you I’ll make sure the three of us have a great day. Cool?’

‘Cool. Or as we say in Brazil, beleza! There you go Bryce a new word already, beleza. When some asks you how your day is going and you’re have a great day, you answer “Beleza”.’

Beleza, I liked it, I could handle that.

Pablo suggested a hotel he knew where we could rent an air conditioned room for an hour. Ooh I was stepping up in the world, they seemed like a good find; he reckoned it was a lot safer than smoking on the streets.

Fuck it why not. I was keen, and besides I had nothing of value on me.

Also there was my switch blade in case things got really eyrie.

I’ve learnt through my travels around the third world that – as quoted in one of the greatest films ever, True Romance – it's better to have a gun and not need it, than to need a gun and not have it – only this time it was a knife.

Besides there was a cop about every twenty five feet.

## In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

They led me to a real classy joint down a thin street just off the main square. It's just an open doorway with a steep old rickety looking staircase leading gloomily up to God knows where.

I followed the boys up and after some arguing with the fat guy at the old reception desk, Pablo shrugged his shoulders and says that the guy wanted too much money for the room.

He and Tiago have a quick chat where an agreement was obviously made, and Pablo suggests that if I don't mind, we can go to his place, which was about a ten minute walk from where we were.

Apparently it was ok 'cause I was with them.

Fuck it why not? I felt the knife weighing down in my pocket. As I mentioned it's a switch blade with a polished wooden handle, the blade's about three and a half inches long and about an inch thick. She's sturdy, heavy and acts as a great confidence booster. I bought it for three dollars U.S. while I was in a far out town in Laos called Vang Vieng, but that also is another story.

We made our way to Pablo's through the labyrinthine streets with the odd person yelling out and waving.

## PABLO'S PLACE

The buildings were taller and dirtier in this part of town.

Before it was all café's, bars and restaurants with the flags of every nation pinned about the place giving you a sense of familiarity, along with the plastic covered multi lingual menus and gossiping young people pouring over their Lonely Planets,' planning their next adventure.

Here was where the people lived, the chefs, barbers and cleaners. The workers of this town, the life blood. The ones who'd grown up here, gone to school and experienced the real spirit of Brazil that we've read about and seen in movies all our lives. The magical spirit that created this dream for us. That has absorbed us, made us put our lives on hold, save all our money, leave our jobs and friends and come here, completely out of our own familiar surroundings.

We try and immerse ourselves in another culture, even down to learning the language, but how many people who do come to countries like Brazil actually stop and talk to the people living there?

Most travellers never get to see this part of the destination they've chosen to come to. They're too busy seeing all the sights, checking out this museum and that monument. They go to markets and haggle or barter over twenty pence with someone earning a couple of dollars a day as they try and trade the wares that they've more than likely grown or made themselves. They pour your drinks and serve your food.

It becomes all too easy for the locals to become invisible to us in their own country like the homeless are in ours.

The place where I was being led, was residential apartments; off the tourist trail, no police on the corners anymore for your own protection.

So to speak, I had left gringo town.

Unlike the buildings in the town centre which at least had had a basic spruce up and lick of paint, here buildings were faded or had bubbled strips of paint peeling off the walls and surprisingly here, unlike the tourist areas, there were no bars on the doorways and staircases leading onto the street.

I guess the criminals don't bother the locals; maybe it's that old community spirit not to, (as the expression goes) shit in your own back yard. Maybe it's simply because they have nothing to steal, or that locking up your place makes you feel like a prisoner in your own community. That by having barred doors and windows you're actually showing the criminals that you have something worth stealing, so you've locked it up afraid of whomever it is that might want what you have.

After about fifteen minutes we stopped off at a small corner café which turned out to be under Pablo's apartment. It was a grey soulless concrete building on the outside; we grabbed a couple of really frosty beers and headed up the cold grey concrete staircase.

It was about six feet wide and, coming from God knows where, was water running down the middle in a thin stream with green mildew growing in the bed of it. It must have been leaking for a while by the looks of it.

As we hiked up the staircase I noticed, temperature wise it was much cooler in there than down on the street level – a welcome reprieve from the oppressive Brazilian heat.

## In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

After about five endless flights we reached a hallway spanning off to the right. Once again a padlocked gate with heavy steel bars. Pablo produced a key and clicked it open.

Tiago looked over his shoulder, flashed that toothy smile and waved me in. 'It's ok, follow us.'

A feeling of tension and apprehension ran through me. Should I go through with this? I could turn away now and be out on the street in less than a minute.

But hey fuck it I'd come this far. Once again I checked the feeling of the knife in my pocket gaining some reassurance from the weight of it, the knowledge I am capable of using it, and that as soon as I release the safety the blade will snap out in an instant.

When I was younger, my school put on a course for troubled teenagers, and although there was nothing major wrong with my life, the guidance councillor knew me and liked me and knew it would be something that I would relish. The course was called The Ark Trust and it was one of the most beneficial things I did in my youth.

Every two weeks a group of teens from all kinds of backgrounds was put in different survival and adventurous situations, on one of these weekends we stayed on a traditional Maori Marae, which is kinda like a village with a communal meeting and sleeping hall, that the native New Zealanders used to and sometimes still do, live in.

Me and some of the guys had a few free hours after a horse trek through mountains whilst we waited for the others to return. I was playing darts, badly I might add, when one of the other guys came up and snatched the thrown darts out of the board and told me it was his turn and that I could fuck off. Wisely, I covered the board with my hand and informed him I was playing.

Sure enough a dart was soon lobbed though my hand and managed to sink itself about a centimetre in. Everything happened quite slowly after that, but as the dart fell to the side, the end stuck into the back of my hand lifted up the skin and you could see how deep it was embedded. I remember pulling the dart out, flying at the other kid and stabbing him with it twice before being dragged off by the others. The kid's name was Freddy and previously we had been friends, so it wasn't too long before we both apologised to each other and carried on that friendship.

As you can imagine nobody tried to pick on me after that, I guess it was just boys trying to see where they fit in the pecking order like dogs that bark and then sniff each other's asses. This also served a purpose in showing me what I was capable of when it comes to the crunch, 'cause I can assure you no one was more surprised by my reaction than me.

I've always been and still am a friendly, polite person never looking for trouble and known to walk away from confrontation which I simply cannot abide.

Back to Brazil.

Now I must point out that in these types of situations, where you're purchasing drugs off the street in a foreign country, I have a few rules to of engagement or, survival tips as you would.

1. Take nothing with that you don't mind losing or having stolen, except of course photo I.D so your body can be identified in a worst case scenario.
2. Take details of your medical insurance in case you end up in hospital but are unable to speak for yourself. I.e. in a coma, bloodied and beaten.

3. If you have the misfortune of getting robbed let them take your stuff, do not fight back. It is after all, your own fault for being here. Murder is common place in a lot of these countries. I will however defend myself if attacked and think I'm going to die. Hence the knife
4. Never let them know you have a weapon if you so choose to carry one. Keep it as a surprise. Also there is a high statistic of people being stabbed by the very knife they brought to the party. Don't wave it around; if it's business time, it's business time. Besides it might not be the first time someone has pulled a knife on your assailant and you're gonna feel pretty sick to the stomach if you pull it out, wave it around and they take it off you. Or worse still your actions have them pull a gun on you. Waving a knife around is a sure way of ending up dead.
5. Take nobody with you whose behaviour is, once wasted, questionable. For instance gets drunk, mouthy and you all murdered. The people you are dealing with aren't just people you met in a pub. You're in a third world country with one of the highest poverty and murder rates in the world, buying drugs off crack addicts or whatever on the street and now I'd even lost the safety of the street.
6. Always tell them you only want a little bit for now, repeating the fact you haven't got much money on you, and besides if it's good you'll be back for more anyway.
7. If, as is more than likely, you are travelling alone, never let them know. You will be asked. Tell them people are waiting for you, even if they are not
8. Most importantly whether it's Yaa Baa from South East Asia or crack from Brazil? Be willing to share it with them, let them know this and then follow through with that. Even if you don't do the gear with them, give them some to take home. Or if lucky enough to just be scoring off the bartender, tip well. If using a taxi allow them to charge you a little more than you know you should pay. For God's sake don't barter with them for twenty minutes. This usually always guarantees you good drugs. They don't want to take shit drugs themselves.
9. Remember, more often than not these people are desperate addicts who can't afford to get high, and they more than likely really, really want to. They're taking a lot of risk by approaching backpackers and tourists on the streets. Remember all the police I've mentioned earlier. They probably know these people and their history, as more than likely they grew up in this town too. And walk behind them a little. This also gives you a head start if the time comes, to start running the opposite direction.
10. Finally, once you've got a good source, stick with it. You don't want to have to go through all this shit and mental head fuck too soon again do you?

These steps and a lot of nerve should guide you right. Often it's the holding your nerve thing that proves the most difficult, but hey that's the part of the rush innit? Like sneaking into a concert makes the music sound better 'cause there's been a bit of danger and excitement thrown into the mix.

Anyway I pass through the gateway and Pablo locks it behind us.

Following Tiago through a door on the left we enter a small room about twelve foot by six foot, it's stifling hot in there and the humidity made my singlet cling to me.



A small window provided the only natural light and a blown four foot tube ran along the ceiling black and burnt out at one end.

Along one wall is rubbish piled two feet high and there was a grubby two inch thick mattress with a single sheet on the floor beside it.

'Welcome to my place,' Pablo said looking a little self conscious, 'I'm afraid this is all I have, I hope it is ok?'

I don't give a shit. I've lived in places in London not much better than this. All I wanted was one of those cold fuckin beers and to get high as a kite. I'd come this far; besides I was relieved there wasn't six guys in balaclavas in the room planning on selling my kidneys to the highest bidder. Also, I was enjoying the boys' company.

Despite the current dwellings I found myself in, I'm totally relaxed and don't feel threatened in anyway. The boys are laughing and are quickly trying to straighten out the place, stack a few bags and pieces of rubbish, that sort of shit.

So not to look like a snob I plumped myself down on the floor, crack open the three beers, and pass two of them over.

Anticipation awaits. Now for the good stuff.

Tiago had picked up some more gear for us on the way and pulled out two small packets and opened them up producing two crystallly yellow rocks, each just under a centimetre square. He pulled a ridiculously small brown pipe from his chequered shirt pocket – which looks good for fuck all – then lit a couple of cigarettes so we could collect the ash. (When you burn crack it liquefies, we need the ash to soak up the crack otherwise it'll all disappear down the pipe and we'll lose half of it.)

Mean while I racked up the cocaine I had left over from earlier into three choice lines, to pass the time while the cigarettes burned. Sweat was really starting to pour off me so I took off my singlet and used it to wipe myself down.

Tiago and I hoover down a fat South American sized line each, the same way I guess you'd smoke a Bob Marley sized joint if you were Jamaica.

Pablo passes it up. Oh well, more for me and Tiago. Pablo explained he only smokes, doesn't sniff. He cuts up the first rock with a small razor he pulled out from under the edge of his mattress; He breaks it down into nine pieces and stacks the pipe, ash first then the rocks and blazes it up. I'm not too sure where the fuck they got this pipe from but it's just not working right, it's all blocked up and shit and to make things worse, even though he's got his head sideways, Pablo still manages to burn his nose.

'Let's use a can,' I suggest.

After a brief discussion amongst themselves Pablo reached over to one of the piles of rubbish and pulls out a tattered old can already set up to go. What's with the fuckin little pipe then? Maybe they were trying to impress me or something, maybe there used to a different type of gringo. It didn't matter anyway.

Pablo loaded up the can ash first again, then a fat rock and burned it proper this time. He inhaled for about thirty seconds, nailing it in one hit. The rock melted into the ash but was held there and continued to burn as the ash gave off an orange glow. He gave a grunt while trying to hold all the smoke in before exhaling a massive plume into the room, leaving the air with a faint amniotic taint to it.

I'm excited, my turn next, my turn for the big silly grin.

I had butterflies in my stomach; the sweats really going to town now, running down my neck and slight beer belly, my hands are so covered in moisture it leaves wet marks on my cigarette where I'd been holding it.

I wiped down my face and chest with my singlet which now resembled a wet dish cloth.

As Pablo passed me the can he's put fresh ash on it and a monstrous rock double the size of the one he'd had. How very polite of him. He lit it up for me and I drew back on it. The ammonia flavoured smoke crept over my tongue and slid down the back of my throat thickly. Slowly it filled my lungs from the bottom up until I could take in no more. As I was holding my breath I could feel my heart start to beat faster, it's like I could almost taste the flavours of the smoke inside my teeth. As I exhaled a rushing euphoria swept through me.

My blood quickened and I could feel it rushing through my veins. A tingle starts running through my body, streaming through to the very tip of my fingers and toes. I didn't think it was possible but even more sweat starts to pour and my singlet now is so completely soaked I could almost wring it out, but I couldn't care less. This is what I was here for; this is what I've been searching for these last few days since I landed in Brazil. Here I was, hanging out with the locals, away from the tourists. In *their* house talking to the *real* Brazilians, listening to *their* conversations, finding out about *their* lives, *not* the images projected to you from tourism board.

There are about one hundred and ninety five million people in Brazil and ten percent of them have nearly fifty percent of the country's total income. There's mass unemployment with no future prospects of work for a large amount of the population, no education programs nothing.

Come to Brazil, see Rio and the Jesus statue. What they don't tell you is that there is a slum with over four million people dwelling on the hills behind it. A lot of people there have no running water, no gas and no hope. There are gangs that have been killing each other over control of the drug trade in these slums, or as they're known locally, 'Favelas' for decades now, and the reportedly corrupt police aren't interested in stopping it or helping the people out.

It's all about the money.

That's the equivalent of the entire population of New Zealand, my country, in only one of the supposedly many Favelas. One slum, one sprawling mass of forgotten humanity that if it wasn't for the movie 'City of God' almost nobody would ever have known existed at all.

## BACK ON THE STREET

I'd taken that first hit and it was bliss.

We sat there; just the three of us enjoying each other's company.

I'd come from the other side of the world. Seeking a dream and I was now living it. Most people dream of the art and historical architecture these places can produce. I dream of under worlds, of drugs, of good times. I like to hang out on the seedier side of life. Millions of people all over the world take cocaine regularly but almost none of them have ever tried the real thing, the above ninety percent pure stuff.

At best in England you get fifty percent cocaine and fifty percent God knows what. There are tricks of the trade used by dealers so you don't catch on. Tricks like baby teething powder to make your gums numb or worming powder so you get that good quality cocaine shit just after the first line of the evening. Signs of good gear yeah?

To me it was unbelievable. I'd done it. I was off the tourist trail hanging out with these locals in their house, all the barriers of lifestyle and social boundaries were down, hey we didn't even speak the same language as each other, but that didn't stop us from laughing, talking, communicating by drawing pictures in the dust on the floor, acting things out, whatever it took really.

There was no sense of frustration between us in the lack of ability to get across fluently what was on our minds.

Besides, I'm used to this kind of conversation and experience just from living in London and having such multi-cultural friends. Most of whom English is their second language.

If anything it added more to the whole scenario we were living through and my now ever increasing adventure. We were more animated because of it.

The next couple of hours passed in the blink of eye.

The rocks had been blazed and the beer was long gone now too. Pablo this time offered to pay for some more crack and cold beers – once again how very polite – before disappearing out the door, leaving behind me and Tiago to chat about his favourite subject, his local football team 'Esporte clube Bahia' he loved them. Although I could pick up only part of what he was saying, he talks about them with gusto, waving his arms around like any excitable fan. Half the time he even forgot to translate from Brazilian to English.

He chatted about his life growing up in Salvador Bahia, about the drugs, violence and death that he'd witnessed.

Violence that seemed so unimaginable as I was growing up in New Zealand.

Yes we have drugs, violence and gang culture too. We have gangs with tens of thousands of members, spanning from generation to generation in a country with a population of only four and a half million people but, it wasn't until we got our own socially acceptable, smokeable, addictive substance that went on to wipe out our communities, 'Crystal Meth' that we can even get close to an understanding of what the people of South America have been suffering for decades now. We've only had it for the last ten years and the effects have been near catastrophic.

The Brazilian people are such a wonderful people, they can be so excitably happy that they seem dizzy, like dizzy blonde dizzy; but there are extremes of violence that can always, for me, be lurking just around the corner, or maybe is it just in the background of my mind,

lingering in the shadows. Maybe the awareness of this helps keep me safe when I put myself in these situations.

Tiago's only about eighteen or nineteen, he was about six foot two, lanky with that light brown Brazilian skin that a lot of them have and had short dark curly hair.

Like all Brazilians there's a pair of Havaianas flip flops on his feet, those ones being yellow with the Brazilian flag on them.

With a sombre look on his face he talked about a time when three guys came crashing into Pablo's shoe box of a room one night, beat him up and took the pretty much nothing that he had. It was inconceivable to me, that this guy who slept in this – I don't know what you would call it. It didn't even have a toilet or shower! To think about what little he had and for other people to be jealous enough of his meagre surroundings that they would see it as a chance, or an opportunity, to make their lives better by barging in while he's asleep and taking it, showed the extreme extents of the desperate poverty there.

He explained this is why there's the padlock on the gate. So Pablo can protect what little he has. Tiago then leaned across over the rubbish to the window sill and lifted a fuckin great two foot long rusty looking old machete. And waving it around with the look of a child getting up to mischief, proudly stated, 'Amigo. Next time he'll be ready for them though.'

I laughed at this comical scene. I probably should have been scared, after all I was a stranger in a strange land, away from the relative safety of the tourist trail, smoking crack in some guy's apartment, hangin' out with some strung out teenager who's swinging a machete around but, I'm not, 'cause all the jumping around and demonstrating he'd been doing to communicate this story to me had been fun, laughable in fact, and fixating.

There wasn't any moment of threatening behaviour, no subtle hints that something was being hidden from me; that there was an ulterior motive to all this.

We were rushing off our heads and since we were getting along so well we had loads of things we wanted to say and talk about; questions to ask and answers to give. It took full charades type movements and about ten minutes to communicate any of this to each other. Sometimes you'd think you had it right but then you'd realise you'd been on the completely wrong track for ages.

Of course when I saw the machete, I did get think, 'Well maybe I'm about to become another statistic, another missing traveller'. I thought about the weight of the switch blade in the bottom right front pocket, just above my knee.

I had only a split second to assess the situation, to look at it and know if this was all part of Tiago's story and behave accordingly, or had I been led into a false sense of security. Should I let my paranoia over ride my common sense and either drop to my knees and beg for my life or jump up and bolt for the door leaving my so far kind hosts dumb founded and thinking about the loco gringo who ran off.

The thought that you might go racing to the police, looking over your shoulder, petrified, tweaking out of your head, sobbing that you'd been nearly murdered and robbed by some guys who conned you off the streets and back to their house, only to pull a machete on you once you had gotten inside away from the view of others, would probably frighten them half to death. But really more than likely all they wanted was to get high, chat about their country Brazil, the country that they're so proud of. To teach you a little of their language and practise a bit of their English.

## In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

I think anyhow Tiago realised what he's doing, and with a sheepish look he put the fuckin' great big chunked out thing back on the window sill out of sight.

He grabbed a seat on the old striped dirty mattress beside me and we share a smoke to pass the last few minutes, as we waited for Pablo to return, which Tiago assured me, would be any moment now.

After about five more minutes we heard the snick of the lock being turned and the rusty grating sound of the iron gate opening. Pablo strode through the door and suggested that we go down to the street to a cafe for a beer there instead of sitting in his humid, cramped accommodation.

We smoked some more rocks quickly, rushing them down before I wilted or melted into a puddle in the room and headed off back down on to the streets.

There's a certain feeling you get when you take that first foot step out the door, it can only be described as a sense of freedom and the satisfaction of a good job well done. The open air hits you and you feel your foot thud against the hot cobblestones like it's the first time you've ever noticed it.

Like the free concert it's that moment you realise you've gotten away with something that ninety percent of this world wouldn't even dream of doing. Looked down the barrel of the gun and survived, or as you would, played with matches and not gotten burnt.

Everything was cool, fine, in fact it created a high all of its own on top of everything else. I was loving it and was hanging out with two Brazilians who seemed like great people.

Still no weed yet though. Oh well, I guess I couldn't have it all could I?

They didn't have to be nice people, that machete could have been hidden on the window sill for darker motives, motives led towards funding their crack and cocaine habits by force rather than friendship.

I just got lucky, I'd put the effort in and in turn been rewarded for it. It's not always the case but this time I'd been rewarded proper.

We cruised back into the tourist area with its big ol' church and cash machines, and found a nice cafe just enough off the main strip to be quiet and free from other tourists. It had big open windows and cold beers. Sold. I asked the boys to teach me some more Brazilian, Portuguese; it turned out it's not exactly the same as normal Portuguese, there are subtle differences.

TO THE BROTHEL, BUT NOT FOR WHAT YOU THINK.

We sat around the cafe, me buying the beers, 'cause they didn't cost much and the guys obviously didn't have a lot of cash. The boys tried to teach me Portuguese and although I was trying, my attention span at that point in time was, I guess, just a little less than a goldfish's.

Tiago talked about his family life again, talking proudly, as a father does about his two year old son, but then a glassy look came over his eyes and he suddenly seemed close to tears. He said that his boy had been diagnosed with cancer, I could sympathise with him, I had lost my mother to cancer or was it the chemo, back in the late nineties. That happening is what gave me the motivation to get out of New Zealand and try and achieve something with my life. I don't really know if achieve is the right word, maybe the desire and ambition to bring experiences into my life, something a little more than sittin' around on the dole in New Zealand selling a bit of weed for extra cash.

I've realised through trial and error, that the more you work towards something, and the more goals that you set yourself and then achieve, the more confident in your own ability, that yes, you can do anything if you only try. You may not always succeed but if you don't even try due to the fear of failure, you'll never succeed in anything at all.

Back in the little red café with its polished solid wood tables and chairs, Pablo seemed uncomfortable with the conversation and I noticed a quick silent exchange between them, just a momentary glance, but I noticed. It was one of those ones that friends who've known each other for most of their lives have. Tiago changed the subject back to football and passed me a cigarette.

Pablo was about forty, thin with leathery sun baked skin and short cut hair, his faded, dirty jeans were ripped and well worn.

One time when we cheers'd or santé'd over a fresh beer I scuffed his hand with my bottle and one of the scabs on the knuckle of his pointer finger cracked and a slow drop of blood oozed out. He kinda looked at it and then to me, with a, I dunno, fear, rather than anger at me for rupturing it. I wondered if he had aids, it is s'pose to common place in Brazil and he *was* living in a cell pretty much behind a barred gate. Fuck; for all I knew I'd spent the day sharing a crack pipe with a leper. Do they have leprosy in Brazil? It was mentioned in Papillion. (I know that story's not based in Brazil but it's all generally the same place innit?)

Oh well too late now.

We'd been in there a good few hours and I'd been sticking to my own rules. Every now and then I would bring up the fact that people were waiting for me at the guesthouse and I was s'pose to meet them around eight o'clock. It was sixish then I guess, as the shadows had over taken the sun on the street.

I decided it was time to make a move and asked Tiago to get me two more grams so I could take them with me.

I thanked Pablo for spending the day with me. I hadn't seen a tourist just about all day and had really enjoyed spending time with the locals there in Bahia. In those situations you do always end up buying the drinks but hey that's part of it, and what do you expect when your sunglasses alone a worth nearly a month's wages for the locals. In Brazil like a lot of countries there's poverty all around you, but it's hard to comprehend until you get down to the street level and take the time and effort to chat with the everyday people who live there.

Of course you don't need to quite take it to the extremes that I do. Most of them are just happy to practise their English on you and are genuinely pleased when you're interested in their lives.

Besides Pablo had bought some gear too, probably with the money he'd made from me purchasing all the coke earlier but still, he'd contributed.

My mind was racing and I started thinking about my Pousada, what if I got back and there was still no one there? I was close to bouncing off the fuckin walls, and talking these guys' ears off at a million miles an hour. They probably couldn't understand ninety five percent of it unless I went into a whole routine. But none us really have the patience for that as much anymore and we were all just rambling at each other, laughing when the other laughed, 'cause it's infectious like that.

So I started thinking maybe I should stick with these guys for a bit longer, grab some more crack for me and Pablo, some coke for Tiago who apparently didn't smoke only sniffed, a stack of beers and show those boys a good night. Maybe go hit this hotel they took me to earlier during the day, rent out a room for a couple of hours and get proper fucked up!

The boys had been reassuring me that I was a good gringo, and to stick with them 'cause they liked me and that there was a lot of dodgy locals out there who were only after your money, hmmm, whatever. But better the devil you know, and remember the final rule, stick with them, you don't wanna' have to go through all the earlier risks taken during the day again.

So, hey, they didn't seem that dangerous and besides they'd had plenty of opportunity to rob me by then.

Tiago returned with the two grams and I told him to keep one for himself and went to the tiny but clean cubicle; chopped up about quarter of the doey white stuff then murdered it in one blast.

It all went up my preferred left nostril and started trickling down the back of my throat, cutting out the feeling it as it progressed. After a couple of minutes my two front teeth felt like they had disappeared altogether, leaving a hint of banana flavour in the back of my sense of smell, hidden somewhere deep inside my perceptions. I dunno how to describe it, it's noticeably not an airborne smell you pick up like a fart or when you smell roses, you more catch glimpses of it when you breathe in and out through the nostril you can no longer feel. It slides down the back of your tongue

I made my decision to stick with them for a bit longer, checked my switch blade; depress button, snap, the blade flicked out and locked into place. I unlocked it, eased the blade back inside the handle and put it back in the same place I always kept it, right front pocket just above the knee, then went and laid my idea out for them.

'So boys, fuck the gringo's back at the guesthouse, how about we get four more grams of crack, four more grams of coca, some beers from this lovely lady behind the counter, rent a room out at this place you've been telling me about, and punish the lot of it. But hey I've only got a couple of real on me at the moment so I need to go to the Bankomat and get some more cash first.'

Their eyes lit up like kids at Christmas time; Pablo even offered to buy the beer, so we stocked up and made our way to the town square where the bank was located. Pablo and Tiago offered to wait outside so as not to make me nervous that they'd jump me, and also –

as Pablo put it – keep an eye out, so no one else could rob me either, ‘Some of these locals are crazy, gringo, stick with us and nobody will hassle you amigo. This is a dangerous place at night.’

I believed them. It didn’t feel safe. Lots of small winding thin cobble stoned streets, lots of shadows for people to hide in. There was all the Police about though, but that only served to make you feel even more uneasy in the gloom when one wasn’t around. More vulnerable. What type of place has a cop every thirty to fifty feet for fucks sake?

They led me down the road just off the main square and up to the doorway we’d been to earlier. This time though it had the most ugly cracked out looking crack whores I’d ever seen. Don’t get me wrong, I’ve fucked a lot of ugly hookers in my day but these took the cake. They had that sickly white pallor to their ebony skin that black crack addicts get. It’s like they haven’t seen day light in years and they’re slowly losing they’re dark pigmentation. It seems to be rising to the surface like that yellow colour white folks have when suffering from anaemia. These guys had the lot, there was missing teeth, frizzed out hair, even bare feet. Jesus Christ I bet if you fucked one of these ones you’d be taking something home with ya’. It looked like a two condom job, but not even two using two Condoms would protect you from the scabies or crabs these girls were most likely cultivating.

Pablo whispered to me as we approached them. ‘It’s alright your with us, but hey gringo, still, watch your pockets, these girls are professionals.’ And mimed out someone sneaking their hand into your pocket with a whistle.

The girls cop me, and with a squeal threw their hands in the air and came rushing over. I jammed my hands into my pockets quick smart so they can’t get theirs in instead. ‘Hey gringo. You want some fun? Some action? You ever made it with a beautiful black Brazilian woman before?’ No I haven’t and if I fucked you love I still wouldn’t of.

‘I’ll make you cum sooo good!!’ Giving me a smile with two missing top teeth. For fucks sake this chick was twenty, going on seventy!!

Pablo gave me a grin and a wink. ‘It’s ok gringo your with me, you wanna’ take one of these beautiful women upstairs and party with her for a while, have a smoke and then fuck her all night long? She won’t steal from you. I’ll tell her you’re cool.’

‘No fuckin’ way. Not even with your cock Pablo, would I fuck that. Obrigado amigo but I’m ok. Let’s go smoke these rocks dude.’

Besides I’d done so much gear that I had less chance than fuck all of being able to get a hard on, let alone sustain it long enough to get any decent use out of one of those toothless crack whores. Although people do recommend blow jobs from toothless women don’t they?

With their flip flops slapping on the dry creaky old wood, Pablo led me up the stairs with Tiago behind us. It was kinda’ dim at the top, but I could see at the reception desk on the right, the same fat guy with the big handle bar moustache and greasy shirt was sitting behind the desk. This time he agreed with a price for the room and Pablo paid him what looked like twenty real, it was hard to see. Once again Pablo took the lead with Tiago behind. Being a brothel as we passed by doors you’d think you’d hear grunts and moaning but there was silence, must be a quiet night, maybe they should invest in some women you wouldn’t mind paying to fuck. Maybe, I was gonna’ end up like in that movie Hostel.

(Right front pocket, just above the knee)



They led me down a thin dank hallway with dirty and stained white painted walls. Pablo produced the key given to him by the fat guy behind the counter and opened the door.

'Here we go amigo our 'Hotel' room for the next few hours. If we want to stay longer we just have to let Constance know at reception.'

'Nada problema my amigo.' My Brazilian was improving.

He cracked open some beers and passed one to me and one to Tiago, 'I'm just going to pick up the coca I'll be back in two minutes.' Then he disappeared out the door, giving the key to Tiago who then locked it before disappearing out another door at the side of the room. I heard him pissing for about three minutes; he finally stopped and poked his head around the corner.

'Hey amigo I'm going to have a shower I won't be long.' I hear the shower start up and him jumping in. Now that sounded like a good idea. Fuckin' sweat had been pouring off me all day; I must have stank like a pig.

This break from the two of them gave me a chance to reflect on my day, check my switch blade and look around the decrepit room. Decrepit is polite, the place looked like it was from a horror movie. The room's walls were lime green and the wallpaper was peeling off. There was a section about two foot wide hanging down from the ceiling with grey mould growing on the wall behind it in rosette shaped patches. The mould was all over the ceiling too, it must have been from the constant humidity, that or the plumbing upstairs has been slowly leaking for a long time now and the damp had completely soaked through the plaster, which would explain the washing machine smell.

The white patterned lino floor bubbled up in places and the double bed was well worn although the sheets looked clean enough. Rewarded for that I guessed. The green of the walls gave the room a sickly hue and the single bulb hanging down in the centre of the room was dim with no cover.

Tiago came out the shower with a towel wrapped around him saying there was a spare towel if I wanted it. I decided to rinse the layers of sweat off and start again fresh. Jumping in the shower, it was cold water only, but like I cared. The last thing I needed right then was a hot shower. I placed my rancid clothes on the basin beside me so I could keep an eye on them. Yes the guys had been friendly but ya' never knew. Better to be safe than sorry.

The cold water was a gem; to start off with it ran off me in big brown streaks, fuck I must of ponged. There was a spare towel on the rail beside the basin and I dried off before chucking my baggy camo shorts back on, not bothering with the singlet which felt like an old used mop.

I woulda' killed for a spliff but the boys either weren't interested in going to get it or they actually couldn't get it, oh well.

There was a knock on the door and I heard Pablo's hushed voice whisper, 'Bom dia.' Tiago opened it up with a loud creak and Pablo comes through grinning.

As soon as I heard his voice I remembered we needed the ash from the cigarettes and lit one each for us and passed them around as he entered.

He had a couple more beers on him and some little cups of water with a tinfoil type seal over them that he must have bought from a shop.

With that childishly toothy big grin of theirs that I was beginning to know and love, he produced a handful of little plastic wraps and baggies from his pocket, the wraps had the

crack and the baggies the coke, there were four of each. I pocketed two of the bags of coke and gave the other two to Tiago. This time with my own childish toothy grin I announced. 'These are for you amigo for showing me such a fantastico day.'

Fantastico? Is that Brazilian? Sounded enough like it.

I looked at Pablo and he was already picking apart the wraps of crack which had been done up so tightly in clingfilm, it was taking all the concentrated effort from those sweating shaky hands of his to do so calmly. Using his dirty chipped nails, close to the edge of tearing it apart with his teeth, the frustration showing on his face, he finally managed to get the first one open.

I passed the beers around and looked expectantly for a can or pipe to smoke through. Tiago at the same time was racking out four fat lines and I hammered one of those down while Pablo started fuckin about with the little cups of foil covered water.

'Hey gringo' Pablo says grinning. 'This is a true Brazilian way to smoke cracky.' He crushed one of the beer bottle caps in half and used the pointy edge to poke a circle of small holes on one side of the foil attached to the top of the cup. I was starting to get the idea.

He pierced another larger hole that he could suck through, so I copied him and soon enough we were ready to go. The timing couldn't have been more perfect as the cigarettes had burnt down and now we both had a pipe to rock n roll with.

He'd even bought an extra lighter so we had one each! What a diamond!

We got down to business, he'd already cut up the first rock while I was still poking holes in my cup.

We both scrambled for the biggest rock on the little wooden plate he'd used to put it on. He was quicker, so not to be out done I picked up two of the smaller bits and chucked them onto the ash and blasted away with the lighter. The thick yellowy smoke crept into the cup, swirling around on itself, gaining a dense oiliness like when you take a massive drag on a water bong. Then that familiar moorish taste sensation swept across my teeth, slid over my tongue and eased down the back of my throat, filling my lungs with the insatiable desire for more. I tried to do the whole two rocks in one hit but couldn't manage it. Failure. Oh well. I held it, then choked and coughed it out, my chest heaving and my lungs screaming for fresh air.

Doubling over my head started to tingle like pins and needles were rushing across the surface of my brain, and a throbbing humming sound could be felt vibrating on the inside of my ear drums. My teeth too felt like they were vibrating, as though there were magnets bouncing them off each other. I gathered myself together trying not to look too much like a gringo with tears streaming down my red and purple face. Pablo gave me a comforting back rub and Tiago snickered away. (What the fuck was he giggling at?) I regained my composure and finished the rest off in half a toke. The smoke reminding me of a water bong had given me an idea and lighting another cigarette I burnt a small rush hole – or clutch as some people like to refer to it as – on the side of the plastic cup, just above the water line. Pablo was intrigued but insisted I had no need to do it. But hey I could make my own fuckin' choices thank you very much.

Pablo and Tiago had a quick exchange in Brazilian then Tiago said to me. 'Hey gringo for a rich guy you are really cool you know. You didn't even blink when we came here or went to Pablo's. Ya' know, ya' just sat down and made yourself right at home. That's so cool man.

How's this, I was handing out my fliers the other day and as I approached some guy he was like, 'Don't come near me, what are you after?' 'The guy grabbed the bag that was over his shoulder and like hugged it into his chest, as if I was going to steal it. I fuckin' should of, stupid fuckin' gringo! I was shocked eh! I went to try and tell him everything is tranquilo and reassure him all was ok, and he was like, "Don't fuckin touch me man what the fuck are you trying to talk to me for. Eh? What; you want to steal from me you bastard!!"

'I couldn't believe it gringo, the guy started backing off from me and I didn't know what to do man. I kept trying to calm him down and he started yelling for the police!! True!!' "Don't touch me!! Police. Police!" 'It made me feel like, dirty or something. I became so angry with this guy. What was he doing in my country with that attitude? Mother fucker!! I was so pissed off I hocked a big spit and spat on the ground in front of him and yelled; No, you fuck off gringo, this is my fuckin country! Fuck you gringo!!'

'Someone yelled out and I saw the police coming from the other side of the square. They were pulling out their guns man! Their fuckin' guns!! Lucky for that mother fucker they were there after all that. I couldn't believe it!!' Tiago's eyes were massive and lit up. 'But you gringo, you're cool for a rich guy. You know, usually we charge most gringos double than what we charged you, but you argued with us over price without being rude, bought us beer and we've had a fun day , aint that right Pablo?'

Pablo was looking at him kinda' funny.

I reckon I was too. This rich guy stuff had unnerved me a little. I didn't want to be kidnapped or robbed. All the fuckin Crack was twisting my head; scenarios were flying vividly through my mind. Word for word conversations, me blindfolded and tied to a chair, my singlet ripped and burn marks on my chest. Tiago standing over me with a fire poker glowing red hot at one end, and the smell of seared flesh looming in the air. I can still smell the imagined odour to this day it embedded itself so deep in my psyche. Although the hallucinations didn't appear in the physical world like on good LSD or psycho active plants, mentally they were just as vivid.

I was crying in front of a camera begging for my government, anyone to pay some sort of ransom to these people. Who were these fuckin' people anyway? What the fuck am I doing sitting here with them off the streets away from the police? Come to think of it maybe the police were there for a reason, maybe they were there for these two? I thought about the weight of my knife, how quickly I could get to it, and the sound of it snapping out. Depress safety, snap, action time.

Jesus this fuckin' heat man, the humidity, sweats pouring from my forehead again now, or did it never stop? Fuck I'm soaking wet, have I been sweating like this since I got out the shower or did I forget to dry myself off? I need to smoke some more rocks man. It took a few attempts with my incessantly trembling hands and wet, slick, sweat covered fingers to pick up a piece and jam it on top of some fresh ash, most of which stuck to my finger tips.

I ploughed rock after rock, as drug fuelled movies raced through my head. I wasn't too sure how long it had been since I'd said anything but I couldn't shake the rich guy comment, it was scrambling my brain. To quote The Happy Mondays, 'It's twisting my melon man.'

I pipe up suddenly, randomly, that 'Hey I'm not rich, I worked seven days a week to pay for this fuckin' holiday and saved up for a year man.' Jittering out, 'So no, no I'm not rich amigo, I just wanted to have a good day with you guys, so I don't mind buying a few drinks,

some coca for you and cracky for me and Pablo. You've taught me your language, Pablo you shared your home with me; and Tiago, you felt confident enough to share with me about your sick son. Good luck with that brother, but no amigo's, I'm not rich.' Remember the rules – stay alive. 'I haven't even got any money on me right now, I only got enough out for what where doing now.' Good one fulla that was subtle. Got a big fuckin switch blade though, right front pocket, just above the knee.

I casually undo the button of the pocket, hoping they don't notice. That'll give me access to it that little faster if growing suspicions prove to be correct. Faster than Billy the Kid if needed I reckon.

The four wraps of crack were nearly gone in the time it had taken to drink three beers each, that's almost four more grams between just me and Pablo, let alone all the lines me and Tiago were put away. My heart was pounding so hard and furiously that my rib cage was actually moving, thudding and pulsing. The thump thump, of it travelled from my chest all the way up to the base of my skull and there it merged with the pins and needles swirling about on my brain. The boys kept encouraging me to smoke more and more, faster and faster in consistently larger amounts. Pablo insisted that as soon as we finished, the next was on him.

I dunno' what's going on anymore I can't shake these mental visuals, are they waiting for me to white out so they can rifle through my pockets while I'm partially unconscious or incoherent? I can see myself, defenceless doubled over throwing up on the floor lost in a crack psychosis and then Pablo standing behind me with a club in his hand. One that he's probably got hidden down the side of the bed. A dirty old fuckin' brown wooden thing with notches missing out of it from the last poor sucker they tricked into coming to Constance's 'Hotel' or maybe that big fuckin' machete, oh hell that big fuckin' machete, why did I think of that?

Lurching, on my knees, Pablo standing up behind me in his dirty light green shirt, eyes wild and wide, the rusty machete in his right hand raised in the air above his head..... Then whomp, as it flies down and connects with my body just between my right shoulder and my neck, tearing open a bloody, jagged V shape as my arm comes half loose, red and torn. I can hear the sound of the thud as the dullish blade hacks through sinew and bone and can feel the sensation of me slumping to the floor.

Picture the bewildered look on my face as I tumble forward, all of a sudden that toothy grin has a different meaning. Maybe that's what it's meant the whole the time? I just presumed it was innocence and friendship.

A moment of clarity; fuck man I gotta' get my head together. Keep cool brother, keep cool.

Better still I had to get the hell outta' there before whatever plan these boys had was played out.

'Here smoke more gringo, you sure you don't want a girl. It's ok we'll tell her you cool man, your safe, your with us man. Tranquillo?' Pablo said. 'Tranquillo amigo.'

Yeah I'm not feeling to fuckin' safe right fuckin' now amigo, tranquilo? Fuck you!!

Keep cool dude, time to make your excuses and leave.

All of a sudden the rocks are gone! Thank fuck for that!!

'Gentle men, Amigo's, it's been a pleasure but it's time I left, I really should catch up with the gringo's at my guesthouse, I don't want them to get worried.' Good one, keep using the rules. 'After all they are waiting for me.' Nice smooth. 'Obrigado for a great day, but good bye.'

'No gringo what's the rush, it's my turn to buy the rocks and hey Tiago do you mind asking Constance for some more beers.'

'No, no, really I gotta' go guys I appreciate everything you've done for me today.' I feel calmer now 'But I *really* gotta' go.'

'No, stay and party with us amigo everything's tranquilo.' Tiago piped up, then placed a reassuring arm around my sweat soaked shoulders.

Nope not going through my pockets.

Before I know it Pablo's unlocked the door with the key from his pocket and swung it open.

Freedom was right there. Just jump up barge them out the way. The hall wasn't that long, I imagine Constance at the top of the staircase, the big fat fuck. Slapping the heavy wooden club from behind the bed into a meaty palm, smack, smack, smack, but that's ok; I'd dodge the arcing swing of the club fly shoulder first into that fat fucker with his grease stained white t-shirt and over hanging belly rugby style, and surf him down the stairs onto the cobble stoned streets, bowling those stick thin fizzy haired crack whores in the air like a strike in a bowling alley and on to freedom.

But....what if it was all in my head? Calm down dude, these guys have been nothing but good natured, kind hearted, friendly and sharing. Besides Pablo showed me his house, lots of people saw us on the way, the café owners, locals, surely those police on every corner. If I went missing there would be far too many witnesses for them to get away with it. Luckily Hostel 2 hadn't come out at that time, because the whole town was in on that one I think.

So I kept my head, and tell myself, don't frighten the poor locals half to death by bolting. I never considered pulling my knife to get out, that's really last resort shit, as I've said, it's something you wanna surprise someone with and then use to save your life not to threaten.

'O.k. amigos see you soon.' deflated, beaten, accepting my fate.

They both left the room together, Tiago popped his head back in and said, 'Don't worry amigo we gonna' lock the door for your safety, so no one can get in, see we care about you amigo, your cool man, tranquilo.'

Yeah I'm feeling pretty cool right now dude.

I heard the click of the lock and was left to stare about the place. Ah fuck, might as well make myself comfortable. So I kicked my flip flops off, climbed over the bed to have a peak down the wall side. Nope, nothing there, no club, no machete, no nothing. A quick scan under the bed revealed an all there clear too. I was locked in, so there was nothing else left for it, so I spread out on the bed and stared at the different mould patterns on the roof, trying to make little animal shapes out of them. Happy thoughts, mmmmmmm nice, that's much easier!

It was literally only a minute before I heard the shuffle of footsteps coming down the hall and the click of the lock being turned. A smiling Tiago popped his head around again then waved three more beers at me. The smile was fun and infectious again, not leery and frightening like it was five minutes before. Phew, thank fuck for that, but still, I should make a move soon. Politely though. I think my poor head's had enough for one day.

Tiago cracked open the beers and we lit up the cigarettes, ready for when Pablo came back with the cracky, as I too had decided to affectionately refer to it. Hey when in Rome.

We barely had time to finish the cigs when there was another knock on the door, and Pablo's voice wafted through from the other side. 'Bom dia amigos.'

Tiago lets him in and locks the door again once he comes in the room.

Pablo pulled out a couple more wraps and Tiago passed him a beer. We all sat on the bed around the little wooden tray that we'd been using to chop up on, and following the usual routine. Tiago and I have a line as Pablo cuts the cracky down into usable, breathable chunks.

He still complained at me for burning a clutch hole in the side of my foil covered water cup pipe thing, saying it's not necessary. And smiling in reply, I insist that this isn't my first time. We banter away like that for a while as he prepared both wraps then we started the whole process again.

My chest was still heaving thump thump, thump thump, and my singlet must have reeked. It surly could have been wrung out so I decided to give it a go, explaining to the boys in that animated way what I was up to.

All three of us piled in to the bathroom, and holding it over the shower a giggling Tiago grabbed one end with both hands. In fact all three of us had the chuckles. I grabbed the other end and started to twist, slowly tightening it into a rope. The moisture started to rise to the surface and pool in between the tight coils. Tighter and tighter until sure enough the first few brown drops fell from the singlet to the shower floor. Tighter and tighter still. A steady stream started to flow now and none of us could hold in the laughter any more. It was fuckin' gross man. You could have drowned someone with what was coming out of that rag. Pablo was buckled up, his hands on his knees, and laughing so hard he started to cough. Fuckin' too much. Brilliant. The stream of filth slowly came to a halt and the boys told me that it was fit for wearing again and made me put it on, slapping me on the back as I did so, finding that funny too.

We got back and Pablo and me finish off the yellowy rocks. I was a lot calmer now as the paranoia evaporated as swiftly as moisture on a sunny day after a brief spell of rain. Still, it was time to go though, so I came up with a simple plan.

'Hey amigos my turn to get some more beers and coca but I need to go to the Bankomat again.' They smiled at this and Pablo spouted up that Tiago should go with me as well to stop other locals hassling me. You know, so other locals would know I was Pablo and Tiago's amigo and that I was cool.

I was fine with that, as long as I get back down onto the street and back in a public area, I was cool as fuck.

'Nada problema amigo, come Tiago lets go.'

The key was once again produced and the door unlocked, I tried to look casual as I strolled through it but I nearly fell over myself in trying to get out.

We stepped out and Pablo locked the door behind us. Oh my God I'm out in the hallway. It's gotta be ten degrees cooler out here and there's a draft coming through which helps too. We headed down the hall past the fat bulk of Constance behind the desk, I could only see his face and over sized belly which were lit up by the flashing images of an old portable television. It sounded like there was a game show on as I could hear the canned laughter of the audience as we passed.

That sense of freedom was returning, but I didn't have that sense of victory yet. The feeling you get when you've out run and then shaken the security at the concert.

Yes I did still have to ditch Tiago, but if it came to fisticuffs I was confident in battering the shit out of him and then claiming he'd tried to rob me if the police got involved.

As we reach the bottom of the stairs, then got out on to the street, it was dark and I wondered what time it could be. Any amount of hours could have passed. Fuck, how much of that stuff have we smoked?

It was a humid, muggy night, the girls called out and started heading over I stuck my hands in my pockets and blanked them completely as we walked past. Tiago had a brief chat with one of them; they laugh and joked together quickly.

'Hey amigo.' I heard him yell out, but I just keep on walking not looking back. The main square was only about twenty feet away and I could see it was well lit up and populated with tourists everywhere.

I just gotta' make it to there man, only a few more feet and I'm out of this shadowy alley and back with the gringos and the tourists. Oh man, bring on the gringos, hippies and tourists. I've had spent enough time with the locals for one day. My poor, poor head, the things it sometimes has to suffer for the greater good of the adventure.

I heard the slapping of what I guessed was Tiago running after me in his flip flops. 'Hey amigo, wait up.'

I reached the main square about the same time as he caught up with me, and start heading towards the other side which led to my guesthouse and away from where the bank was.

'Hey amigo' Tiago said again, this time sounding a little more worried as the penny dropped about what was going on. 'The Bankomat is over here'

'I'm going home Tiago. Thank you for a great day and night but I'm leaving.'

'No amigo stay and party with us.'

This is becoming very fucking tedious. 'No Tiago, I'm going to my Pousada. Ok? Thank you for a great night but good bye.'

'Stay please stay.' he says, close to pleading, 'We want to party with you. Come have one of the girls for the night; she'll be the best fuck you ever had.'

This was all just making me paranoid again and I was glad there were people all around us as he was getting a really desperate look in his eyes

'Look Tiago,' I said a little more forcefully. 'I've had enough and I'm leaving. Ok! I'll meet you guys under the clock tomorrow at midday ok. I've had enough and I'm going home to my Pousada.'

He looked confused and maybe a little frightened; maybe Pablo was going to be none too pleased at him for losing the rich gringo. This was enough to confirm and cement everything for me, I was outta' here. He had one hand wrapped around my wrist and I pried it loose. Then thanked him again for a great day, turned and walked off.

I heard him yell out, 'Can you give me and Pablo twenty reals each so we can keep getting high and party some more?'

Fuckin' friends not after my cash eh? And twenty reals to get high not the fifty I'd been paying all day long? I looked at him with dismay. Fuck it, I went to the cash machine and withdrew forty reals only, which I give to him with a promise that I'd meet them the next day under the big clock, turned and with pace walked off.

Finally I'd done it. I'd ditched these mother fuckers, but I couldn't relax yet, no way, not until I got inside the Nega Maluca and that heavy door was shut behind me.

Walking, almost at a running pace, I reckoned, I could have won one of those Olympic speed walking events. I didn't wanna run though; to me, that would have seemed too much like panic and cowardice.

My feet were slipping all over my flip flops. I was constantly looking over my shoulder as I passed through the thin winding streets, looking into every shadow, looking for them coming after me. The movies were racing through my head again and I could see them emerging from every street I passed. Maybe they'd called ahead letting others know that the rich gringo was on his way.

I noticed no one was around so I moved the switch blade from its usual place and pushed the button, snapping open the blade. I hid it in my right hand which was jammed into my pocket; sweaty palm tightly wrapped around the handle, still checking over my shoulder about every two seconds for them. I'm so freaked out that I realise I'd passed the guesthouse and had to backtrack. Fuckin' typical, I bet I stumble across them now.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!!!!

Where do I live? I don't even remember what street I'm staying on! Oh God don't this to me now!!

Where is it? Where is it? Where is it?

Suddenly bingo. That's it! I recognise the big door!! It's lit up!! That's it alright! Oh thank fuck for that!

I repeatedly pushed the buzzer as fast as possible until 'said' Spanish looking cunt opened the door. 'You only need to push the buzzer once hombre,' with a disapproving look on his face. Where the fuck did they find this guy?

Shut the fuck up dude, get the fuck out of my way and lock that fuckin door behind me eh!!

I didn't bother saying anything to him and headed straight to the reception desk. 'How's it fulla?' I stammer at him. 'Just to let you know I'm checking out tomorrow. How do I get to Morro de Sao Paulo?'

'Just to let *you* know you've paid for three days and *you* can't get your money back now because *you* booked and paid for your bed. We've had to turn other people away because there was no room available.'

A right proper movie goes through my head. I jab this cunt square in the nose busting it, grab his hair and smash his face into the reception desk. Then once he's on the ground moaning about it I stomp all over his fuckin' body and face, relishing the crunching sound as I break his fuckin' arms.

'Nada problema amigo.' Yeah dude keep my fuckin' money, obviously unlike you I'm a rich gringo with lots of cash and you can stick it up your fuckin' ass. Now do the job you seem to be so good at and get me a beer and leave me the fuck alone!



### THE END OF A LONG NIGHT

I hadn't slept all night. I'd lain down, tossed, turned and sweated like a priest in boys' changing room, but I've never been able to sleep in that condition. Bugs the fuck out of me, some of my friends can pass-out like they've had nothing but booze and good food all night. Me? I even look at coke and I can kiss sleep goodbye. I was in that state when you can actually see and feel your rib cage move 'cause ya' heart's pounding so heavily.

It was the next day and I now found myself on a ferry to an island off the coast called Morro de Sao Paulo. I was standing at the front of the boat chatting to a pale freckled ginger middle aged German man in a thin red Hawaiian shirt with crazy patterns on it, and light beige shorts. He was covered from head to toe with what turned out to be some super high factor sun cream that resembled something you'd probably paint the outside of your house with.

Heimrich here or whatever the fuck he was called was on a two week holiday. He'd managed to book a return flight from Frankfurt to Salvador and back for three hundred and fifty Euros, can you believe it, three hundred and fifty Euros! I'd paid six hundred and fifty pounds just to get to Sao Paulo, which was still about two thousand fuckin' miles away from where I wanted to be. Then I'd had to spend another one hundred pounds to get to Salvador. And to top it all off, the website I tried to book through kept crashing as I was trying to make the payment.

Sure as shit they charged me three times. The bill didn't show up in my bank account for nearly six weeks, and by that time I figured out what the fuck had gone on, they refused to refund my money because I had waited more than a month to make my complaint. Well durr, no shit I waited six weeks to complain, because you mother fuckers waited six weeks after the initial transaction to bill me.

I had a moment to think back to the night before. What was up with the guy at the Nega Maluca reception desk? Jesus was he a fuckin' menace or what? Man what type of person has that kind of attitude. That fulla' just seemed to relish making me feel bad or something, and the thing is, I reckon he was a backpacker too. They'd advertised work on the website, and loads of people are willing to put in a few hours for a free roof over their heads during their travels. Any means to save a bit of cash and make your experience last a little longer. I s'pose it introduces them into a social scene too though, and that's fair enough but that's not for me. I'd worked enough already to get there, I was in Brazil on holiday.

Anyway. What the fuck was that about? As with the barred gates, getting cleaned out by cunts was something I was starting to associate my holiday with. Don't get me wrong it's not only Brazil that's like this, I get punished everywhere I go. But hey ya' can't let it get ya' down. Many third world countries and tourist destinations I've found are, or have similar, I dunno', scams. If that's the right word? People are all over you, all around you, trying to take your money in some way, hands in ya' pockets or else extended palm up.

I reckon I'm similar to most people and just want to be treated fairly. It's a shame really, you've only gotta' lower your defences for a second and bam! Some fuckers making off with ya' money or ya' payin' ten bucks for a coffee at some cafe in Florence. Not that I drink the stuff. Urgh. It's yuck, besides; everyone knows it's bad for you. To me old coffee smells like what an ashtray must do to a non smoker.

There had been about five or six people sitting around on the balcony of the Nega Maluca when I sauntered out there with a beer in hand trying to act casual, but when I kicked off my flip flops into a pile of other ones, the soles of my feet were so covered in a thick layer of grimy sweat I nearly slipped straight over onto my head.

Of course this was after a quick stop off at the loo to powder my nose. I remembered feeling, that this place was fuckin ridiculous, here I was in Brazil and I had to hide in the toilet of my own guesthouse to do gear. What was this, fuckin' London? Well I'll tell ya what. Brazil certainly wasn't liberal about drugs like Cambodia. Here it's with cocaine, not Yaa Baa, opium, weed and everything fuckin' else, and that was what I had been expecting or at least hoping for. Oh well I guess I'd been spoilt in South East Asia.

As the great Ned Kelly said before the hangmans noose, 'Such is life!'

The toilet was cramped due to the fact that the staircase to the floor above ran on a sharp angle straight over your head. It was clean with white tiles and had that slight disinfectant odour you sometimes come across in public bogs when they've just been cleaned. Nice. Wouldn't have to feel so guilty when I wiped what was left of my line from the back of the seat onto my gums. He, he, he. C'mon. We all do it.

I had to tell someone about my day and although trembling and frightened like a rabbit trapped in front of a set of car headlights that are bearing down on it in the middle of a dark night, I decided I needed to join a conversation to keep my sanity.

So spying an empty seat at a table with four others sitting around it and trying not to shake too much; I introduced myself and sat down. There were two Norwegian people, Alf, his sister and a couple from Switzerland, Johannes and Eisha.

I tried not to, but when asked how my day was and what I'd been up to; I just unloaded the last few hours or however long it had been upon them. Unsurprisingly they looked kinda' worried. Oh well, I couldn't hold it in; if I had, I might have popped.

They let me know that they were all going out on the town and I was welcome to join them, but hell and high water wasn't getting me back out *that* door and onto *that* street. We chatted for a while and they had a calming effect on me; slowing the heart palpitations and random twitches.

I didn't know it yet but these four people would continue that effect on me at different stages throughout my time here in this part of Brazil. To me and to my cracked up mind, surprisingly, I was accepted straight away and welcomed into their conversations. Obviously the story of my day with the locals threw them a bit but it didn't put them off. Although they didn't ask me too many questions about it either.

After a couple of hours they moved on, and a couple of other guys who I came to realise had stayed in the Nega Maluca for quite a while joined me at the table. They were talking about a night out they'd been on a few evenings before when one of them had tried to pick up a local chick at a bar up the road. Being a smallish area of the town the local boys took a small town red neck offence to it and acted like small town red necks by chasing them up the street.

What the fuck was that? What the fuck is this crazy place? What the fuck is anyone doing here? None of them mentioned cocaine or weed so I didn't ask. I knew I was outta' here first thing and was all the more glad for it.

I continued punishing the Charlie I had on me and noticed one of the two hammocks was free so I took the opportunity to stretch out.

My hammock neighbour was a Swedish man who'd just come down from Manaus, a city right up the Amazon. In the rain forest I think. After a brief chat and being the kind of guy I am, I offered said Swedish man a line but he just said thanks and pocketed my gear. You could picture my face; fuckin' priceless. I actually held on with good grace for all of about five minutes before I questioned him about when he was planning on having some 'cause yes I did want it back. I was dying for some more already, not having the coke in my possession was unsettling, and every second that cunt waited was an agonising hour of despair.

'I'm saving it for later' he replied.

'No I don't think so,' trying not to yell at him, to give it the fuck back. 'How about I hold onto it and when you decide you want some let me know, and if there's any left you can help yourself then.'

We didn't talk too much after that so I passed the next few hours of the night swinging to and fro on the hammock like a mad man in the nut house. I tried to straighten my head out enough, so that I could go and lie down on my rock hard bunk in my shared sauna, knowing I'd sweat the night out till first dawn.

As I said it was a pretty sleepless occasion, so as soon as the sun was up I grabbed my bags and took them upstairs still determined to make tracks and get out of this crazy fucked up town. Afraid to the point of sickness that I'd stumble across my companions from the night before.

I sat around on some large soft cushions reading my book. Trying to get my head together, so I could summon the courage to leave this place and move on into the unknown again.

The tale was written by my favourite fantasy author of the time David Gemmel. It's an amazing story in itself. The author had actually died whilst still writing the final instalment in his trilogy about the historic battle of Troy. After his death, David Gemmel's wife had pieced together the notes he had left behind and finished the popular saga for him, maybe also for the fans, but more than likely, for herself.

While sitting there hungry but still not able to eat, Alf – with his long hair pinned back with a chopstick – and his sister came and sat beside me.

The best way to snap out of my current mindset was to start chatting to people, and work to restore my faith in the situation that I was living through. It was just what the doctor ordered. Turned out they were heading to Universo Paralello too.

So feeling better with myself and after having swapped emails with a hopeful promise of catching up at the festival, I booked my long awaited ride out of the place.

## MORRO DE SAO PAULO

I got off the rollicking little old ferry from Salvador Bahia and stepped onto the dock, which had ancient seaweed covered tyres strapped to the side to prevent damaging all the weathered tugs that supplied the island.

Stumbling under the immense weight of my backpack and the burden of the night before I stepped onto the rough concrete path that lead up on to the island proper. The first thing I noticed was the trail itself was set on a ridiculously steep incline. Fuckin' hard work straight away.

Then the native islanders themselves, who it seemed, had made a business out of carrying the luggage of the more wealthy tourists in old well used looking wheel barrows. The wheel barrows might have looked old, but the size of some of the loads I saw them carry and the some of the routes I saw them take, like any tradesmen, if they didn't look after their tools they were was gonna' have one hell of hard day.

As I was struggling up the hill myself under the weight of my backpack in that hot Brazilian sunshine on that hot Brazilian afternoon, I came across a guy who had two bulky suitcases stuffed into his barrow. Sweat slicked muscles taut and straining, his were lips drawn back across his teeth in a tight grimace as he struggled with it.

So, wanting to feel like part of the team I dumped my pack off my shoulders, grabbed the front of the red rusted barrow, and helped yank it up to the top of the hill. Fuck me it was so heavy, I began to wonder whether he'd given up pushing from his end. Like when you're in a Kayak paddling away in the front seat and your mate is sat in the back just pretending. Jesus I nearly had to stop for a cigarette part way up and I only helped for about half the journey.

Man these boys must be tough. How on earth were they doing this? Now that's earning your fuckin money.

The first day must be an absolute killer. Like the first gym session that leaves your body aching for the next half a week. Tell you what, made them fit though.

Just pushing a fully loaded wheel barrow when I was younger one time all day long on flat ground in my Dads' back yard in New Zealand while helping him put the garden together made me never want to do it again. Let alone all day every day for the rest of my fuckin' working life.

The hill itself was only about fifty feet high but the angle of it was, as I said, ridiculously steep and it turned out it wasn't the only one. The whole way round the island was either sheer little hills or soft sandy beaches connected by soft sandy tracks, and these guys were working on these surfaces from sunrise to sunset.

We got to the top and a couple of other Porters – as that's their official title – were watching us with a bemused look on their mugs, snickering playfully at our exhibition. From the effort of it all, my face, I guess, must have been about as purple as the night before when I was choking on crack-smoke, two minutes away from losing my mind with Pablo gently rubbing me on the back.

Their way of living, currently empty wouldn't be empty for long though. There was plenty of rich gringo looking types milling about down the bottom by the pier, wondering how on earth they were going to get their luggage all the way up to where we were. So there was plenty of hard work still to be done by everyone, and plenty of money to be made.

I received a cheerful, 'Obrigado' and gave a pleasant, 'Da nada' in response. Da nada meaning, 'it's nothing'. I was well impressed; it seemed my Brazilian was improving.

I found myself at the start of what looked like a small village high street. Except the roads were made of a dusty yellow sand that was thick and hard to walk over, as your feet sank in it when every time you took a step. I pictured the tyres of the wheel barrows sinking into it like when your car gets stuck in the mud, and then the difficult lumbering effort involved in digging and pushing it out. Sympathising even more for how hard these guys were working for their money, and wondering how much they earned.

I never actually asked, but I imagined it wasn't much in terms of what we earned in places like London. Even London's minimum wage was probably higher. Imagine that, not only did you have to contend with the trudge up from the pier, but then, also pushing these peoples' bags, across – you could say almost, "through" – this hot gluey surface.

The high street itself was made up of a combination of surf shops, fashion boutiques, pousadas, cafes and restaurants. I thought to myself that I'd keep on walking around and see if anywhere interesting to stay took my eye.

I came across a sign with Beaches, One, Two, Three and Four written on it, and pointing down through the town. It seemed like an interesting enough reason and excuse for a direction to go. Fuckin' God dam I was sore, especially my shoulders.

*Morro de Sao Paulo has no motorised vehicles allowed on its beaches or main roads, apart from some tractors that help with getting goods to the far away fourth beach, which is the only one where motorised vehicles are allowed.*

*The island itself is sixty kilometres by boat from the city of Salvador and the journey takes around two hours. I had no idea of the size of the island but imagined it to be pretty small. It was in fact four hundred and fifty two square kilometres most of it dense jungle, and had a population of Fourteen Thousand people. During my time on Morro de Sao Paulo I only saw a small part of the island. So it turned out I really didn't get fuck all off the beaten track as I like to say I do. But hey it doesn't stop me trying or at least convincing myself that I am.*

*What is considered off the beaten track though? Would my idea be the same as say, someone used to staying in a five star resort? I think they would be pretty different opinions.*

There were more of the porters heading about the place now, some loaded with luggage, some with food, and others with cases of beer. All being pushed by the most toned, buff, not a drop of fat on them, finest specimens of the Brazilian Homo Sapien. Now I'm not talking your everyday good looking chaps here, I'm talking a lot of these guys were drop dead gorgeous. Think about it for a second, these men spent all day shoving over laden wheel barrows all over that island. Up and down ridiculously steep slopes, and then through the deep soft golden sand of the beaches. They were prime examples of the male human being and as I noticed over the next few weeks, for a lot of women this was heaven. You would see different porters with different girls all the time. Women getting away from a messy break up or even still in a relationship, no wedding ring but a white band around the ring finger. The women tourists on the island couldn't help themselves but fall all over these muscle bound Adonis's.

After getting to know some of them, they said that they often had expensive gifts bought for them, dinner and nights were always paid for.

It was just like one giant tropical paradise brothel version of Pattaya in Thailand, except in reverse. Morro de Sao Paulo was made of men for women instead of the other way round, and minus the ping pong shows.

The weather girls would have been blessing mother nature for this one, 'cause on that island baby, they were tall, dark and lean, rough and tough, strong and mean. For the girls there, it was raining men, hallelujah!

Anyway, so I walked on down the slope following the random signposts that pointed towards First, Second, Third and Fourth beaches to give them correct title.

I struggled in the dense moist heat and wondered which was heavier, my backpack or the itchy menacing comedown from the night before.

Jesus I might be scarred from that one. Oh well rehabs for quitters right? And I certainly ain't no quitter.

Actually though; By then, I'd had enough of Brazil. The tourists weren't my kind of tourists, and the guesthouses weren't my kind of guesthouses. Here I was, backpacking around South America and it had been nearly a week, and I still hadn't been able to buy any weed.

It was fuckin' ridiculous! I hadn't met anyone I felt like I really connected with, and was in general, one sad sorry son of a bitch. Miserable up to my bloodshot eyeballs. Here I was, stuck on the other side of the world, feeling totally isolated from and missing the friends and family I had been so keen to escape only a short time earlier. And lonely, so fuckin' lonely on my big adventure. Everything was shit! Poor me, poor poor me.

I reached the top of yet another steep incline, the path forked to my left and right. Left was to First beach and I guess back to the pier if you climbed around the rocks. Right was Second, Third and Fourth beaches. Novel names eh I know. It reminded me of a Maori friend back home whose parents had called him and his siblings Tahi, Rua, Toru, and Wha, that's One, Two, Three, Four, in Maori. Cool, innit? As long as it's not you.

I chose to go right towards beaches Two, Three and Four. Once again trying to get away from what looked like the popular tourist area, and making my way along the roller coaster like track. It was so bad in parts they had stairs running along the side.

Always though, like a stream of busy worker ants there was those handsome macho Brazilians slick with sweat, and making their living.

I stopped suddenly my breath taken away for what would not be the only time that day. Flabbergasted, would be the best word for it, as, slumped in one of these barrows was ONE BIG FAT GRINGO, who resembled a beached over fed manatee. He was plumped on a wheel barrow like king muck being carried by his royal guards. Except this was a fat lazy rich cunt who would rather pay two guys to push him up the hill than walk. He didn't even look embarrassed about it. I wondered if he was. To me he looked proud, confident in his place, wallowing in his class of society. As it's always been throughout history, the common folk supporting and carrying the rich.

Sure, that that, sitting there looking like the talking trash heap from the Fraggles, in a Hawaiian shirt with a handkerchief clutched in one bulbous sweating palm. Daring to mop

his brow as though the thought of watching these two boys who were earning their money proper this time, shoving his lazy spoilt mound of a carcass up the steep gradient of the hill, was making *him* tired. Thinking to himself 'Couldn't they do it with a little less effort and where is the McDonalds around here? I could do with a super sized meal with a super sized diet Coke to balance it out.' You could almost hear him thinking it out loud.

As you might be able to tell I was becoming more and more disillusioned with this supposed paradise. Marching on, the scratching little creatures in my blood were reaching an almost unbearable crescendo as the crack and cocaine from the night before seeped its way out through my over used pores. I passed a scuba shop and made a promise to myself to stop there one time, and go for a dive whilst there on the island.

As I came up around a bend, I was for the second time in five minutes stopped dead in my tracks. For, what little breath I had left after the last steep foot way, was snatched from me. This time though, in awe of the most beautiful sight. I had reached the viewing point of Second Beach, the place I was gonna call home for the next few weeks.

There was absolutely no need to search any further. It was stunning, sixty five feet below, was a postcard perfect image of beauty.

The beach itself, thick with white powdery sand was kissed by a rolling two to three foot swell of the clearest bluest water I'd seen since living in the Gold Coast of Australia. It was about one hundred and fifty metres long and from where I was standing up on the viewing point, I could see down below me there was a cluster of densely stacked sharp looking barnacle encrusted rocks. At the far side was a palm covered peninsula reaching out about sixty metres into the sea. Second Beach was at least seventy metres wide with a bustling small village set back from the ocean where it joined hands with the rugged mountainous terrain of the rainforest looming behind, like a spectre's shadow in the night.

I rushed down onto the warm sand, kicked off my flip flops, and felt the welcoming sensation of those fine grains as they rubbed between my toes. Then I passed by a smattering of restaurants with their tables and chairs set up along the front. I followed a sign up a sandy alley that announced, 'Pousadas this way' before continuing along the trail. I walked by a few places, but nothing seemed to jump out at me; until I saw a little hand painted sign and written simply on it was.... Ernesto's.

It was a double storey white plastered house with white tiles on the walls and floors. The stairs leading to the first floor, where I would stay were made of a smooth sky coloured tile. I made a mental note to watch myself on those when trying to climb them pissed late at night.

I decided then and there that I'd walked enough and that this beach and this pousada were going to restore my faith in Brazil, my holiday, and myself.

The village of Second Beach was split into three parts. Starting from the beach side you had the restaurants. The alleys leading down the sides of the restaurants led you to the guesthouses. And pushed right to the back out of everyone's view, typically, was where the locals lived, slept and ate. It sounds like a lot but really it all fitted in quite snugly and wasn't too over bearing. It was quaint and comfortable and had that small village feel.

Ernesto's pousada was pretty much smack bang in the middle of it all. Ernesto himself was a skinny Argentinean man, with wavy long black hair tied into a pony tail. His seldom seen quietly spoken wife was a stout athletic looking woman, and both of them although

tanned from the sun had a pale complexion.

I was given a small room with two bunk beds. My roommate was a Chinese American guy who I never got to have a chance to chat with as he left the next day, which gave me a room to myself at least for a while anyway.



## A SHATTERED EXISTENCE

Alone in my room and having a chance to think about the night before, I found that emotionally, I was shattered. I felt violated and burnt out. My veins were trying to gnaw their way out from the inside of my body, and typically, my mind was crying out for more crack. But I had found my – as the world famous in New Zealand singer Dave Dobyn proudly sang it – 'Slice Of Heaven'.

Once again I dumped my stuff down and hid the one hundred US dollar note and fifty pound note that I always kept in case of a bribery situation, in my pillow case.

Not able to settle I ran out the door, bolting for that deep inside calm only the ocean can bring.

On my way down through the sandy alleys, as I reached the end with the surf in sight, a young looking teenager sitting under a little palm leaf hut hollered out, 'Hey gringo, gringo, come over here.'

What the fuck is this little cunt after? Ah fuck it. 'Yeah fulla what can I do for ya?'

'You want some marihuana amigo?'

Now I had no cash on me and I thought to my supposedly experienced self. Well hey if this little punk is still here in a few hours time he must be legit, 'cause even the most hardened criminal can't rip people off and stay sitting in the same place day after day. 'Cause eventually someone's gonna' find a way to come back and fuck ya'. Be it either by the Police or at the end of a heavy blunt object. Maybe even a big ol' chunked out rusty machete they've had hidden on the window sill or behind the bed. Whomping it into ya' shoulder while ya' back's turned.

So as fate would have it and since I had nothing on me, I decided to bide my time and wait to see what transpired. Besides, at that point the call of the ocean and its healing effects were much stronger than the need for a joint.

Confident in this thought process I cruised down to the water's edge.

The sun had nearly finished his daily journey and would set in about an hour. Over by the palm tree covered peninsula a small group of about ten of the local Brazilian Adonis's were practicing and teaching each other Capoiara. Two of them were doing on these strange string instruments which looked like literally an archery bow with a coconut shell at one end. They banged away with their thumb on this string like fibre just above the coconut shell. As they plucked it, it created a strange psychedelic kinda rhythm. To my uneducated ears, it just sounded like a really untuned guitar.

I found out later on that these instruments were called 'Barrimbau', and as far as people know they originated from Southern Africa, 'cause very similar instruments are played there.

I plunged head first into the cool sea, the reflection of the setting sun danced off the waves in a kaleidoscope of such bright and varied elements that even Jamie and his techni coloured dream coat would have been awe struck by it. The calming water washed away the stresses the last twenty four hours had placed upon me. I could feel it actually peel away the filth and angst inside my crack addled mind, like peeling a layer of scum off the top of a three day old kitchen sink full of greasy dishes.

The sun was disappearing and the surf was rolling in without a strong a Rip to drag me back out to sea. So not only was this easy on my mind it was easy on me physically too.

In New Zealand the surf beaches tend to have treacherous Rip's on them. A Rip is where all the water that comes rushing in onto the beach, drains away in one point creating like a drag or 'Rip' that pulls you out into the ocean. One notorious Rip is on a beach in New Zealand called Piha. There's a giant rock set in the middle, about one hundred metres high and long. A real jagged scarred looking thing. The Rip at Piha runs right across the length of the beach straight towards the rock, then back out into the ocean from there. The inexperienced the drunk and the high are always getting caught in it and dragged straight onto the broken sea shell covered mound, and regularly you see poor souls limping off the rock, their feet and legs shredded to bits ruthlessly by the power of the churning waves throwing you out their house like an un wanted guest.

As the guys were practising their Capoiara in the near distance under the palms; I was being lulled into a sense of security and worth again, the terrible come down from the night before ebbing away like the turn of the tide.

Shame it wasn't going to last for long, I didn't know it but I was about to get sent right over the edge Heaven and down into the self pitying depths of Hell.

This time filled with every dark emotion, from humiliation, to all out uncontrollable – not thinking about the consequences – rage.

But for now....

The sun was almost at rest for another night and at that moment, apart from a spliff, mentally I was sorted proper. In a Zen like state emotionally, I tried sometimes successfully, sometimes not, to body surf the low but long rolling swells. Their colour changed to the deep blush of a bruised plum with the final darkening of the sky. I was satiated, calm and blissed out. The sun had finally made friends with the horizon again, and they held each other ever closer like old compadres too long apart.

I clambered out the surf, wallowing in my new found peacefulness and the sheer beauty of the place I found myself. Morro de Sao Paulo, what a dream.

As I went back to Ernesto's, I once again passed the kid under the awning, gaining comfort from the fact he was still there.

Maybe he's was there all day every day, the front for a nice operation. Youthful and cheerful he was dressed well in matching blue basket ball top and shorts with a red baseball cap. Perfectly, tourist friendly and welcoming.

Back at my new home I showered off the last of the muddy thoughts clinging to my mind from the night before. Then went to a great little restaurant recommended by Ernesto where I got, pork Milanese which is basically crispy fried bread crumbed pork served with rice, beans, salad and the fuckin God dam hottest chilli sauce this side of Asia that I've ever had the miss fortune to have to shit out a day later. That hell fire was called piquant! All for eight reals, about two pounds. Dinner for two pounds, who could complain at that?

Then it was off back to the beach to check out if the kid was still there, in the same place under the hut down in front of the restaurants. Following my own advice, I took with me only four fifty real notes and happy with my lot in life again, went off to find the young fulla'.

And there he was.

'Bom dia amigo.' I said.

'Bom dia.'

'How much for your marihuana?' trying to pronounce it in the same way he did.

'Fifty reals.'

'Fifty reals? Cool. Here you go.' I stated passing him one of the four fifties I had on me.

He walked off up the beach to a couple of older bigger guys, usual story, chatted with them for a second then made his way on down back to me. Too easy. Nice. This is going to be sweet. I was gonna' be stoned on about two minutes time.

'Hey amigo you only gave me a twenty real note not a fifty, see?' showing it to me.

Now I know I only had fifties on me, so he could get fucked.

'Eh? What? I gave you a fifty don't try this shit on me man, swapping the notes over is the oldest trick in the book.'

'Nada amigo, you gave me a twenty.'

'Fuck off I did' still mindful of the two other guys sitting about forty feet away. I didn't need to get too leery and find myself being jumped by these thugs.

'If that's your attitude gringo take your money back and buy you marihuana off somebody else.'

You know what? I couldn't be bothered; all I wanted was a joint and if I had to go through this little prick ripping me off five pounds to get it. As the French proclaim. 'C'est le vie.'

Fuck it, I wanted a joint and it was only a fiver we were talking about here, and besides at that point I had thousands more in the bank; so fuck it, I couldn't be bothered. I was starting to feel the strain of the night before again, and my head was able to do anything but think clearly. I just wanted to sit down on the beach, smoke a spliff and listen to the waves crashing in the warm dark of the night. It sounded like such a simple plan.

'Yeah really? So what? Here look gimme' the twenty.' I bit at him, snatching it from his little mitts. 'And here see this amigo? A fifty. Do you agree?'

'Yes a fifty, but honestly gringo you only gave me a twenty last time.'

Really? Oh well maybe I had? Maybe I took three fifties and a twenty by accident. Fuck it. It didn't matter anyway, as long as in five minutes time I was smoking a joint, who gave a shit.

His eyes lit up,

I know; I should have learnt my lesson on that look by now but hey, even now all these years later I probably still haven't. As my pretty friend Carina from Portugal reminded me last time I saw her, I'm a sucker every time. But hey, no one's perfect.

Once again though and I'm sorry to keep doing this to ya but she, Carina and her partner Pedro the amazing chef are a whole different story. A collection of stories and adventures really. Of friendship, travel, hospitality and most recently, truthfulness. The effect these two people have had on my life is hard to describe but in the future, in a different story, one I already have experienced and can already envision. I shall try to explain.

The story is based around a magical festival in Hungary called Ozora and as the events unfolded in front of my eyes I could picture me writing them down. I want to start writing it now it's so clear in my head but as the beautiful Justyna always reminds me, I never finish what I start, so this time I'm sticking with sharing this adventure with you.

So anyway, I took the twenty gave him the fifty, and 'cause he gave a cheery, 'Follow me amigo,' I joined him down the alley that led back from the beach towards the little village

behind Ernesto's. I was his amigo, not his gringo, I should have realised what was to come, but hey as I've just told you, I'm a sucker every time.

We stopped about half way down the alley, next to where they were building a new pousada, restaurant or some shit like that, and he ducked through a half open gate and gave me a smiling, 'Wait here amigo I'll be back in a minute' before disappearing amongst the building works.

I waited for the longest as mother fuckin' five minutes ever, and my blood pressure began to rise once more. Inside, the strung out wreck I thought I had lost was trying to creep to the surface once more, like a zombie crawling from the grave in a B grade horror flick. Close to starting to twitch and scratch, my mouth parched as my core tried not to go into meltdown.

All of a sudden his bright smiley face showed up, and in an extended hand he proudly held out a plastic shopping bag that had been tightly wound around a big ol' pile of weed.

Little did I know it but weed was pretty much an accurate description of what I'd just purchased for the grand sum of about twelve pounds, plus the five he'd already swindled out of me with the note swapping scam.

Cunt... Little Cunt

Anyhoo I didn't know he was a cunt yet and was still unsuspecting, and pleased as punch that I'd stuck with it, got a result and in turn been rewarded. Good on the little guy.

He wasn't actually that young, maybe sixteen or so. A little bum fluff grew on his top lip and chin but he was small and had a youthful charm about him. Selling weed on the beach all day, what a nice easy life. He and his friends did tourists a favour and made themselves some easy cash on the side, and surfed when they had the chance. Awesome!

'Hey be careful amigo, they were telling me the Police are watching them lately and could be nearby, so when we get to the top of the alley you go to the left and I'll go to the right. Ok?'

'Ok.'

Following protocol as we emerged onto the open beach with its fine powdered sand we parted ways. I made my way to the left and then down to the waves. I passed a new feature in the form of cocktail making tropical fruit stalls, which must have only been brought out for the night trade. Sold, there were fresh Caiparinhas made from Cachasa, the Brazilian sugar cane spirit and your choice of fresh as, just picked tropical fruit. They had like giant green Papaya with their collection of dark pearl seeds in the centre. Sweet mangos with the orange flesh moist and dripping, huge swollen purple passion fruit, the whole works. They'd push it all through a sieve, shake it with some ice, a generous as portion of spirit and away you go. This was gonna go lovely with my joint. Absolutely fuckin magic.

Pleased as punch with myself and slurping away on one of the tastiest cocktails I'd ever had the pleasure to drink; definitely the freshest, I reached the water's edge.

With the tide lapping at my feet I eagerly tore open the bag this kid had given me and sure as shit, my day was ruined. Palm leaves. Yep that's right, fuckin' palm leaves. The little mother fucker, I was gonna' kill him. All the torment from last night, all the storms that I thought had left my clouded mind, turned out to be only hiding in a cave, somewhere in the dark recesses. It came tumbling and rushing back through my system with a kick of adrenaline so hard it was like I'd been done over by a pissed off mule.

I spun around and went viciously looking for him, ploughing back up the beach with eyes only for that little prick. The weight of my switch blade came back to me, bottom right hand pocket just above the knee. Angry is an understatement that wouldn't even come close, I was fuckin' livid, skitzed out and ropeable. My mind had snapped the same way the blade from my knife does when you push the button. I was picturing in my head the carnage I was about to reign on that little fucker and mentally could hear him scream.

Wait a minute; what the hell was going on? Where was this ideal image of Brazil and the paradise that it is supposed to be? What was this fuckin' toilet of a country? For God's sake is everyone here just a thieving fuckin' junkie whose sole purpose in life is to rip off the gringo and treat tourists like rich spoilt pigs? Man I had worked fuckin' hard for this holiday! Seven days a fuckin' week for almost a year!

I reached the hut where he had been sat all day and it was empty, the two guys further up the beach were gone too. I'd been well and truly stitched up and was close to screaming crying or both whilst I looked around helplessly in frustration.

I spied walking towards me from the nearby restaurant, with his hands extended and palms out in a calm down like motion, a slim Brazilian in his early twenties. I could see from the shallow glow of the fruit stall lights that he had tight curly hair that was died a yellowy blond with about half a centimetre of dark regrowth. Like a lot of Brazilians he was dressed smartly.

'Hey amigo, did that kid just rip you off?'

'Yeah man I'm gonna fuckin' kill him.'

'Tranquillo amigo, tranquilo. You touch that kid and you'll never get off this island. Come have a drink at my restaurant, on me of course and calm down. Let me explain a few things about Brazil to you.' he said with a reassuring warmth and placed a reassuring arm around my shoulders that were now shivering although I wasn't cold.

'Come amigo. Tranquillo, one thing you've gotta' know about Brazil, is never fuck with the locals. Never. No matter how bad they provoke you or rip you off because if you do get in a fight with a local and are; how do I say this? If you're unfortunate enough to beat him up, a lynch mob will come looking for you, and they'll be armed with sticks, knives, maybe even guns. Amigo, forget what just happened to you, learn from it and carry on with your life.'

I let him guide me the thirty feet or so to the busy restaurant where he turned out to be a waiter, let him sit me down and open me a beer.

'What was it you were after amigo?'

'All I wanted was a spliff, you know, just something to smoke dude. This place is so beautiful, I just wanted to relax on the beach and smoke a joint. Do you know I've been in this country for five days and I've only been able to get hold of one joint? It's heart breaking man. I presumed in Brazil it would be everywhere.'

'You must know the right people amigo. There are a lot of crack heads out there that are always desperate for money and are willing to do anything to get it. I apologise on behalf of my people for these addicts and the problems they are bringing onto our society and tourism industry. Did you know most crack heads in Brazil are unemployed and uneducated males in their mid teens to late twenties? Man, on average twenty percent of crack addicts die in that time period, more often than not, killed by A.I.D.'s or murdered. They say that two and a half

percent of the total population of Brazil are addicted to crack, think about that amigo we have one hundred and ninety million people living in this beautiful country, that means on average five million of them are doomed to be addicted to crack and most of them are eventually going to die from A.I.D.'s or gunshot all because there is no help. For them, there is no chance.'

This was very sobering; I was starting to feel a little ashamed of my antics from the night before. Five million, that's more than the entire population of New Zealand and then some. Fucked, my God, with a death sentence hanging over their heads.

'Hey anyway amigo we are not here on this paradise to think such dark thoughts. My name is Peter.' He said and extended a broad but smooth hand.

I took it and with a soft shy grip, 'Bryce. Peter my name is Bryce and fuck, I gotta' thank you for coming out and helping me before I did something crazy, which by the sounds of it may have gotten me killed. I was just starting to put my holiday back together and that kid ruined it for me. All I've wanted since I got to this country was to buy a big bag of weed and just chill the fuck out. It sounds so simple but unlike the sun, fortune just hasn't seemed to be smiling on me here in Brazil amigo. So obrigado Peter. Obrigado.'

## PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

I'm nearly at the end of these trials and tribulations. It was kinda' like going through an initiation before Brazil welcomed me with open arms.

But like all bad days this one seemed to never end; seemed to go on forever.

So, I was sat in Peter's restaurant drinking a cold Brahma, which was the brand of beer they sold – rich peoples' beer, gringo beer. Anyway he came over after a quick word with another waiter and whispered kinda' casually. 'Bryce, amigo, I might be able to get some ganja for you if you like.'

'Really? That'd be great amigo!'

'Nada problema my friend. Give me a few minutes to clear these tables and I'll go ask.'

Ten minutes later he rocked back up. 'Amigo no ganja but if you like, I can get you some coca.'

Hmm let me think about that for a second. 'Done, how much?'

'Seventy reals'

Now seventy reals were about eighteen pounds, and I was in Brazil and before I left London, everyone said it would be five pounds when I got there. Besides I'd paid twenty reals for some in Sao Paulo, although truth be told it wasn't very good.

'Seventy reals is very expensive Peter don't you think? This is Brazil. I only paid twenty reals in Sao Paulo.'

'That was Sao Paulo amigo. This is Morro de Sao Paulo. A rich tourist island and seventy real is the price. I'm not making any money out of this amigo. I feel bad for what happened and want you to have a good night. Hey after we have finished here why don't you come up to the Sunset Bar up there on top of the island and party with us?' he said, and pointed up at a small light house on the corner of the island above First Beach.

Now this sounded more like it.

'Ok Peter here's seventy real.' I handed over the twenty The Little Cunt had given me before and one more of the fifties, being mindful to count it out, 'Twenty real and fifty real. That's seventy real dude.'

He asked me if I'd like another beer, which of course I did, and with a nice warm feeling passing through me; Peter disappeared out the back of the restaurant - the same direction the kid had led me earlier I might mention.

After two minutes he was back and slipped me the cocaine, which was in a paper wrap folded up like an envelope made from an old magazine cover or something.

Wasting no time I clambered up the steep stairs to the toilet opened up the packet and boo yaa, was presented with what looked like well over a gram of Columbia's finest yellow marching powder. Mmmmmmmmmmm.

I chopped myself up a three inch line and hoovered that shit right up my left nostril in one go. Man it was so smooth, hardly anything dripped down the back it like, just dissolved the moment it touched the inside of my body. By the time I got back to the table a few minutes later and to my waiting beer, I couldn't feel the left side of my face. Hell yeah now that's what we're talking about. God-sake I was gonna' have to be careful I didn't bite my tongue off my gums and shit were so numb.

So I slugged my beer back and had another fat line to even up the numbness so I couldn't feel either side of my face. Any excuse will do.

On my way back down from the toilet - which was up some dodgy wooden staircase - Peter suggested if I liked there was a party on first beach and I could chill there while they were cleaning up, then meet them at the Sunset Bar in about half an hour or so.

That sounded fine to me, besides it would give me a chance to wear the coke in. So beer in hand I traipsed on down to First Beach.

Still no weed but I had a fat gram and was much more content than I had been forty five minutes earlier. No fuckin Weed though, it was actually quite laughable. There was cocaine everywhere but not a joint to save ya' life. No wonder there were so many problems with crack in Brazil. The government should legalise marijuana and supply it to the crack addicts so they can wean them off of it and onto something a little more natural.

The tide was out, so I decided to walk around the rocks to the next beach. I was guided by the light of the moon which glowed off the shallow reflecting pools that the retreating ocean had left behind.

As I rounded the corner I saw in the distance the light from a small shack like bar with about fifteen people dancing around it. I could hear the steady rhythm of trance music as it reached out to the distant waves which crashed and roared to their own pulse, both sounds to their own rhythms.

I reached the bottom of the steps that led up to the shack. There was a young crowd that seemed to me, to be mostly made up of gringos like myself. And low and behold who should I spy? The Little Cunt himself.

A surge of adrenaline pushed through me and I couldn't help myself. As he came down the steps towards me, I jammed a finger in his face and gripped the beer bottle with the other hand.

'You thieving fuck! Where's my fuckin' money?'

'Nada amigo. I don't owe you any money.'

'Yes you do you fuckin' liar! You ripped me off about an hour ago for fifty reals! Gimme' my fuckin money!'

'Tranquillo amigo tranquilo. You want to buy something?'

I couldn't believe the tenacity of the little prick, I wanted to bury his head in the sand and stomp all over him.

He kept glancing at the beer bottle which without thinking, I was holding in the air like a club. There was a glint of fear in his eyes.

Good.

He had to be fuckin' kidding. 'By something? From you ya' fuckin' cunt! Fuck you!' I was nearly screaming at him.

I had a calming vision of Peter in my head. 'If you are unlucky enough to beat up a local, you'll never get off the island alive.'

So, I had one finger right in The Little Cunt's face. Just about using it to push the brim of his cap off his head and with a, 'Fuck you!' loud enough to stop people dancing and talking so they all stared, called him a thieving cunt one more time and warned all of them what he was like before I stormed off. I wasn't sure whether to feel elated or angry. Elated 'cause I got to front the now officially named 'The Little Cunt' and hopefully cost him some business or angry 'cause, well, you know why.



As I marched off First Beach up to the path that led through the village then around the top of the docks up to the point under the light house where Sunset Bar was s'pose to be located, I let this scenario roll round my head like a football being kicked about by Ronaldinho.

I reached the gate to the party and recognised one of the waiters from earlier at Peter's.

'Hey you must have fifteen people to come in here'

'What?' I responded dumbstruck. 'You guys told me only half an hour ago to come up and join you!'

'I know amigo but everyone must have fifteen people with them.' Now this made no sense to me. Who the fuck had a group of fifteen people with them. Bollocks to it. I felt ridiculous. Like they had taken the piss all along. So trying to maintain some dignity I stormed off back to the guesthouse to sulk and cry my way through the gram of coke.

Brazil sucked! Fuck this place. Fuck the people. Fuck all this shit. I started thinking about going back to Salvador and flying to Columbia until the Universo Paralelo got under way just after Christmas, then flying back.

Once again sad and isolated I made my way back to Ernesto's. But once I got near I could hear loads of chatter comin' from the top of the stairs, and as I reached the first floor, I was greeted by the sight of ten fellow gringos like myself.

Yay.

I got a big hey hello from everyone. Had a caiparinha thrust into my hand and was made to feel most welcome. Thank God. Finally! I sat next to a heavily tattooed kiwi guy called Dave and his Aussie mate Matt. There were also five Israeli people, two girls and three guys, all who had just finished their service, the Chinese American guy and a few others who I don't recall.

'Hey we're all going up to a party at the Sunset Bar if you'd like to join us?' Dave offered.

'I just went up there and they told me I needed a group of fifteen people to get in.'

'Eh?' Matt said, 'Nah that doesn't sound right mate. Let's go back up and sort out what's going on.'

'Well in that case. Fat line anyone?'

Only Dave accepted. Which I was kinda' glad, 'cause lining up ten rails would of finished the gear off.

We stepped into Dave's room, and he was like, 'Where will we do the lines bro?' and I was like, 'The floor will do dude. It's tiled and clean. What more do ya need?' So I dumped some of the yellowy gear straight down on it, chopped up two lines even fatter than before, and me and Dave machined them down.

We all poured ourselves another caiparinha from the bowl they had made up earlier, and trudged off to the Sunset Bar.

I told the guys about my difficulty in finding weed there in Brazil, leaving out the just getting ripped off part, and they promised to introduce me to the Argentinean boys or a waiter in a restaurant that could get me some tomorrow. Cool I love it when a plan starts coming together.

We reached the gate to Sunset Bar again and the same waiter from before was still on the gate.

'Where did you go before amigo? You just ran off.'

'I went to get fifteen people like you said but there's only ten of us. Is that ok?'

‘Fifteen people? No. fifteen real amigo, not people.’ he said with a confused sounding chuckle.

‘Oh. Well that makes more sense. I was gutted before. One minute you tell me to come and party, and the next you’re like where are the people. I thought it was some sort of sick joke on the gringo.’

‘Amigo, this is Morro de Sao Paulo, the most beautiful place in the world, we want everyone to have a good time here. Fifteen people, ha, ha, ha! Gringo you’re funny. Now come in have a drink and let’s party hey.’

We rocked into the bar I ordered six beers for the boys and me, and a round of caiparinhas for the girls.

## A TURN FOR THE BETTER

Sunset Bar was set on top of a cliff face or point, in-between the dock and First Beach. On its left when facing out to the ocean was an old grave yard which apparently is the reason the owner got it for so cheap.

Now get this. He normally only opened the place for two hours every day at sun down. Turned out all the bars or clubs on the island have one night each a month to throw a party and make as much cash as possible. Then they either take the rest of the month off, or just run it for a couple of hours a day. They don't even pay the staff; they just get a ten percent gratuity on everyone's bill. Nice eh? What type of easy life is that? Living on a beautiful tropical island, running a cool place for a few hours a day and your only over heads are the booze you have to buy and the old fridges you store it in.

So this guy had a nice flat hill top over the Atlantic, right where you could see the sunset. He'd thrown a few blankets out on the ground, slung some hammocks up between the trees, and built a few concrete seats. Usually he just played chill out music and projected surfin' videos on to a couple of sheets hanging up, and was it, cash in hand.

But tonight there was a party. They were only playing normal cheesy club music, but it worked with the 'twenty something' crowd, and everyone was having a good time. I had been chatting shit with Dave and Matt when who should I spy to my left, sittin casually there not five feet away. The Little Cunt!

Now I was finally having a good time and really wanted to stay and enjoy myself on Morro de Sao Paulo.

While I was lookin' at him he checked me, and I thought it was time to sort that shit out. I wanted stay there and have a good time and not have to worry about The Little Cunt, jumping me from behind one night 'cause I had threatened him with a bottle down on the beach. So I thought the best thing I could do is front up to him. Let him know I'd learnt my lesson and that there was nothing between us, that we should just forget about it 'cause I just wanted to fuckin' relax and for everything to be cool.

I'd had such a struggle so far in Brazil, and I had finally found myself in an opportunity to hang out with cool people who I could really relate to and in a place prettier than Thailand. Now that doesn't happen too often!

So I sauntered on over to him. Sat down and looked him straight in the eye.

'Look dude, I've learnt my lesson. I just wanna' forget about you ripping me off. So you and me we're cool yeah?'

'Yes amigo we're cool. Hey you want to buy something?'

Ha you've gotta' be kidding, you gotta love this guy.

'What? No dude I don't, you took the piss before and I just wanna' forget about it, ok?'

'Ok. So you don't want anything?'

What the fuck was this guy on?

'No dude I don't want anything from you. Not ever!' I spat out. 'You got that. You and me we're through. I don't wanna' speak to you, or even think about you. I just wanna' relax and enjoy myself here in paradise, and I don't want you fucking that up. Am I making myself clear? Do you understand me? Don't speak to me, don't look at me, don't try and sell me shit and we'll both carry on enjoying our lives. Comprende amigo? I want nada from you! So we're cool yeah?' I held his gaze then thrust out my hand so we could shake on it.

‘Yeah amigo we’re cool.’ he mumbled back, then took my hand, with a confused look.

And with that out the way and pleased as punch with myself, I went back to the bar got a double shot of some type of cachasa with a weird root looking thing in the bottle then snuck off to the toilet for a fatty!

We partied the night away and as dawn approached, the whole group from Ernesto’s decided to take the party down to the beach.

The tide was out so someone suggested we walk around to the bottom of the cliff underneath where the sun set so we could see it rise from the other side.

The funniest thing happened next.

As we were walking down the track towards where we would meet the other path down to the pier, I saw ‘The Little Cunt’ and guess what. There was three of him. True! Three! I didn’t think I was that pissed and asked Matt to confirm for me that yes there were three ‘Little Cunts’ in front of us.

They checked us all coming down the hill a hundred feet behind them, and they kept looking over their shoulders at us as they gossiped amongst themselves. It finally clicked; I’d spent the night hassling three different people. One had ripped me off and the other two had had to suffer me ranting and raving like a loony afterwards. But hey gimme’ a break, all three guys looked kinda’ similar, man, they were all dressed the same, blue basket ball shirts, shorts and red hat!! It must have been their gang colours or some shit!

No wonder the one down by the shack and the one up at the bar seemed confused when I had gone crazy at them for ripping me off. They would have had no idea who the fuck I was. The first had robbed me, and the other two to copped the shit from me throughout the night as I stumbled across them. Ha, ha fuck them. Oh well such is life eh!

A couple of random locals had joined us. Dave had pulled some fit young black girl who turned out to be a hooker, and he was happy as Larry to be getting his black flag. The other local was a large black fulla’, quiet and with a bit of a beer gut.

We were sittin on the rocks waitin’ for the sun to crest the horizon. The black fulla’ started trying to talk the girls into standing up to get a better view.

Paranoid alarm bells started ringing in my head. What the fuck did it matter and why was he continually going on about it.

I decided in my coked up haze to keep an eye on him. He was standing just behind us all and sure enough, when I looked back over my shoulder at him he had his (huge I might add) black cock out, and was givin’ himself a rub whilst peeking up the girls’ skirts.

What was with these people? I fuckin’ pointed it out straight away, and the girl with Dave lost it at him completely. I think she didn’t want him scaring off her business. And as Pablo had said, ‘When you’re with a local, they keep an eye out for you, letting others know that you’re with them.’

I’d had enough. It had been a long two days and my poor brain couldn’t cope with anymore dramas. I stood up and let everyone know I was outta’ there, then started to make my way around the rocks towards First Beach and back to Ernestos. The others soon caught up, and together we scrambled around the rocks, all the way to Second Beach and back home.

Dave took his girl to the room he and Matt were sharing, and Matt and me went down to the beach for a morning swim while Dave got to fly his flag.

In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

It was nice to think of Ernestos as home. Maybe everything was gonna' end up alright after all.

## MORRO DE SAO PAULO A BEAUTIFUL TIME

I spent the next few weeks up until the morning of December 27<sup>th</sup> on the island enjoying the paradise that I found myself in. Matt and Dave, who continued on their travels a couple of days after I got there, were true to their word and sorted me out that very next afternoon with a local guy who could get me weed whenever I wanted it. He in turn introduced me to another fulla' who had the bang on coke, this time for only fifty reals.

Due to the small size of the island population I can't really go in to any detail about them as I feel it would be too incriminating. It's a shame really as they were lovely people who took great pity on me, and felt huge embarrassment for the behaviour of their country's people and for the situations I had previously found myself in. They kinda' took me under their wing and showed me the warmth of character in the Brazilian people that I had been partially blind to before.

I spent most early evenings up at the Sunset Bar chilling out and drinking beer. After about a week on the island I came across the Swiss couple from Nega Malucca. They became my sunset buddies and we would meet every day as the sun wished us goodbye. Me and Johannes would take turns buying cheap fat cigars to share, and puffed away on them and giant spliffs, like steam trains between during the daily setting of the sun. For hours afterwards you could smell the pungent scent of the cheap cigars in your clothing.

Life was good, great even. I spent most of my time with the three Argentinean boys, who had also brought guitars with them. I would listen to them sing Spanish ballads every night down on the beach. Tomas and Paulo even tried to teach me how to juggle. I got kinda' ok and could throw a couple. They were quite good though and it was entertaining to be part of and to watch. It was a nice happy hippy way to pass the day.

Those guys really made my time on Morro de so Paulo special. I'll always be reminded of them every time I sit in a beautiful place and rub the warm golden sand between my toes. Always be reminded of the songs, of the laughter, and of the sense of belonging. Christmas Eve and Christmas night with them are up there with my warmest moments.

Ten days into my island experience, one of my wisdom teeth – the one down in the bottom right hand corner of my jaw – got properly infected. So much so that I couldn't even close my mouth to chew my food.

There was no dentist on the island and it reached a point that if it got any worse, I would be going to have to go back to the mainland to get it sorted. That wasn't the first time it had happened though, and as per usual after about seven days it sorted itself out. I thought, Fuck it' nothing was going to break the happy spell that had been cast over me so I decided to run with it, and resigned myself to sucking down pasta and using cachasa as a mouth wash for every meal. Hey I think ya starting to know me by now and I'll take any excuse will do, besides, the pasta was fuckin' awesome and they had about twenty types of cachasa.

Anyway you always have a sick period whilst you're on long holidays. It's part of the experience.

One of the benefits with spending my time with the Argentinean boys, who by the way were named Paulo, Tomas and German was that although they drank and smoked they didn't do gear.

The coke on the island was so strong that you couldn't really function apart from to stand up, sit down, and wipe ya sweaty palms while lookin about the place with twitchy eyes.

So, I pretty much stayed off the stuff for two whole weeks. That way I was able to enjoy my time with them, and bathe in the simple joy of their company.

I did have the odd bender but would feel uncomfortable with them when I was high on it, so I made the decision to be clean for the simple sake of contentedness in life.

The boys were also chefs and we took turns cooking for each other, as they had rented out a small flat. We really got to eat great quality food and share great quality time together. Food always forms a bond, doesn't it.

I managed to teach them a card game I had spent my youth in New Zealand playing called Bastard, which as per usual I spent the next two weeks losing and having to shuffle and deal the cards.

Years ago when me and the beautiful Justyna were together and travelling around Europe one summer, I spent six weeks on a losing streak!! Six weeks! What the fuck? The problem is, when you're the bastard you've gotta' give your two best cards to the President (or the winner) and they've gotta give you their two shit cards.

The whole point of the game is to put down higher cards than the person until everyone passes, or, opts out of the round for different reasons. Either they don't have cards that can beat yours, or maybe they want to save their good cards for later in the game. This allows you to turn the cards over and start a new round. The benefit of this is so you can get rid of your lower numbered cards as early in the game as possible. Now, when you start a round you don't have to put one card down at a time. If you've got a pair, triple or even four of a kind you can play them all at once. This dictates to all the others how many cards they have to play in order to join the round. Such as, if you start the round with triple sevens, the next person must play triple eights or higher to join the round. If they can't beat your triple sevens you turn them over and start a new round, hence getting rid of more and more of your cards till you've got none left.

Also you don't wanna' be stuck with your shit cards at the end, or you won't be able to get rid of them in the later rounds, 'cause the other person will have higher cards than you and you'll still have a fist full at the end of the game. The other person will have none and you'll end up being the bastard and finding yourself shuffling, dealing and giving away your good cards day after day, or more than likely in my case; week after week.

You don't have to win every hand either. You can pass and let the other person use up all their good cards allowing you to come back later in the game and wipe them out once they're left holding only shit. The order of the cards starts with three being the lowest then, four, five, six, etc, up till Jack, Queen, King, Ace, then finally two's the highest.

I've spent years of my life playing this game and man have I been on some losing streaks, all I can say is thank God I don't play Poker or gamble; well regularly.

Remember the money I hid in my pillow? It went missing on two occasions, the first time I got it back, and the second it was gone. But I'm pretty sure some of it found its way back to me. Funny how life works like that.

Now the first time I noticed it was missing the cleaners had come in, changed the sheets and a concerned Ernesto found it in the washing machine. Surprisingly, although very damp it was very much in one piece.

The second time it simply disappeared. I'd been sharing my room with a charming Italian guy called Alessandro, who happened to move out on the same day the money went. Now I

never suspected him and it wasn't until much later, at Universo Paralello in fact when we stumbled across each other that suspicions started to arise. Things just seemed to go missing from people when he was around. I dunno', he seemed like such a lovely guy but you can't deny the facts.

Anyway I'll cover that later, we're having a good time on the island right now and I wanna' keep it that way.

Let me continue.

On Christmas Eve Paulo, Tomas and German invited me over to their place 'cause in Argentina they celebrate their Christmas meal the night before the big day. While Tomas prepared a traditional Argentinean stew called Carbonada Criolla which is a mix of beef, tomato, potatoes, peppers and corn I popped up the road to pick up some smoke for them and also some for me to take to the festival, which was only two days away.

I had been going to a certain part of the island to meet 'The Man' so to speak. I had been introduced to him earlier from my connection that Dave in turn had introduced me too.

Like I said, my connection felt bad about what had happened to me in my first week or so in Brazil and when he had told The Man my story, he too felt sorry for me and was apologetic about the situations I had found myself in. You could see in their faces that they truly felt it. But really I knew in the back of my mind, it was my fault. I had been the one that had made the choice to do what I did, I had sought it out. I was willing to take the risk and had suffered the consequences when it didn't turn out right. But hey I was alive and in the end it had all come good in the end.

Who can blame some of these poor souls who have to live in such poverty and with the dereliction the drugs caused, while I walked around flashing cash everywhere? Fuckin' gringo.

I was welcomed by him and got hang out whenever I wanted. The biggest and most satisfying benefit to this was; hang on, let me start this wee story from the beginning.

Now just so ya' know, I'm not gonna' go off into a rant this time and start cursing out the country and the people I was now beginning to love.

So, on a couple of occasions, after eating out with fellow non-native speaking gringos, when we got our bill at the end of the night, if you added it up you would find yourself being over charged.

When confronting your waiter about this they would automatically become aggressive, hoping that as like most gringos you'd back down, pay the excess and just fuck off none too happy about what had just happened, but still minus your cash.

The first time this happened to me was the second or third day on the island, at a burger bar down on Second Beach. By then I was much more relaxed but still wasn't quite over the locals' attitude to cleaning me out.

Now; I had only bought a burger for six reals and a beer for two reals. So you can imagine the surprised look on my face when I received a bill for twelve reals. When I questioned my waiter, who was a light skinned Portuguese looking mid twenties man with badly bleached curly hair, his instant reaction was to lose it at me. The only part I understood was the term 'Gringo' being launched at me every couple of seconds in between waving hands and dirty looks. He was acting like it was me who had ripped him off!



It doesn't take a genius to figure out after those first couple of days the amount of grace and dignity I took this with. In an instant and with a rage more than enough to match that fuckin' prick's feigned anger, I flew to my feet and yelled back. 'Nada Gringo! Who the fuck are you? What, you think I'm so rich and stupid I can't figure out six reals plus two reals equals eight reals for fucks sake?! You know how hard I had to work for that money? What I had to do?'

We were yelling at each other in completely different languages with hands flying about when some other local fulla' came up and in nice English was like, 'Tranquillo, tranquillo, amigo. What's going on here?'

I spelled it out, 'I bought a burger which is six real and a beer which is two real and this guy gives me a bill for twelve.'

'Tranquillo amigo, calm down.' (They seemed to have been saying this a lot to me lately) 'He was only putting a service charge on top of the bill. You see the guys don't get paid here. They only earn service charge or tips.'

'A fifty percent service charge? You actually have a policy of a fifty percent service charge? 'Cause all the other bars and restaurants on the island have ten or fifteen percent, and hey I was gonna' pay with a tenner and leave the change any way. But fuck this dude man. All I did was question him about the bill and he just flew into a rage, calling me a fuckin' gringo and shit. That's out of order dude.'

They chatted briefly, the waiter kinda' looking away, shrugging his shoulders like couldn't really give a fuck.

'Hey tranquillo amigo, are we cool?' the guy who'd intervened said after a few moments.

'Yeah we're cool, I wasn't goin' to let him just rip me off and then try and stand over me like that though, fuck him. There's gringo's here, there, there and everywhere.' pointing around to all the other tourists on the island. 'But me? Nada gringo.'

So I paid the eight reals, kept all the change and went and joined the others down on the beach for a joint and a beer. Problem forgotten and problem solved.

The cool thing about this is when I later got to know The Man it turned out the waiter was one of his runners or some shit like that. Obviously news had gotten back to him about what had happened, and although before, every time the waiter saw me he looked at me like I was a cunt, all of a sudden he was particularly friendly, and even bought me a beer one day. Fuck I coulda' fallen over in shock when that happened.

It wasn't long before the Argentina boys and a few others clued on that I was getting the best deals on the island, and were asking me to get weed for them too whenever I went to pick some up for myself. I was picking up about quarter of an ounce every three days for me for fifty reals, about twelve pounds. They had all been buying it off one of the beaches and were getting a lot less for a lot more.

I was more than happy to help out though and I think this might have helped contribute to The Man's warm smile every time he saw me. Then again, it may of been because, I'm just one charming individual. I must have been handing over three to four hundred reals every couple of days to him. That's the equivalent of half a month's wages to the locals. I guess *everybody* had to be nice to his gringo.

When I eventually left the island I bought eight hundred real worth of weed and coke to take with me, and another five hundred real worth of weed for everyone else. It was certainly

Christmas for The Man by that happy Brazilian glint in his eye. He even rolled up a joint and bought me a beer to drink while we smoked it on top of the partly built apartment block, his boys kept watch from.

He seemed to love the fact that I was out here on my own, going to the party, getting high and getting by, and although limited the Brazilian that I did speak and understand now was pretty fluent too.

Paulo, Tomas and German had spent a couple of days teaching me to ask how much something was and then making sure I was able to understand the answer. This came about a just before I met The Man. I had been taken to another part of the island to meet one of his guys so they could have a quick chat and I dunno' evaluate me or something.

When the boys asked me how much the smoke was and I didn't know yet how to ask. They were like, 'Well how are you going to know how much to pay?' So that was it, we spent the rest of that day and the next on the beach memorising as much as possible. Be it through counting how many times they could juggle, to crabs in a rock pool at low tide down on Third Beach.

Here are the multiples of ten and the low hundreds.

10-Dez

20-Vinte

30-Trinte

40-Quarenta

50-Cinquinta

60-Sessenta

70-Setenta

80-Oitenta

90-Noventa

100-Cem

200-Duzentos

300-Trezentos

And so on.

As a rule now, whilst travelling I try and learn as quickly as possible;

Hello,

Thank you,

How much?

Yes,

No,

And the numbers,

That generally gets you past most situations, and the locals usually for the most part, are more chuffed than Thomas the Tank Engine about it too, 'cause most travellers don't even get that far, or don't even bother.

Yes I did do the diving too. It was another fabulous morning and I'd been trying to motivate myself to do something for a couple of days. Other than drink piss and smoke weed down on the beach.

So I made the decision to get off my ass and went into town where the dive shop was. On the way I made a call to my insurance company and got myself covered in that way. Then after a quick chat with the shop owner, found myself strapped up with a tank and standing at the water's edge.

Now, I've dived a couple of times before but don't have a licence – I was refused one when I was younger due to my asthma. Something to do with decompression times and asthma attacks, I dunno. Anyway I'd explained this to the guy and he said we could just go straight off of First Beach as there was a big reef there.

We did a couple of exercises like floating at certain depths, clearing ya' goggles, hand signals, shit like that, then we were off. The ocean was so clear and still under the surface, it was like looking through a high definition crystal ball.

As we made our way around the edge of the living reef, there were schools of silver and black striped fish the shape of Nemo, circling coral that resembled giant brains. Also there were yellow and black ones that looked like puffer fish but without the spikes.

A highlight was a small blue lobster like looking alien that let us gently pick it up, and then stayed still so we could pose for photos. After about ten minutes my guide in that mysterious zero gravity wonderland signalled with his thumb that we should go up to the space inhabited by the humans.

Once back in the real world, floating with just our heads above the water, he complimented me on my ability, even though I had no Padi certificate and asked if I was up for something a little risky. Of course I had no problems with that and was instantly curious. He said there was a secret tunnel under that hidden world, which led all the way to the centre of the reef. There, a little hole surfaced up near where people were splashing in the rock pools. But I had to keep it a secret, 'cause loads of people swimming through it every day would spoil the natural beauty of the life there.

He also told me that at times it gets quite tight, and if I found myself stuck to just stay calm and wait a few moments 'cause he'd always have an eye on me, and would be straight back to sort me out.

The tunnel was around five feet under the surface. At the beginning it was about three feet wide. It was dim and dusky in there except for the odd sporadic yellow rays bursting like lasers through small gaps in the rock formation above. The tunnel was about forty metres long and at the end, it lit up like a ball room. Once again I followed my host up to the part of the planet that is better known by us. True to his word, we came out right next to where people were exploring that little piece of land that only sees the sun once a day as the tide retreated. We scared the daylight out of a couple of kids I might add, before we made our way back down through the cave, and back to the mainland proper. It had been exhilarating, and had created a high all of its own. It was something different to take with me rather than memories of beer, ganja and cocaine.

So; I'd had a great time on Morro de Sao Paulo, met some wonderful people and felt really included – which means a lot to me. By the end, my family was so large it took me two days

to say goodbye to everyone. From the owner of the Sunset Bar who had invited me to spend New Years on his boat with him and his friends drinking champagne, to The Man and The Waiter. It was beautiful and hey if anybody ever needs a week or so off life, you couldn't do much better than Morro de Sao Paulo.

Just watch out for a group of kids in Blue Basketball shirts and red caps going by the name of 'The Little Cunt.'

## TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

It was another beautiful sunny start to the day, filled to the brim with that warm Brazilian sunshine. Paulo, Tomas and German had walked me down to the small dock where I had originally stepped that first step on to the island. Tomas was even carried my backpack for me.

As a gift they had given me one of the pairs of Thai fishing pants they had brought to sell for extra income during their stay in Brazil. They were a bit hippy and a dark pickle green colour but hey, I'd been wearing a black pair of Adidas tracksuit bottoms, shiny nylon, with a white stripe down the legs. You know the ones, as the British would say; right shell suit, chav looking things.

I'd cut or, more like hacked them, into a pair of shorts with an old squeaky pair of scissors and had ended up somewhat resembling a modern day Robinson Crusoe. Only I was dressed like I grew up in the Estates of East London. Remember though, as I said, it was snowing when I left Ol' Blighty and I was wearing them to stay warm when I got on the plane.

I'd only brought one other pair of shorts with me and I couldn't wear them all the time, besides they were combat style surfer shorts made of heavy denim, and they took about a day to dry out once they were wet.

Now this is just between you and me alright but perhaps the hippies were right, it was the first time I'd ever worn Thai fishing pants and they were so comfy. (Sorry I don't like saying the word comfortable, it gross's me out for some reason, always has.) These sturdy threads were made of heavy cotton for durability, were loose and perfect for the Brazilian humidity. They just lacked pockets, of which I have a constant use for. Besides, they were a gift.

So I swallowed my preconceptions of what a hippy looked like, was grateful I wasn't wearing sandals in case somebody I knew saw me and hugged the boys farewell. Secretly happy there was half a world between my friends and me dressed like this.

Hey, maybe I'd even grow some dirty dreadlocks so they rub all over people while I'm dancing at raves just out of spite; he, he, he. Kinda' like a wolf in sheep's clothing. Surely that's what some of these people do? There's nothing worse than some sweaty shirtless hippy rubbing all over you at a party with their unwashed hair getting in your eyes. It feels like thick strands of steel wool brushing up against your face. Ugh. You can picture all the lice jumping off them onto you. Sickening innit'!

Instead of going all the way back to Salvador, I went to a small town on the other side of the mainland. I've tried searching for it on maps since then, but the closest I think I've come to finding it is Valenca, but that's only a guess. At the time I never bothered to ask. Anyway the point of coming here was that this would cut a few hours off the journey to Pratigi Beach and Universo Paralello, as Salvador was placed on the other side of a large peninsula. I couldn't see the point of going there just to drive all the way back around. Besides I was still a little jaded about Salvador Bahia and was still not quite over the twenty four hours of power I'd had there.

It was a different ferry this time, small, more like a private boat but it was fast and steady.

Within an hour I was standing on the dock of this small rough looking town that hugged the muddy river system, which was probably its life line and reason for being there.

As usual a friendly smiling local was there to help guide me to a taxi (for a few real of course) and I soon found myself only ten feet away from the dock bartering with a taxi driver who was parked there and down five real already.

Oh well money to the guide's family I s'pose, and hey it was only a pound or so. He even made me carry my own luggage for the ten steps I had taken. It was classic really. He was waiting for people as they got off the boat and everyone just ignored him, so I asked what he was up to and he said he was a guide or whatever.

'Um, (One) taxi then please boss.'

'Taxi? Nada problema. Cinq real and I get you taxi'

'Ok, four real and you've got a deal'

Hey you've gotta barter a little, but there's a difference between friendly banter and actually haggling with someone for twenty five pence.

'Four real. Done amigo'

He turned around walked up to the car parked directly behind him and with the sun shining in his proud eyes, extended one hand out in a sweeping motion and cheerily announced. 'Your taxi Sir!'

Ha! You gotta love that shit. I gave him the fiver and told him to keep the change. That was awesome.

So with a grin on my face and having clearly been cleaned out, I attempted my next bartering session. This time with the Taxi driver who must have witnessed the whole thing and knew there was a sucker standing in front of him.

The bus station apparently was on the other side of this nowhere town and would cost me another ten real to get to. The other side of town? By the serious look on the driver's face this was gonna be a mission to get to, maybe even take a while. I had no idea what size the town was, or even where the fuck I was, so I was hustling on a shoe string. So hey fuck it. What was ten real to me? Two quid fifty, and out of that ever hotter sun, that's what.

Two minutes after getting into the taxi I found myself stood at the bus station, watching my driver with that beautiful Brazilian glint in his eyes, and one of those beautiful beaming Brazilian smiles on his face, driving off down the road, waving the ten real out the window as he went.

I'm pretty sure I had that same now familiar smile smacked across my face too. Other side of town, ha, fuckin' place was only about two hundred and fifty metres wide, and besides I'm pretty sure he drove around the block a few times too, just to make the ride last for ten minutes. Ha, ha, it probably would have been faster to walk but hey, who am I to take food from the man's table? Good on him!

It was leading up to be another sweaty muggy day and as I queued for bus tickets to Pratigi Beach or apparently the town closest to it. Which I had been assured on the party website there would be taxi's and shuttle buses from to the little hootenanny the South Americans were kindly throwing for us and that I had come to participate in. When who should come flying up out the blue with his arms wide? That charming Italian guy Alessandro!

It was great to see him. Now remember at this point I had no suspicions of Alessandro and Alessandro's light little fingers.

## In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralello'

The guy himself spoke pretty good Brazilian so when I got to the front of the queue he helped organise the tickets to the other town. The one near to Pratigi Beach, Iubira it was called. All I knew of it was that I was heading south down the coast of Brazil somewhere.

We sat down and shared a beer while waiting the hour and a half for the next bus south. He apparently wasn't in any rush to go anywhere.

That's the nice thing about long holidays, you get used to doing nothing, having nowhere in particular to go, and no specific time to be there. Well it's nice for a while but after a few months I'm usually gagging to get back to real life and some form of routine.

We were approached by a deeply tanned local guy and his thick dark bushy moustache. He was wearing a yellow shirt with a green motorbike printed on it and a pair of blue Levis.

'Ola amigos I have a moto-taxi and will take you anywhere for a very good price.'

'Really?' Now I liked the sound of that; of riding down the coast of Brazil on a motorbike like Che Guevara.

This could be heading in a good direction.

'I'm going to Pratigi Beach do you know where that is?'

'Sim, yes amigo I can have you there in about four hours it is a beautiful place.'

Fuck yeah fate is smiling on me today.

'Quante costa?' How much?

'Oitenta real.'

'Oitenta? Eighty real?' Ha, sounded good to me.

'Nao e a muito. 'I'm telling him it is too much Bryce.' Allesandro said. 'Hey don't look so keen eh. I'll talk him down.'

'Here let me sort this out, Nao oitenta, quarenta real amigo.' Which I took to mean 'Not eighty, forty reals. It was cool, my limited understanding of the language had improved drastically due to my dealings with The Man, and I was generally able to guess what was going on.

'Nao. Sesenta' Seventy.

'Ele tem bilhete já embora.' Lost me on that one.

'I'm telling him, you already have a ticket for the bus.'

'Aprovacao amigo, cinquenta real.' said Old Bushy Moustache with a finality in his voice.

'He says ok then, he will do it for fifty real if you like.'

'Fuckin' yeah man, does a dog lick his own balls? I'm keen as. Hey Allesandro, you want my bus ticket? Come meet me at Universo Paralello. Thanks a lot dude. This is gonna be fuckin' great!' I almost squealed like a two year getting his favourite toy.

He took the tickets, and promised to do his best, and with a big hug we parted ways again. Damn it was good to meet him. How lucky was that? How lucky was I that Old Bushy Moustache had chosen to ask me?!

'So amigo what's next?' I questioned.

'Here is my motorbike.' he said, raising the calloused hand of a hard worker, and with a thick finger pointed to a battered old Yamaha 250. It had a red dented petrol tank with a black racing stripe stuck to it and a rusty chrome exhaust. The seat although ripped, looked thick and comfy enough, and that suited me fine.

This was gonna' be like fuckin' Easy Rider man. A motorbike ride down the coast of Brazil to the party? Giddee the fuck up!

Ha, to all the suckers on their buses! Hope you have a good journey dudes.

I jumped on the back and we rode to his house on the edge of that run down little town to pick up a helmet for me.

‘Hey amigo, we can take my car if you like. No extra cost.’

‘No way Amigo, I wanna’ go on the motorbike. This is so cool, obrigado amigo!’

He smiled that Brazilian smile, that I either loved or hated, got rewarded or punished by. This time I loved it, this time I was rewarded! Like all bike owners he was proud of me I guess for the fact that I wanted to ride. But hey come on, who wouldn’t?

So we began, him and me, just like Che and his friend, cruising the coast of South America on their bikes – only we were sharing.

I tuned Born To Be Wild into my head, and off we went.

Get ya’ motor runnin’. Head on up the highway. Lookin’ for adventure. In whatever comes our way. Everyone together now! Everybody’s gonna’ make it happen. Take the world in a love embrace. Fire all of your guns at once now, and explode in to spaaaace. ‘Cause like a true natures chiiiild. We were born. YEAH!! Born to be wild. We could climb so high. Never gonna diiiieeee!!! BORN TO BE WIILLLLLD!!! DAH DAHDAH DAH, DAH DAH DAH!!

I’ll spare you the rest. I think you get the point though. I was pretty excited.

Freedom that what this was. What could be better than this?

Nada, nothing, that’s what.

I had on me my backpack loaded with a tent I’d bought the day before for twenty pounds. Fuckin hustled eh? It woulda’ been cheaper to buy one in London, but beggars can’t be choosers so I had no other choice, and besides the guy had a charming smile. I thought I wouldn’t need one but it was starting to rain at night so it was better to be prepared.

It had no fly to it, so I’d bought a sheet of yellow heavy duty plastic ten, feet by twenty feet as a cover to the elements of sun and rain. Also a small machete, beautiful woollen hammock, bottle of high quality Cachasa – which had material stitched around it – and pretty much one change of clothes. Down my pants I had four grams of coke that was in two rocks and an ounce of weed.

Sorted, what more did a man need? All bases covered you could say.

We hit the road.

As I looked at my shadow dancing along beside us, the hammock streamed behind, fluttering with gusto in the wind like a proud nation’s flag held high.

We passed dry but green sweeping farmland sprinkled with palms, dense lush forest and run down shabby looking towns. He took the twists and turns tantalizingly as they appeared on the road before us, before finally after three or four of the most amazing windswept hours of the breeze blowing in my face and Steppen Woolf running through my head, we approached a sign that pointed to Pratigi Beach down the road to the left.

The new road was more windy and partially gravel. We pulled up at a café after about fifteen more kilometres and stopped for a beer. A much needed beer I might add, as the day was hot and my throat was drier than the scorching Kalahari.

It was sweet. We drank the first one in about two minutes, it didn’t even touch the sides and I ordered us two more. I was tempted to roll a joint but there were a few kids around and decided for once it was better not to tempt fate. So I had a line instead.



## In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralello'

Turned out it was a good decision, not the line, that's always a good decision, I mean not smoking the pot. 'Cause when got back on the bike, the first corner we went round had a Police road block.

A big hard looking copper in blue camos came out onto the road and scrutinised us but we were waved on.

'They were looking for gringos' amigo so they can search them. If they find anything they take all the money your bank account will give them. Remember they are here when you leave the party amigo,' Old Bushy Moustache yelled over his shoulder.

I was to find in a few days time that that was some of the best advice I would get in Brazil. 'Cause in a few days time that same filth and a few of his friends did stop me, and did search me, and did pull out their guns, but I had fuck all on me and there were other gringos to catch so they let me go.

We carried on for about another half hour before we came across a load of coaches and saw hundreds of hippy types sitting around in what looked like some giant queue of some sought.

There were parking attendants trying to organise car parking chaos. Thank God I wasn't in one. Some people looked like they'd been stuck trying to park for hours. Old Bushy Moustache questioned one of the attendants about whether this was the place.

'Sim Amigo, Universo Paralello.' Yes amigo Universo Paralello.

I gave my man fifty reals, shook his hand, checked his smile and waved good bye.

King of the fuckin' world man, king of the fuckin' world!

## Part 2

# Through The Looking Glass

A CHEGADA É UM ESTADO DE ESPÍRITO

(Arrival is a state of mind)

I was here! I'd made it. Fuckin eh yeah! Who would have believed it! I'd come all this way to a party that I'd stumbled across on the net, one that I'd never heard of before. I'd travelled with no proper maps or guide books, no nothing. The only advice I'd had was from some random dude I'd met in a pub one night who'd told me about Morro de Sao Paulo, it was good sound advice. I had made lasting friendships on the way, and with a little help from those friends, had made it to the front gates, fully psyched, fully stocked and fully loaded.

I'd smoked crack with the locals in Salvador Bahia. Learnt some of the language, escaped the usual public transport and taken a ride with an hombre and his moustache. I'd even spent time with The Man of an island and been robbed by The Little Cunt. These may not have always been enjoyable experiences at the time. Hey some were downright traumatising, had fucked my head up good and proper, *but they were all experiences. They were life!*

This goes to show you can do almost anything if you put your mind to it. Come out of your comfort zone. Leave all your trusted world behind and venture into the unknown wild, daring to do something different. Be willing to take that risk and not be afraid to fail. Most of the time, we can nearly always achieve our dreams if we work towards them and never give up. Of course you won't always be successful but if you set yourself ten different goals and just go out there and do it, you might succeed in a couple. Isn't that better than to only ever dream about things you never did, always wishing you'd of at least givin it a go?

Why have it floating in the back of your mind that you never even tried? Or even worse, have it screaming at you from your death bed. At least if you fail you know you can put that one out of your head, start a fresh and dream a new dream; a dream where that in life you can achieve. You don't have to stay stuck in that rut, suffering a miserable existence, alive but not living. Listen to me; this is it man, this is where we all should be. Out there taking life by the horns and giving it a good shake. Dare to dream, dare to achieve, dare to fail, but most of all dare to live!

UNIVERSO PARALELLO

(Dec 27<sup>TH</sup> 2007 – Jan 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008)

Like the giant Pythons of the Amazon, the queue snaked back and forth. Some entrepreneur had been smart enough to put up a shop selling beer and snacks. Having cold beer helped with the couple of endless hours it took to reach the front gate.

As I slowly approached the ticket booth, I hoped the receipt I'd printed off the internet was legit and would do the job of getting me in. A tendril of doubt was trying to hold back my excitement.

At long last it was my turn to stand at the front. Everyone behind, jealously watched the next one of us that got to enter that wonderland. Still, there was no other choice for it, so they waited patiently for their turn to be processed like cattle being counted by a farmer at the end of a long day.

I reached the booth and passed on the ravaged looking piece of paper with my ticket details. It had been stuffed in the bottom of my pack for nearly a month now, with all the possessions of my mobile life piled on top of it.

They checked the numbers against thousands of others on a clip board, and after a couple of tense minutes found mine. No wonder it took so long for people to get in. I couldn't believe they were going to try and process ten thousand people this way.

Oh well I guess we were all lucky it was a seven day party. Seven days. Sheesh I was gonna' have to pace myself on this one.

Both times I journeyed to the Boom in Portugal I burnt my brains out within three days. I don't think I slept for those three days either. Self control was going to be key here. Dam at Ozora I blew my brains out completely before I even got there, a case of LSD in the extremes. But you'll have to wait for that one. Dam you think this story is risqué. I'm only getting warmed up. South East Asia a tale of drugs and debauchery is next, then Ozora the tale of love and betrayal. Each one with their own culture. Each one with their own drugs. But, you're gonna' have to wait till I'm finished with Brazil first.

The girl behind the counter of the hand built little ticket office passed me over a form to sign before attaching my wrist band. It must have been terrible working all day in there, you could feel the trapped heat seep out from across the counter. The form was basically a waiver acknowledging that I understood I was on the edge of a rainforest in South America. Living there were snakes, spiders fuckin' Christ maybe even Jaguars. The party was truly in the middle of nowhere wasn't it?

It was late afternoon by the time I finally I had the wrist band and the sheet was signed. They only wanted to check my bag and I was in. Nada problema amigos, well until they found my Cachasa and told me it couldn't go into the party. But hey it wasn't getting wasted, so I popped the top and spent the next couple of minutes slugging back as much as I could handle. Which I might add was about quarter of the bottle. Even the guard at the gate looked well impressed. So with fire in my belly and coke down my pants, we shook hands and I passed the bottle on to him.

To get from the main gate into the party proper we had to all clamber onto these dust and mud covered big ol' nineteen fifties lookin' blue trucks, with makeshift seating welded to the inside of the rusty black iron bed attached to the back. There were about fifteen-twenty of us lined up on either side, looking at one another expectantly. We'd all had our own adventures to get there; many like me had flown from the other side of the world just for the festival. We would all be each other's new family for the next week or so. We would all be looking out for each other, sharing good times and memorable experiences. That's why I like this type of scene, this type of crowd. It's always hello, what's ya' name? Where ya' from? Non-violent and care free.

We took a rugged ten minute drive over a bumpy road made up of a mixture of dirt and sand. Sometimes we had to negotiate pools of thick, brown sludge a foot deep. Eventually though as the sun finally got a chance to sit down after his hard day's graft we found ourselves on the edge of a camp ground.

Here, it was generally clear of the wild looking trees, and instead there was a scattering of random coconut palms. On one side, the forest was dark and dense, and gave the impression that a curtain of black velvet had been strung up against the twilight sky. On the other the soft round curves of the sand dunes were silhouetted by the vast, vibrant colours of that wondrous day's goodbye. You could also hear the powerful roar of the ocean calling out to you in greeting as somewhere behind those dunes the crashed against the South American shoreline.

I made it all of about one hundred metres through the tents, found a space between them big enough for me and set up my home. I'd look for something more permanent in the morning. Right then I had other things on my mind.

The tent went up easily enough and I pegged the plastic sheet straight over the top of it as the fly part was missing.

It was time for a wank and a line. Have ya ever tried havin a wank or shag in a tent? Shaggin' I s'pose is alright cause people are secretly proud of ya' when they overhear it – as long as you make a good attempt of it. But you don't want people to think ya noisily shaggin', only for them to find out ya' staying on ya' own do ya'? That's not quite so cool. It's easy to forget your neighbours are only five feet away, and really you don't have a wall between ya', just a paper thin nylon sheet to hide the sounds you make. So it's gotta' be a dead quiet affair, and on the coke it's usually a long drawn out – close to frustrating – one too. But oh well such is life and we all have needs.

My plan was simple. I'd spend the next few days meeting people so I could become familiar and comfortable with my surroundings, before starting to take any of the psychedelics I came across. You could say, to establish an inner calm in myself for when I was tripping amongst the masses of humanity that came to the event. I also wanted to get to know people so I wouldn't have to spend the days seeing shit on my own.

Meeting people wouldn't be a problem though. I'm used to solo travelling and know you have to put the effort in and find a group of likeminded people that think along the same line as you.

I would drink and do cocaine whilst trying to find Alf my Norwegian friend. I had another acquaintance here too. A DJ/Producer based in London named Jay Om.

It was time to explore my surroundings, familiarise myself with my new home.

After one wank and one Brazilian sized line, actually two Brazilian sized lines later, I ventured out into the wilderness.

You do feel a sense of loneliness when you're walking around a place like this by yourself, listening to the groups of people and friends laughing together, but hey fuck it. As long as you're willing to sit down at a table and say hello to the person next to you, ya' never alone for long. With a bit of effort soon enough you'll be one of the people laughing in the crowd. Besides when you travel on your own you have to be ready for this type of thing and confident as well as comfortable in your own company.

It's always hard to find someone to come travelling with ya'. People always say, 'Yeah, I'll do it.' But rarely do they ever stick to their word. And hey, if it means the choice of; either staying home and living ya' life as part of the system, or going out there and doing the things that I want with this amazing marvel that is the Human experience. I know my choice every time. No excuses. Nothings gonna' stop me.

I found a dusty road that had been marked out along the side of the tents, with the ocean just on the other side of the dunes beside me. The thundering call of the waves made me want

to find a way over the dunes and down to the beach but there was no clear path and wasn't quite ready to kick through the scrub just yet.

Following the course of the track for about five minutes I stumbled across a half sunken, or broken lookin, ol' wooden pirate ship. The prow and the stern, or front and back, were about fifty feet apart, each stuck about ten feet out the sand and up into the air. It looked awesome, and put a smile on my face. Between each segment of that lost and stranded soul, were red and white shade cloths stretched up above where the crowd would dance. It was destined for minimal techno, pounding and continuous. 'Cause all the camping was within hearing distance of a stage; those around here were the lucky ones. Over time ours would be the easiest to sleep next to. Its monotonous psychedelic beats slowly hypnotised you into a sense of peace within.

I continued my journey full of hopes and expectations on what I was gonna' discover next.

After a few more minutes I came across a few larger army style tents selling food. There were picnic benches out the front and I decided it was a good time to roll a joint to smoke on my mission.

ROSTOS AMIGÁVEIS DE PARA FORA DO NEVOEIRO

(Friendly faces from out of the mist)

Sitting down in the nicely humid Brazilian evening, skinning up a big Bob Marley sized doobie, a smiling face from out of the darkness drifted towards me. 'Alf! Fuck that was easy! How are ya' dude? How've ya' been? We're ya' camping?'

In that Norwegian accent of his, 'Oh I'm great man. We're camped on the other side of the party. It's about fifteen minutes walk from here.'

'Fifteen minutes? Fuck how big is the place? What's it like?'

It's fantastic man, the main stage is just up over there. You should see the speaker stack. It's hanging in the air, and pointing down to where the dance area is, and it's massive. They've been doing the sound checks; it's crystal clear and loud man. Fuckin' loud! A few minutes' walk down from there is the chill out area. It's just a bamboo frame at the moment but it's massive too. There's another smaller stage just down past that, then finally if you keep following the path, you'll come across a rickety bridge that cuts through some mangroves. Go across that and you come across the Goa stage. It's smaller than the main stage but the music there is gonna' be out of this world. If you're ever trying to find me man, that's where to look. Come I'll show you around and see if we can find my friends. Hey by the way, one of those friends is dealing and has brought loads of MDMA, acid and charris with him to the party.'

As I stood to follow I could feel that Brazilian lookin' Cheshire cat grin wrapping itself like magic around my face, like a banana split with cream and cherries on top.

I sparked the spliff and joined him, laughing and gossiping as we smoked the joint. Now like one the others around me, I felt like part of the crowd. I was in; I'd made a good decision to come here. This experience certainly didn't look like it was going to be a letdown.

Together we walked to where the main stage was. I couldn't really see much 'cause it was dark, but the stage was about thirty metres wide and as Alf had said, with some great big huge speakers forty feet in the air, on either side pointing down to where the crowd would be. You could see material of, pinks, oranges and greens stretched out amongst the palm trees for shade. From there we went down to the beach. Man, down on the beach they had these huge Buddha heads, the skinny Thai Buddha not the fat one. One was blue with a pink crown and the other was golden with a green crown atop its head, they were both set about fifty metres apart.

You could see the white flashes of the waves as they tumbled, and crashed down on top of themselves, churning like cream in a fresh fruit blender. We travelled down the light fluffy sand that resembled a good powder snow prime for boarding over, for about two hundred metres, until we came across what looked like the thunder dome from the Mad Max movies

'This is gonna' be the chill out area once they've finished it.' Alf said in that calm collected way he expressed himself.'

We stepped up off the beach and wondered at the inside of the chill out structure. Still a skeletal frame it was immense in size, and could easily fit two hundred dozing ravers.

Back on the main track through the show, there was another tent which apparently was for meditation classes and after that, the alternative stage which would play Jazz, Reggae and the like.

We passed on to an area where camping started again and my Norwegian counterpart offered up a small wooden bridge that was ground level but disappeared off into the darkness amongst the mangroves, as earlier promised.

Alf pulled out one of those black-rubber-water-proof camping torches that people have, and lit up the way before us. He was excited as fuck, and talked about the type of psy trance they were gonna' play there. It was called Goa trance and picturing hippies in Goa, (although

I've never been) I imagined it was gonna' be a more chilled out type of music. (I couldn't have been more wrong, but that's still a few days away.)

The bridge was nearly fifty metres long and about a metre wide. It bounced as you walked, putting a spring in your step as you passed over.

He was right, this stage wasn't the biggest but the noise it would produce in the near future would blow my mind like nothing I'd ever listened to before. People think death metal is hard. Jeez this shit runs at about one hundred and eighty beats per minute, and pauses only for effect, so some fuckin' really twisted sound can drill its way into your psyche. Catching you then..... Dooga, dooga, dooga, dooga, wraaaooonngg, dooga, dooga, dooga, dooga, wraaaooooonnggg, rup, rup, rup, rup, dooga, dooga, dooga, dooga. Yup to the inexperienced and the sober, that pretty much summed it up. In a few days time I was gonna' love that stage and fight a battle with the Great Hindu God Ganesh the Destroyer.

We doubled back over the wonky bridge, and it was about ten thirty according to Norway.

Alf let me know he was tired and wanted to show me where he was staying so we could catch up the next day. We turned left at the end of the bridge and passed through more campsites until we came to where Alf lived. I tried my best to remember the way, but it was a red and blue dome tent surrounded by a thousand other red and blue dome tents in the middle of nowhere in the dark. I gave up hope of that and started the journey home, knowing I'd find them again. They weren't going anywhere were they?

I stopped off at a small café with some throw rugs on the ground and rolled another joint. I heard another cheery 'Bryce!' come my direction and looking around there was Jay Om strutting towards me, his hairy arms wide open and ready for a hug.

'How are you Bryce? Man! Brazil what a beautiful country. I've been playing in clubs all over. Sao Paulo was the best, but I am playing in Troncoso soon. It is a party on the beach every night there!'

Jay Om is a long haired, squarely built Italian fulla', who's worked his ass off in London. He'd risked a lot of cash hiring one of the biggest and well known venues named SE1. SE1 holds up to three or four thousand demanding but up for it ravers. Don't forget, in investing in a place like this you have to deal with the type of club owner that owns a venue like this. It costs thousands of your pounds and if it doesn't fill up, and you haven't paid up front, you owe a lot of money to the wrong kind of people. Jay Om had risked it all for his passion, his dreams and his desires. He had started his own record label, 'Free Spirit' and had taken on other hard working producers or DJ's, all of whom have managed to stand out in an environment where DJ's are a dime a dozen.

Little did he know it at the time, but he'd done it. His hard work, talent, perseverance and patience had paid off. In a few years he'd be owning the dance floors of Africa and Europe. At that point though, internationally, he was still trying to make his name by playing anywhere they'd let him, even paying for his own flights and accommodation.

He had a friend with him, small, skinny, white – translucently white, especially for someone who had already spent a month in Brazil – no chin to speak of, and bald as a ducks egg. I couldn't believe the disdain on his face when Jay Om introduced us, and when I held out my hand to greet him, he limply offered me his in return. It was remarkably cold for the heat we were in. Cold I think like the mind of the person bearing it. He looked at me like I should be scrapped from his shoe. He reminded me of those aliens in that Kiefer Sutherland movie, Dark City. They were called, The Strangers.

What the fuck. Oh well. Can't get along with everyone in life, maybe he felt threatened 'cause I knew Jay Om from London, and had never seen this prick before.

'Hey great to see you Jay Om, sounds like you've been having fun. You wanna' join me for a spliff?'



'No thank you. We are trying to find one of the organisers. I might be able to play on the Goa stage in a few days time. I've got some great music on me. Man you should check it out.'

'Fuck yeah dude. If you get on a stage I'll definitely be there!'

'Well I think we'd better be going, we have a long walk ahead of us,' said The Stranger, with a whispered scowl

What a fuckin jerk.

'Yeah we're staying right on the other side of the camp, man it's about two miles away,' added Jay Om, before The Stranger threw his two pennies worth into the conversation.

'It's where the artists stay. We've rented out a house there.'

Woah, big fuckin' deal cock sucker.

'Hey we'll see you tomorrow Bryce, I'll meet you down by the main stage about twoish if you like.'

'Well we do have a lot on, we'll try,' said the dome headed mother fucker beside him like a pissed off girlfriend that tries to murder her partner by throwing a strop, in front of his friends.

Try? I'd been looking forward to seeing Jay Om in Brazil since we'd talked about it last time we were together back in London, who the fuck was this Stranger? I'd been to a lot of Jay Om's parties, hung out back stage with him and shit, and never once had I seen that fuck! Oh well bollocks to him.

I gave Jay Om a big hug goodbye, glad to see him and then hugged The Stranger out of spite. I could feel him try and slither away like a worm accidentally trapped under your bare foot into the mud, so I held on for an extra second just to bother him. He, he, he.

I made my way home to my tent, which was easily distinguishable from the others surrounding it because of the mustard yellow sheet of plastic pinned over the top. Nice.

I was dam lucky I got that sheet for cover, 'cause at about two or three in the morning the wind picked up and a really heavy tropical down pour struck us with a vengeance. It blew with a hell of a gale, and the plastic sheeting rippling two feet above my head, sounded like the thunder that rippling two kilometres above that. Somehow though it managed to stay pinned to the ground, but I couldn't put up with that racket every night though. I'd have to come up with a way of tightening it all up.

The exhaustion from the day's travel held back the cocaine rush that generally keeps me awake and yanking my knob fruitlessly, so dawn came quick enough. Nothing in the world makes time drag like lying in bed wide awake on drugs.

The first order of the day was to roll a nice joint of the seedless sticky outdoor buds The Man had supplied. I only had these fuckin' rolling papers which were like ones I'd bought in Saigon one time, and that somewhat resembled recycled newspaper, and didn't even have a sticky bit on them. It was hard case. They were thick like the pages of a book, kinda' greyish and came with a rubber band wrapped around them. Really classy, but hey beggars can't be choosers and I'd rather smoke a joint rolled in that stuff than be stuck with a pile of weed and no way to smoke it. You'd end up having to fight off the temptation to fuckin' eat it or something, anything to get high. It's gotta' be more frustrating having weed and no means of smoking it than having no weed at all.

I sparked up, poked my head out the door or flap if you like, stood outside to stretch. The bones in my back and shoulders voiced their disapproval with me for sleeping on the lumpy and sandy ground the night before.

I took in my surroundings and thought about how I was going to improve my home for the next seven days. There was no choice but to take on a Robinson Crusoe type attitude to my current situation.

About twenty feet away directly towards the stages, some people had put up a massive complex of about ten tents, all covered with a sturdy canopy. It was huge; easily forty feet in diameter tied to and held up by three inch wide wooden poles. Jesus those people were organised!

An idea hit me, I un-pegged my not quite so impressive shelter, folded up the cover so it wouldn't blow away – there wasn't much wind, but knowing my luck – and dragged my dome tent with all my possessions inside, over to one of the branches of the structure where it was tied to a pole, and positioned my world there. Now, the ground was a little uneven and covered in bits of branches and shit, so I cleared as much of it away as possible until it looked reasonably un-lumpy, and re-pegged the tent. The plastic shelter I had greater ambitions for.

Now I had no idea of the time but it was early morning, just after sunrise and it was already steaming hot. I was gonna' need shelter from the sun, wind and the rain. Something that was also versatile in movement though, so as not to rip the plastic.

My plan was simple. I would pin one side down over my tent and the other side, the beach side – which is where the elements came from – I would hang over the rope that was holding my neighbour's impressive little world in place. To that side I tied three large heavy coconuts which just reached the ground. So as the wind came and tried to lift everything from the earth, the coconuts were free to move up and down with the motion of the shelter next door. That way my piece of cover wouldn't tear if strained too hard, as it was in effect, able to adjust itself with the wind pressures. If the wind was strong as you would expect, it could grab my tent and everything, and try to blow it all away. But the weight of the coconuts would hopefully hold it in place. As the wind died down they would sink to the ground again, only having to be re-adjusted occasionally so they didn't bunch up. Simple eh? And it worked. Ha! Unbelievable.

The front door of my tent faced away from the party, towards where we had been dropped off the night before.

To my right was a large red and black dome tent and just to the front on my left were two matching plain blue tents with an awning put up between them. The red tent had a smiling large man with curly dark hair, beer belly and three day beard, sitting out the front of it. His thin but beautiful wife was beside him cooking their breakfast and peaking over every now and then.

'Bom dia, my name is Bryce.' I said and walked towards him with my hand extended.

'Bom dia Bryce, my name is Miguel this here is Serafina.'

'Ola, Sorry how do you pronounce your name?'

'Bryce, B, R, Y, C, E, Bryce, like rice but with a B.'

'Oh Bryce, nice to meet you Bryce. Where are you from?'

'I'm from New Zealand but I live in London. I've been there for seven years now. It's great fun, but it's fuckin' cold in the winter. I try to work lots over the summer and save as much as possible before escaping somewhere warm and fun when it starts to snow.'

'Oh wow that's amazing! Well thank you for choosing Brazil.'

'Brazil was an easy choice Miguel. Besides, I wanted to come here for Universo Paralello, and here I am. Jeez you wouldn't believe what I've been through to get here. But I'm still alive, and a little more wise. Fuck Miguel, I'm loving it! Hey you guys wanna' smoke a joint?'

'Yeah man, that would be great.'

'Cool, I've only got these fuckin' great big thick papers though; do you have any normal Rizla?'

'No my friend Rizla are very expensive here, eight reals a packet.'

'Eight reals? You gotta' be kidding me I could buy dinner for that!'

'Crazy hey?'

'Yeah man. Oh well fuck it, we're all in the same boat then.'

Smoking weed has that added benefit of introducing you to people. Doesn't matter where you are in the world, if you roll a joint, light it up and pass it on to the person next to you; you're almost guaranteed to make friends. That's what it's all about innit. It's a much more natural ice breaker than beer, a nice way to side-step your social boundaries and put yourself out there. It works anywhere, breaks that uncomfortable silence in your head when you're on your own travellin' about the place and introduces you to likeminded people. People on the same wave length, 'cause, come on nearly everybody smokes pot.

'You must have a good job that lets you go and travel whenever you like.' Serafina said.

'I'm a maintenance contractor, I mainly change light bulbs, vacuum out gigantic air conditioning machines called an Air Handling Units and unblock toilets. Really riveting stuff but it pays well and there is so much work in London that I can leave a job, go on holiday and find another one when I get back. How about you guys, what do you do?'

'We are both doctors down in Sao Paulo,' Miguel said. Really? You can leave your job any time you like and find another one in London straight away?'

'Yeah I'm signed up with five or six employment agencies and I just gotta' let them know a week before I get back and they'll have work waiting for me. Cool eh!'

'That is cool Bryce. Hey did you bring any drugs with you from England?'

'Nah bro. No way, why would I bother? This is Brazil innit? The land of samba, parties and dreams. Everything should be cheap as chips here.'

'No, Bryce. Yes coca and weed are cheap but MDMA is almost unheard of here, more like a legend from the movies.'

'Ha. The same way Charlie, I mean cocaine in Brazil is a legend to us in Europe. The grass is always greener eh?'

'So it seems. But anyway MDMA is bad for you, have you ever seen what that shit does to your brain? Hey did you know the rushing tingling effect you get over it that feels soooo good?'

'Yeah.'

'That's blood pouring down the sides of it from your receptors.'

'What? Whatever dude, it's fuckin' sweet as, in its day, they reckon fifty million ecstasy tablets were being taken each week in England and there is almost no recorded deaths. Ever... That shit won't kill you, fuckin' alcohol and cigarettes now there are some fuckin' killers for ya'. Everybody's been conned by the government, so they can fund our world from the taxes. They love selling us addictive shit that doesn't do anything but make you want to buy more, Get a slight high out of it and, 'Nooooo' you can't have that. 'Give up smoking and try gambling, that's the new cool,' they say. In New Zealand they legalised big monstrous casinos and prostitution almost the same year they banned smoking cigarettes inside. They knew it was gonna' fuckin' cut Tax revenue from cigarette's and from bars losing trade because of it. The same pattern had happened in all the countries they'd forced the smoking laws through before then. So they came up with another source of income from our weaknesses. Bastardos. Is that Brazilian, Miguel? Bastardos?'

'Close enough Bryce, eh, eh, eh. But hey when it comes to MDMA that's the facts, that's that tingling sensation in your head. Blood pouring down your brain, ketamine, now that's ok that's a different matter altogether.

Bah, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, we all broke down laughing together. For fucks sake. He, he, he, he. Good ol' K, I won't hear a bad word against it.

It is odd though, MDMA which in general is the most peaceful drug out there is a class A drug. Yet ketamine which knocks seven colours of shit out of ya' is only class C. In basic terms this means, one's a prison sentence and the other is less of a fine for possession than marijuana. Sniffing a line of the more unheard of 2-CB is like sniffing a line of LSD. Two

minutes after taking it you walk straight into a full on acid trip which lasts for about an hour and a half. You used to be able to buy that stuff from shops in Holland until the mid nineties.

I didn't know it at that point but you can buy ketamine over the counter in a lot of third world countries, it's used almost everywhere. Not just on horses, which is the popular social agreement but on humans too. Aaaaahhh ketamine, God bless it's cotton socks. But that's for Cambodia, not Brazil, Those weird, wild and wacky encounters are for another time altogether.

In Brazil, for me it was all about the cocaine, the real stuff. Not the type of cocaine that I'd been paying fifty or sixty pounds a gram for in England. The type of cocaine that when the police in England catch you with it, it's so cut your lucky to get charged at all. I bet half the time people are arrested and done for possession over it in the U.K, they've been done for possession of point seven of a gram of God knows what and point one of a gram of coke. No my maths isn't shit, dealers just rip you off and even though they're selling you shit, the assholes will still under-weigh it. Sell ya' point eight of a gram as standard. Fuckin' fuckers!

We chatted away like this for a while, no one in any rush to go anywhere. We were all settled in and the show didn't start for two more days.

From the blue tents emerged my other neighbours. In the one closest to me was a young couple about my age. The guy had a big Jack in the box tattooed across his back. It had a wide toothy grin and a Jester's cap. Jack in the box, had short black spiky hair and walked around barefoot. His cute petite girlfriend had big intelligent eyes, and a gorgeous chipmunk kinda' face, that just made you wanna' squeeze her cheeks. From the other side two great big hulking lads appeared dressed only in Speedos, or budgie smugglers, depending on where ya' from. You know what I mean, tiny little Y front type swimming shorts, but man were these boys were big, bronzed and toned. Sculptured you could say. Obviously gay. It wasn't the cut muscles, the little shorts or the gorgeous face. It was the way they held their wrists. Man you can't hide that shit. You can be big tuff and staunch as you like, but if you've got a wrist like ya' holding a cup of tea, you ain't foolin anyone. That, you can't bury in a closet and besides, in this day and age, there's no need to 'cause no one cares.

I wanted to go out and truly see my new found home.

In my well worn camo shorts I placed; left front pocket just above the knee, my most treasured possessions; passport, one of my ATM cards and mobile phone, all buttoned up nice and safe. I keep my ATM cards separated in case I lose one. Left top pocket was my wallet with the two rocks of coke bulging inside and my other card. Top right front pocket had the ounce of weed with the skins, and as we all know, right front pocket just above the knee, was my switch blade. Hey, ya' never know and besides I liked it, it was comforting to me and also added a feeling of wildness to the proceedings.

IR PARA UM PASSEIA

(Going for a stroll)

I stepped down on to the road which was about ten feet to my left, just on the other side of Jack in the box's blue tent and made my way down into town, as you would.

After only a few minutes, there was the pirate ship, fuck, I'd forgotten all about that, what else was there? It led down onto the beach which and seeing it in daylight for the first time totally blew me away. The surf was similar to Morro de Sao Paulo, but the beach itself was longer and never ended in either direction, just made its way off into the distance. There were people swimming in the waves, splashing about and laughing. There was even a couple of surfers. Ahead of me were the two gigantic Buddha heads, looking as if they'd always been there giving positive energy, for a thousand years.

I made my way towards them, a distance of about two hundred metres. Half way there the sand dunes to my left parted allowing access back on to the boulevard and opened up to some shops and what heaven sent, looked like a bar. Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god! They were selling beer. My mouth was shitty and fucked and my skin was scratchy, 'cause I needed a shower, and as yet I still hadn't brushed my teeth. All in all I felt rank.

'Um bia, por favour.' One beer please.

'Inglesh?'

'Sim. I mean yes.'

'You must go over there with the other people and buy tokens, we take no cash here.'

What? Oh well. Fuck it. Dam it was a hot day, and the queue of about two hundred people didn't look like it was going anywhere fast, so I covered myself in factor thirty and joined the back of it. Always the back of the queue, it's so deflating on your good time innit' being stood at the back of a large slow moving line of people. The cloak room at Brixton Academy was the worst. After waiting an hour to get in, you had to spend another hour waiting to drop ya' jacket off, then another hour at the end of the night queuing to pick the fucker up. Fuckin' crazy. Three hours of ya' night was spent just standing around high as a kite. It sucks most when ya' the last one too. Until a few other people end up standing behind you, then it doesn't hurt so bad. Like when ya' break up with ya' Mrs, it hurts most and the longing is there until ya' get that first shag, then hey presto, it doesn't seem so bad any more. All that longing and waiting just seems to evaporate a little before ya' eyes.

Yeah you do wish you weren't out there on ya' own, last in a hundred man race. But hey, at least you've moved on from where you were before. Slowly moving ever forward. Closer to the good times that always come, it's just a matter of patience.

I was surrounded by people, who spirit wise, looked the same as me, give or take a decade or two in age. You could feel a static energy in the air, 'cause everyone was so fuckin' excited and thrilled to be there.

Next to me I could hear the thick sounding accent of South Africans. One was my height, about five foot ten and had that bleached blonde hair of someone who lives for the sun and the surf. He wore an awesome porn star moustache, thick bushy and sitting about half a centimetre past the edges of his mouth. His mate was about six, two with close cropped dark hair, and like most men at Universo Paralelo, unshaven. He was wearing jeans in that fuckin' heat? (Which is utter madness in my opinion, but then again who the fuck am I to judge.) He also had Tom Cruises sunglasses from Top Gun. I knew that accent anywhere. At the time I lived with four South Africans in London plus my charming brother, his girlfriend the fabulous Louisa, who can cook I tell you that, the infamous Cousin Paul and my girlfriend of the time.

I know, it's a lot eh. But that's London livin'.

A few weeks after I first got to London I moved into a house with fourteen of us in it. Fourteen and twelve of them were South Africans. From Durbin, Jo'burg, Pietermaritzburg,

Cape Town, man, from all over. And man they were mean to me. I'd walk into the room and they would change their language from English to Afrikaans. Change from my language to theirs! They'd speak in that guttural sound of theirs and totally disclude me from all conversation. If it wasn't for my job at the music festivals, where everyone was just amazing I would have thought there was something wrong with me.

You'd think patience would be the key but no, inner calm was. After two or so hours in the burning sun, I had finally worked my way to the front of the queue, and was trying not to yell out at the slimy fuckers that just casually pushed in. Finally I had my chance to buy some of those fuckin' vouchers. Making you buy tickets like that is such a fuckin' scam man. I can guarantee at the end of any festival that does it you won't be able to cash them back in. But hey maybe it's for safety too. Maybe if cash was building up everywhere it would encourage robberies, I was in Brazil after all.

NOVOS COMEÇOS E NOVO EXPERINCES PODEM LEVAR A UMA NOVA VIDA

(New beginnings and new experiences, can lead to a new life)

I didn't wanna' have to wait in a queue like that ever again. There were still five, six or seven days to go, so I bought a hundred and fifty real worth of beer vouchers, and ten real of water vouchers. Hey you gotta brush ya' teeth right? As a token of good faith I got thirty real of food ones too. In return though, I only got about thirty odd beers vouchers instead of the about fifty or sixty for which I had already handed over the cash for.

'Oi Amigo! You not give me enough.'

Here I give you Cez Cinquenta (one hundred and fifty) real for beer. You give Billette (ticket) for Setenta (seventy) real.

'Nada Gringo.'

'Yes you fuckin' did!'

'C'mon hurry up!' people were yelling from behind.

I gave it one more chance. Amigo. Nada Trinte Cinco Bia. Setenta! (Not thirty five beers. Seventy!) See look. Trinte cinco!' I tried in desperation counting them out in front of him, while the angry masses behind starting to grumble and shove each other like wildebeest trying to escape a river that churns with the swarming of crocodiles. We were all anxious to get out of the sun, so we could drink beer, eat food and feel normal again.

'Nada gringo!' I had thrown at me from across the counter.

'Come on hurry up.' from over my shoulder.

Fuck it! Fuck this. I'd rather drink thirty five beers than think about this shit. It was a war I wasn't going to win. The ticket office was just a shack in the sun next to a beach. There was no management around or anyone to complain to, and this wasn't going to ruin my day. I'd take the thirty five vouchers, get a cold beer and have a fatty. Too easy, problem solved, problem forgotten.

'Be careful those cunts just ripped me off about eighty real, I informed the Saffa guys behind me, before bidding them farewell. I wished the blonde one good luck with his set on the Minimal stage the next day at two pm telling him I'd be there.

The party was so close to starting, you could almost taste it. Nearly running to the bar, I picked up two beers. I didn't even leave it's shade, before I finished the first. It must have been well over thirty degrees Celsius of dry heat while the sun loomed ever present, never letting you forget his presence, even in the under shelter.

Following the road down to the main stage along with the other masses you could sense the excitement was building. The thought of the future few days caused a trembling in my stomach that reared like startled geese at the excitement of seeing the main stage for the first time in the light.

Alf was right. It *was* massive. Huge speaker stacks hung in the air, angled down towards the ground on either side of the pyramid shaped stage. It would create a wall of sound that was crystal clear, yet deafening. At times over the next few days it was so loud it was uncomfortable. It was an overpowering sound that left your ears ringing like the bells of St Paul's. Just like it says on the box, the mixture of drugs, exhaustion and sound would put you into a trance like state.

We were living like those crazy witch doctors in the jungles we were now camped next to. Living like them on the edges of nowhere, and separated by society and its laws. Together we would find a way for the people of the new society to cohabitate and harmonise, people of all cultures, all backgrounds and speaking all languages. There was no racism, no violence and as yet, no theft.

The wall hanging that draped the back of the stage was made of a group of Hindu Gods. Leading out from there were shade cloths stretched amongst the smattering of palm trees, these random bits of pink, orange and yellow shade paved the way back to a framework of

sparkling CD's arranged like fans, or miniature windmills, about ten feet in the air and four rows in height. There was about eighty in total blowing with the wind, glistening like freshly caught fish in the tropical sun. The giant heads of Buddha framed the view out to the massive expanse that is the Atlantic ocean, on that most glorious of days. It was while there looking at that beautiful spectacle under the shade cloths with the wind lightly wisping across my face, Jay Om came into my field of view.

There he was with a group of about ten others, clouds of smoke briefly engulfing them before drifting off with the soft breeze.

A warming smile rose up in me and I went over to him, arms extended and called out, 'Oi, Jay Om. Bom dia amigo. Hey you like that? I'm speaking Brazilian.'

'Hey Bryce, great to see you. Hey guys this is my friend from London.' he proudly stated to the others. I looked around, it was a group of happy excited beautiful people plus The Stranger slithering around like a chill from an arctic wind.

I greeted everybody with a warm hand shake, hug, or kiss on the cheek, which ever they led me into.

'Hey Bryce, guess what? I got a set on the Goa stage at two o'clock on the second!'

'Dude, the second is a long way away, but no matter how fucked up I am, I'm there!'

There was Llanna with his long hair, big belly and who sounded German. He was wearing a seventies style red and yellow loose fitting tie dye shirt. There was also Gaudi, who was a young American guy, quite cut and dressed more like he should be playing Hip Hop rather than trance, plus a few others that had names like they belonged in a Marvel super heroes comic. And then there was Werner, a South African guy dressed in the regulation Thai fishing pants, with his medium length hair that looked like he'd been swimming in the ocean and the sun had dried the salt into it. He was the only one who gave me his real name. The others were all obviously some form of superstar DJ that I should be in awe to meet. Although I did come to find over the next few days, Llanna and Gaudi were really down to earth. One was a strikingly hot Spanish sounding girl. Strikingly hot till she opened her mouth and started to talk. Or should I say complain like an over paid diva. Fuckin' hell she was complaining about her free accommodation, FREE. And also I had to listen to, 'Where are the beer vouchers?!' Yada, yada, yada, it was like the teacher in the Charlie Brown cartoons, 'wah, wah, wah!'

Werner by the way was the only one who would smoke my joint too as the others only smoked Charris. What? I've come all this fuckin' way from England and ya's won't smoke my joint 'cause it ain't some fancy fuckin' hash originating from India? You're in Brazil! There's good weed everywhere. What the fuck? Oh well whatever.

I was chattin' with Werner for a while with my back to the others and the feelin' for another line started to creep in, so I turned around to offer one to Jay Om when, hey presto there was no one there. They'd fucked off. Without even a, 'Good day to you sir.'

Fuck that, 'Hey Werner. You like Charlie?'

'Yah bru. Fuckin lekker. (Which is South African for, 'Yes. I love it!') 'Where's your tent bru?'

'Ah it's a bit of a walk, but hey there's fuck all else to do though innit'.'

'What are you here for Bryce? Are you playing?'

'Nah I'm here to party dude. I'm here 'cause I love the crowd, the freedom and the whole vibe of the scene. It's fuckin' freedom man. There's never any trouble in this kind of place. I've flown all over the world for it, from the streets of Berlin to the jungles of Thailand. Now I've flown all the way to Brazil to tear up these trance floors.'



A ENERGIA ESTÁTICA CRESCE. A MÚSICA COMEÇA AMANHÃ

(The static energy grows. The music starts tomorrow)

We were walking through the heat; as we passed the bar with the big queue I offered to get a beer for the long journey up past the pirate ship to my little yellow mustard coloured home.

'So you?' I asked. 'What brought you here?'

'I'm playing.'

'Really? What's ya' DJ name?'

'I'm called Rinkadink bru.'

'Yeah fuckin' true? I've got some of your tunes on my phone. Fuckin' cool man!'

'Yah. It's cool bru, hey, you know I don't really wanna' go on about it too much.'

'Cool as man, hey you were the only one who gave me your real name and you're the only actual DJ out of that lot I've ever heard of.' Says a lot eh?

'I don't just DJ, I produce. A couple of years ago I put together an hour of trance and sold three thousand copies and agency signed me. It's lekker bru; I get flown all over the world and no matter how fucked up I am, as long as I can push the buttons on the computer at the right time it's all good!'

'That's awesome dude. Hey I unblock toilets and stuff all day. But I love this shit so much, I'll unblock toilets seven days a week for a year if I have to to save enough money to come to lekker places like this. Better than coming all this way to look at buildings built by slaves innit?'

'That is lekker bru. Cool as China.' (The South Africans sometimes use the word 'China' and often use the word 'bru' like the Kiwi's say 'bro' and 'ow', or the English, 'bruv'.)

I recognised the big community structure which my home was attached to the side of, like a village slum house on the outside of a grand castle's wall. 'Anyway my tent's just here. Ready for a Brazilian sized line? You know what they say! When in Rome!'

'Nah not too big bru, seven days is a long time bru. Once I pop I can't stop. But you watch bru. See all these nice, smart dressed, even innocent looking people. By New Year 's Day bru, it's totally different. It's like a seething cess pit of debauchery. You'll see people fuckin' on the footpath and others freaking out. All of them with a total lack of sleep because of this fuckin' heat. You can't sleep during the day and everyone makes the mistake of partying from tomorrow once the music starts without a break. By January the first everyone's ready to pass out. They've been on acid for days, and they forget. Forget how hot it is and you'll see them bru, lying down on the dancefloor and sleeping right there in the crowd, heads all twisted and shit. That's why I love this place. This is my favourite festival bru. Overnight it just changes. Everyone's pretensions drop and they all become free. It's amazing bru. I love it!'

While he was yabbering away I was choppin' two lines that I thought would be big enough to impress a famous psychedelic trance producer like Rinkadink, completely ignoring what he'd just said about trying to pace himself.

Sweat was pouring from my head on that humid day. I was half lying inside the tent with no breeze, perspiring like a fuckin' dog in a green house. I was nearly there, when a drop of sweat fell from my forehead. In slow motion, I was like 'Noooooooooooo' and deftly pulled aside the book I was using to rack up on.

Woah that was close, but hey. I was cool, it wasn't my first time. No need to panic, I managed to save it.

Psy producer or not, it was still me first. I hoovered that sucker down, The Mans gear smooth but fragrant. No wonder sniffer dogs can smell that shit. I can smell that shit! Smelt like bananas! Subtle, but to me like bananas, that or the clay they use for making sculptures. I know there's a big difference, but that's how it was, I couldn't figure out which, although I gave it my best shot.

'Here you go dude.' I said out from inside the almost steaming tent, and pointed towards a three inch line about five mil thick.

'Oooohh bru. What's it like? Is it good coke?'

'Is it good coke? Pah, what the fuck? Fuckin eh it is! I bought four grams and it came in two big rocks, look. He, he, he! C'mon bru, when in Rome and all that, and hey you're the one that's famous here not me. So sniff ya' line and shut the fuck up!' I said, smiling away with the innocence of a cherub We're in Brazil on this beautiful beach in this beautiful country dude, have fat fuckin line with me man. Let's get things get the party started.'

'Ya, fuck it, why not bru, as you say, when in Rome.' He chowed that line down in one smooth movement, no more hesitations. Wasn't his first time either.

'Fuck that's lekker shit bru where'd you get that? Did you get that here?'

'Nah bru I got that Charlie on Morro de Sao Paulo. Man, have you been there? Fuck I had such a beautiful time. I can recommend that place to anyone.'

'Nah bru I haven't been but I've heard of it. It's only just off the coast. Hey, after the party loads of the local fisherman pull up and offer rides to the islands if ya' keen. Hey, I've got a load of drink vouchers supposedly waiting for me just up past the main stage. Come with, it must be my turn to buy the beer.'

'Twist my arm. Fuckin' eh, let's go,' and with that we were off back up the well trodden sandy road with its two trench like gulley's, that were made from some heavy vehicle's tyres that had cut through it at some point, corroding that unscarred sacred land.

As we passed the now familiar bar I couldn't wait a minute longer, so I went to the same hot girl as the last two times, and ordered us two more beers for the mission through the stifling and shimmering Brazilian heat.

'Hey I'm definitely getting the next ones ok bru. The place is just up there.'

'As they say in Brazil, 'Nada problema' dude! It's a hot day, I'm thirsty and beer here in Brazil is cheap, especially when ya spending the pound!'

'Lekker.'

'Hey when do you play?'

'I'm playing nine am on New Year's Day!'

'You're what?! That's fuckin' awesome man. That's like the primetime slot!'

'Yah and I'm playing again later in the day with another mate. Together we're called Whiplash. Come and check it out. If your there when we're on, come backstage and say hello.'

'I can't get backstage dude.'

'Ah it's alright bru. Universo Paralello isn't like most other festivals. They don't really have security. You can just walk behind the stage and straight up to where the guys are playin'. Just look confident like you should be there, and no one will say anything. Trust me bru it's lekker.'

'Fuckin sweet as man. See you there.'

'Hey Werner.' That hot lookin complaining Spanish chick yelled towards us from over by the beach as we were passing the main stage. 'You want a line of cocaine?'

'Yah why not? Hey this is Bryce. He's flown all the way from London just for the party!'

'Oh hi.' she said, barely sparing me a glance. Obviously not remembering me from before and not bothering to introduce herself *again*.

She started to complain.

'I can't believe they haven't got our food and drink vouchers yet, how amateur is this? My God it's fuckin ridiculous, they should be embarrassed!'

Well someone should be embarrassed love.

There was a group of three other guys waiting in the shade of the big blue Buddha head with his pink crystal covered crown. Lookin' out towards the ocean, he was the one on the

left. The golden one with his green bejewelled crown was fifty metres down to the right. Pink and green flags were fluttering in between them and the eighty windmills made of CD's spun and made their colours reflect little shards of rainbow glints.

'Has anyone got anything to sniff through?' she griped.

'Yeah I do.' I replied, and pulled out a hundred real note.

I wondered how much cash I had on me anyway? I'd gotten a thousand real out just before I left Morro de Sao Paulo. There was eight hundred reals. Hmmm is that gonna' last me another five or six days? Fuck and as far as I'd seen there were no fuckin' cash machines there either. What the fuck was I gonna' do?

'Hey Werner is there any cash machines nearby?'

'Yah bru, you just have to take one of the trucks just up by where you're camping back to the main gates and there you'll find taxis and buses to Itubera, which is the town the buses from Salvador drop people off at.'

'Fuckin' sound! Nice, I might have to do that at some point. Personally I dunno' it though. I got a ride on a motorbike with a local.' I said before leading off into the story of my journey down from Morro de Sao Paulo

'Here Rinkadink have a line.' from the Spanish girl

'There's only one left. What about my mate?'

The line was only about an inch long and really thin.

'Don't worry bro,' I laughed. 'If you guys are that hard up it doesn't matter, I've got plenty.'

I couldn't help it. Come on, these guys are s'pose to be the DJ's. Surely they should be having the biggest lines of all.

'Oh.' suddenly not so cock sure of herself and surprised her built up tough guy barriers were beaten down so easily by some stranger.

To her credit she chopped me up a line no smaller than the others had had. Then the bitch tried to pocket my note by holding out her hand like the hundred reals was hers. Another embarrassing realisation made its way across her face.

She obviously didn't like this unexplained insecurity and changed the subject to something she was more confident in. Whinging like a spoilt two year old.

'Let's go see what they're doing about these beer vouchers,' she moaned. 'I'm diiiieeeeeing of thirst, this is soooo unprofessional. We're the stars of this party!' she huffed, and that was her, storming off to give the organisers another piece of her mind, with her four dogs in tow.

Nice chick.

I really couldn't be bothered hanging around and listening to that self righteous bitch's high pitched monotone voice much longer.

After a few more minutes I decided to part ways with my new found friend, with a promise from him to buy the beers next time we saw each other.

There was fuck all else to do, so I decide to look for Alf and try to get some of that gear off his mate before he ran out.

Besides as my *all* my friends will tell you, I like to talk when I'm high. You know I don't mind travelling on my own, then and there but I was really in the mood to jabber away to someone at a million miles an hour. They didn't have to listen, that was cool. I just like to think out loud and I don't look half as crazy if there's someone next to me pretending to hear.

Back in London during the ecstasy, speed and hard house at Brixton Academy era, I reckon I coulda' talked for England. Every now and then I'd get introduced to somebody and my friend introducing us would say, 'I think you guys will get along. Such and such likes to talk too.'

I only had to get to the chill out area before I came across Alf, his sister, a tall Scandinavian looking guy with the classic mullet and a short Chinese lookin fulla'.

I got a 'Hey how's it man?' before being introduced to the fresh faces. Both were from Norway, although the Chinese lookin' guy was actually born in Japan, but had grown up there. His name was Hiroyuki, but I could call him Hiro. The other fulla', I always thought of, as the BFG. You know the guy, the Big Friendly Giant from the Roald Dahl story, the one who would blow happy dreams in children's ears while they slept. The Norwegian BFG never did that to me, but the man was a great companion when ya' were trippin' balls.

'Check out this shit man.' Alf said, and pointed at some guys on the top of the dodgiest lookin' scaffolding ever. Shit was worse than Asia it's bamboo scaffolds. They were trying to put up the final touches to the chill out area's roof.

Fuck! It looked like the thing was gonna' topple over at any moment. Everything was stacked up against it goin; well. The safety police woulda' had a field day over it. Made of normal scaffolding poles, the top was swayin' about like a fuckin' ravin' mad man. The feet of it only had planks of wood to sit on, to stop it sinkin' into the sandy ground. Trying to hold the whole thing vertical were three tough lookin' dudes that strained to stop it all from fallin' on top of the crowd of a hundred or so people sittin' beneath.

'Hey dude. Do ya' remember sayin' last night your mate had loads of gear with him? You wouldn't be able to help me out with that would ya'?'

'Yeah man, Hiro's fully loaded! Hiro, Bryce is after some gear. What have you got on you?'

With a grin Hiro walked over, and unzipped his black leather bum bag.

'I've got Hoffman trips, charris and crystal MDMA. Check it out.'

Giddee the fuck up! Cheshire cat grins all round.

'Got any cocaine?'

'No, sorry I don't do the stuff anymore so I'd rather not have it on me.'

Sigh. What the fuck? 'Fair enough dude, I'll take a gram of ya MD's.' It resembled damp brown sugar, so need to question the quality when the crystals look like that. Some of which went straight into my beer. 'And five of ya Hoffmans.'

Hoffman trips are named after the founder of LSD, Albert Hoffman. He was a Swiss scientist trying to synthesis a fungus that grew on wheat. One day he accidentally put his fingers in some synthetic substance he'd created without realising it. Upon finishing work he got on his bicycle and started the now infamous story of his ride home way back in nineteen forty three.

Below is a short caption where he described what he felt.....

*... affected by a remarkable restlessness, combined with a slight dizziness. At home I lay down and sank into a not unpleasant intoxicated-like condition, characterized by an extremely stimulated imagination. In a dreamlike state, with eyes closed (I found the daylight to be unpleasantly glaring), I perceived an uninterrupted stream of fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes with intense, kaleidoscopic play of colours. After some two hours this condition faded away.*

And so led to the world as we know it.

Think about the how the music changed. First the Beatles, how was the change in their fuckin' music eh? From clean cut I wanna' hold your hand, to **Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds**. Then we had Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin and Led Zeppelin. We had Timothy Leary running around freakin' people's minds out, Woodstock and the whole hippy movement. No other drug until Ecstasy changed the lives of so many people; created such a drastic change in the pre-existing life styles of the day.

It's well known that the rampant spread of ecstasy attributed to the halting of the mass of generationally ingrained football violence in the UK. It created an entire new culture that would last almost to this day. As far as I know, ecstasy and the rave culture was the next major movement.

In the early twenty first century with the death of rock n roll and then ecstasy which was followed by rise of psychedelic trance – which originated from Goa – LSD has made its way back into the lime light, becoming the star of the show once more. To this day it continues to change the way people experimenting with it view the world. Usually for the better but not always. You've gotta remember LSD is always a throw of the dice, you've always gotta keep your wits about ya'. Let them down for a second and you might find ya'self imagining conversations of your friends talkin' about you from behind the toilet door. Making up movies in your head that those safe enough to take the drug with only a few hours before, actually aren't that close after all. You've gotta ensure ya' stay positive on LSD. Make a concerted effort to be excited about being on it. Keep it a happy, special place to be.

Printed on the Hoffman Trips is a cartoon picture of Doctor Albert Hoffman cycling his bike in front of a green snow topped mountain. Behind the mountain on the right hand side is the sun with a red background, and on the left is the moon surrounded by a blue sky. It takes twenty five of these trips – which are little squares of thick paper about five millimetres wide – to make the picture.

In England when I was working at Womad festival one of the guys there, had a brother who rode a, Tuk Tuk around. They were both gingers from the Midlands.

His brother picked us up on the Tuk Tuk after our final night and like the Royal Family in their fancy car waving the Queens wave, (you know the one, like ya' screwin' in a light bulb) we were taken through the crowds back to his tent. There he pulled out a sheet of acid with four pictures of Mr Hoffman himself cycling his way to destiny.

'I dunno' what they're like mun. But you fulla's are welcome to try.'

We deciding to start with a half and see what happened from there.

'I'm goin up to the backstage bar to give these out mun. I'll see you guys up there soon eh?'

'Yeah cool man. Give us a bit of time to finish the booze and we'll see you up there.'

It came on strong and fast. The tent became too tight for the three of us to sit in anymore. Besides the noise of the festival was calling out, so we left the safety of the igloo like tent and ventured out into the wild unknown.

The backstage bar was only a few hundred metres away. Or in Tripping time three hours. There we met Nigel who also worked in the caravan sellin' food eighteen hours a day. He joined us by taking half a trip too. We sat down with a fresh beer and rolled a joint and let the waves of LSD wash over us.

It was perfect. There was the classic indescribable LSD laughter that feels like someone's tickling your ribs from the inside. It comes hand in hand with the feelin' of being in a different place from the rest of the world. Like the rest of the humanity doesn't exist.

The man with the acid came up with that now familiar glint in his eye. 'I sold most and gave almost the rest away. Everybody here has had some mun!'

There was about a hundred people in that backstage area on that summer's night. This was gonna be interesting.

After about forty five minutes a village feel came about the place. Everybody felt part of the little society we had created. Everybody animated, talking, buying beers, sharing drugs and rolling joints with people who were strangers less than an hour ago in real time, but a week in LSD time.

At one point I found Nigel on his hands and knees with that hysterical, uncontrollable laughter.

‘Imagine Bryce. The farmer who rented out this field. Imagine if he comes up now to see how things are going and finds almost the whole staff that are s’pose to be running the place tripping off their heads, and making no sense. ‘Get orf me faaarm! Get orf me faaarm!!!’ ‘Bah, ha, ha, ha, ha!!!’ That’s what it was like. Like a carnival inside a carnival. Backstage at this festival of world music with fifty thousand others fenced away from us like commoners.

The acid wasn’t visual. It was a head trip acid, mind bending sensations rushed through you. The popular ideology that you hallucinate on acid every time is a myth. I’ve found on paper trips, without any other strong additives you seldomly have a visual trip. That is only my experiences though. Remember that *every* trip is different for *every* person.

On one occasion I was sitting with a group of people struggling to roll a spliff. The idea of paper to in-case the stuff with as a means to smoke it and get high seemed, Neanderthal. Surely if we can fly to the moon and destroy races of people we have failed to take the time to understand, the human race has evolved past having to wrap this weed in dried out really thin bits of wood. But no, it must be because huge corporations are involved in the tobacco industry and they’d like us to keep puffin’ on life’s biggest genocide, that we haven’t found the need to get past this method of gettin stoned. But then again I ain’t no fuckin’ rocket scientist or anything innit’.

As usual I was goin’ at it vocally. Next thing ya know some fulla’ beside me was like.

‘Excuse me what? I can’t understand, I can’t hear you.’

‘I’ll repeat it louder then shall I? Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.’ I can’t remember what it was now but I’m sure it was most witty and intelligent.

‘What? Sorry I’m deaf in one ear.’

Bullshit. A few people were laughin’ now, so this guy’s gotta be havin a joke at my expense.

‘Are ya? Fair enough then dude. Sorry to hear it?’

‘What?’

Fuck this, when’s this joint gonna’ end? I’m gonna’ catch up with the others.

After spending a life time trapped in a few minutes the doobie was gone and so was I. The sun was up now and my friends we’re probably still outside.

Later on he walked past and I waved, he cupped his ear and made a face that said. What? To this day I can’t figure out if he was actually deaf or not. Whether I was the ignorant one or whether this dude was just some other harmless trippin’ fulla putting some comical spice into the night, I’ll never fuckin’ know. But that’s what it’s like some times on psychedelics; it’s always a throw of the dice. You could be havin’ the best time but still, there’s all the question marks that are thrown up, all those movies of the mind.

For me though, that’s what it’s all about, the challenge. You can have your guard up and it can still bite you in the ass in the most subtle of ways. *Every* trip you take changes you slightly.

I had quit my new job as a chef in London’s posh suburb Holland Park, and spent next three summers working with those wondrous characters, in that wondrous environment. The first job was, backstage at the wild world of Glastonbury, with Fat Boy Slim as a neighbour. The Friday night I found myself on the Pyramid stage in front of a hundred thousand people beside the Chemical Brothers, tripping out with a bottle of Amyl Nitrate in one hand and a spliff in the other. Yellin’ I’m king of the World, with my arms wide like Leonardo Dicaprio in Titanic.

I could never have forgiven myself if I didn’t take the job when it was offered. Even before I left the Southern Hemisphere I’d told my friends, ‘I wanna’ go to England and get a job workin’ at music festivals.’ So I just put myself out there and chased my dreams.

PASSE TEMPO COM O LOCAL. SOMENTE HORAS AGORA ATÉ QUE A MÚSICA COMEÇA

(Spending time with the locals. Just hours now until the music starts)

We walked about familiarising ourselves with the place. Everyone there was excited about the unknown and ever nearer future Universo Paralelo would provide. The MDMA was doing its job, and we floated about in head space bubbles of wonder as endless drivel about my adventures flowed from my mouth.

I was gonna' need more money. The MD's and the acid had cost me two hundred of my eight hundred real. With just over twenty beer vouchers left, I was goin' to have to face the queue again soon too. I made the decision to find my way to Itubera and to a cash machine now while I was still relatively sober, rather than when I was cooked outta' mind in a few days time.

I bid my new found family farewell, with more promises of beer and good times, before making my way back to the tent. Jack in the box and Tucu were there, munching out on granola and honey.

'Here amigo you want?'

Now that's hospitality. How can you say no to that? Jack in the box came over, free pouring honey into his mouth from a bottle. 'Here,' with a thick accent and a smile. I tilted my head back and he squeezed some into my mouth. It was fab' and tasted amazing. Tucu came over with the big bag of granola and the three of us sat on the ground and shared from it.

The rolled oats in the granola swelled and filled my stomach, absorbing the thick globs of honey being poured down my throat by an always smiling Jack in the box.

Might as well try and do some food shopping while I was in town too, I thought to myself. Get some sandwich materials, fruit, and tins of tuna. Some candles so I could see in the tent at night. What else? Another lighter, cigarettes. Oooh maybe some olives, granola and honey too. Yeah that's the one, high energy foods to replace the vitamins raped and stripped from me by the LSD.

It was crunch time, if I didn't just stand up and go then and there, I might not have ever worked up the courage. That would have meant forcing myself to go on the second or some shit when I was a cashless, twisted, drug fucked vegetable. By then everything would be mental warfare, and a looming mission of that nature hanging over ya' head, can be enough to keep a man up at night. Sometimes it's just better to get shit over with so you can just chill the fuck out and not have to worry about anything.

So that was it; mission on. First I checked I had my wallet, (It would be typical of me to go all the way there without it) and then started to make my way over to the trucks back to the real world. A quick check of my pockets while I was walking brought a few shortly forgotten surprises. The ounce of weed. Ooops. Well, I thought, I don't wanna' leave it in my tent I'd be fuckin gutted if I came back and it was gone. But oh yeah that's right, I wonder if that cop is still out there waiting for gringos as Ol' Bushy Moustache had said he would be. Fuck it I'd have to do something, maybe bury it under the tent? Jack in the box and Tucu seemed like lovely people, maybe I should just ask them if they don't mind holding on to it? We had just broken bread together as you would. Tucu spoke almost no English at all and Jack in the box's was limited to say the least, but the smile on their faces spoke a thousand words.

Fuck it, I would put my trust in them, besides Miguel and Serafina were not around and I needed to go now before I became side tracked and found an excuse to not bother at all.

'Bom dia amigos. Um favour por favour?' Good morning friends a favour please? Or at least that's what I was going for.

‘Sim gringo’ with that wicked grin. I realised it was the same tattooed expression on the face of the jester springing up his back.

‘Ah.’ Hmm how was I gonna’ put this? Using my thickest Brazilian accent and simple wording so they could understand, ‘I go to Itubera. Sim?’

‘Ah you go Itubera?’ said Jack in the box

‘Sim.’ yes

‘Por favour.’ and pulled out my big bag of weed. ‘Watch, ummm look after? Ummm, nada marihuana to Itubera.’

A glance at each other and a nodding approval from Tucu seemed like they understood. A silent agreement was been made between them, so I handed over the ounce. ‘Oh, por favour,’ pulling out my wallet and digging out the coke. There was only one of the two rocks left from what I’d originally had a couple of days before, but it was still well over two grams. They took that too without a question. Turning towards the truck one final search of my pockets revealed the five Hoffman’s and the gram of MD. ‘Oi amigos. Ah, this too.’ It was my turn for the devilish grin, as I handed it all over.

Finally confident I was clean, and filled with the warmth of trust and friendship amongst relative strangers, I made my way to the where the trucks were s’pose to pick you up from.

The trucks about every fifteen minutes or so dropping off trailer full after trailer full of expectant wide eyed party goers. They would bring thousands a day until we hit the capacity of around ten thousand revellers ready to go!

I clambered on to the truck liberated by the faith in my neighbours. One hundred percent confident they could be trusted. These people had shared their breakfast with me out of pure generosity of spirit. We didn’t even speak the same language or know each other’s culture, but there was that feeling of companionship and trust in our own character instinct. You know how it is; sometimes you just meet people and know they are genuine. Sometimes you just get the feeling that they’re a thief.

Again I was met by warm smiles and handshakes. ‘Bom dia amigo. Tu du bem?’ Good morning amigo. Havin’ a good day? Or something like that.

‘Sim, yes. Bom dia my name is Bryce, I said rolling the ‘R’ because the locals seemed to understand how to say my name easier if I did. Putting a Brazilian accent on my speech seemed to make things clearer for them. I do the same thing in Asia. I speak so fast in general that even my English mates sometimes find it difficult to keep up with what I’m on about.

There was a group of four friends in the bed of the truck with me, three guys and a beautiful girl, all in their early twenties.

The day was hotter than ever and the breeze from being on the truck helped stem the tide of heat washing over us all. The guys on the truck reckoned the best way into town was to share a taxi. It wouldn’t be much more than the bus and we could go where we liked then too.

‘You’re with us now gringo. On your own the bus would have cost you more than the taxi would for us. So now you can go to Itubera and back, nada problema.’

The five of us crammed into some shitty old dust covered heap with squeaking brakes and nonexistent blinkers. The bottom scraped the road every time we went over a bump or into a hole. Dodgy car or not, within an hour I was at a Bankomat and had two thousand six hundred real on me. I put a thousand in my wallet and hid the rest away, mission fuckin’ accomplished. Things were sweet once more.

We went to the shopping centre and I started ticking off the checklist. I got fresh bread rolls with cheese and luncheon meat so I could share another meal with my neighbours and return their kindness. I also got a jar of green olives, a bag of granola and some tins of tuna that I could open with my small machete. Mangoes, huge, soft and sweet went in the basket too, along with other assorted tropical fruit, all good staples to keep the body going while I punished it over the next week.



Out the front I saw my friends throwing the bottles of water they'd just bought over each and chasing one another about. My questions were answered after a soaking of my own. 'Vodka amigo, nada problema.' They were also tipping some purple coloured stuff in to big plastic iced tea bottles too. Fuck they had a lot of booze. Seven litres of vodka in all and about ten of the purple fizzy stuff I took to be some form of alcoholic energy drink.

Back in the car we were drinking from one of the bottles of purple fizzy madness when we came up around a familiar corner. I recognised the cafe where me and Ol Bushy Moustache had stopped for a well deserved beer that day, and sure as shit there was that same copper standing right there in the middle of the road, with a chromed canon in one hand, and baton in the other. We were waved down by three others, although I think that was not needed. We all got his meaning. We were taken out of the car and I was separated from the locals. I knew what was coming next and started emptying my pockets on to the car boot. He picked up my passport first and got on the radio, then went through my wallet.

There was about nine hundred real after my little shopping trip. The rest stayed in its hidden place, not to be found. I was counting my lucky stars once again for my motorbike ride down and the word of warning. Also too, thanking the gods for Jack in the box and Tucu whom without, I may have taken the risk of bringing it all with me.

The police found some weed on one of the other guys, but the Pigs just took it along with the twenty reals he had in his wallet. With a wave and a tchau, 'bye' we were sent on our way.

'Oi amigo they said they saw you in the car and picked you as a gringo straight away, that's why they stopped us. If it was you they found the marihuana on, they'd have emptied your bank out, or at least made you withdraw the maximum limit. They know us Brazilians have no money to pay bribes, that's why they just took the twenty real. They probably want a beer to go with the joint they just got.' And with laughter and purple tongues in our bottoming out, shitty old car we drove back to the drop off point.

There we came across another enterprising young local who had a beach buggy with removable panels installed, prime for smuggling.

'Oi amigos hide all your alcohol in here so the security down on the beach don't see it, and I'll take you to the party along the shorefront eh!'

Obviously a practised smuggler and obviously on our side. Brilliant.

'Universo Paralelo!!! Woo hoo!!' yelled from the sweet young thing with us.

'Universo Paralelo!' we all yelled in return. A cheer went up across the car park.

'Universo Paralelo Arrambimba!!!!!! Woo hoo!!! Yea pah!!!' as hundreds of others joined in.

We drove off down a different road from the one the trucks used. As we made straight for the beach the yells and chorus's of the festivals name faded behind us.

E ENTÃO COMEÇA. NÓS ENTRAMOS O UNIVERSO PARALELO

(And so it begins. We enter the Parallel Universe)

We drove a couple of kilometres down the beach, with the waves crashing on our left hand side left. The frenzy becoming visible ahead of us on the right, matched with a soft pulsing rhythm.

Whoomp, whoomp, whoomp, whoomp, breaking over the rattling lawn mower noise of the little yellow dune buggy.

First we passed the chill out dome with its purple-red top and sides, next came the giant heads of Buddha, which led back to the main stage.

The stage was giant techni coloured pyramid with evolving Hindu Gods, wearing their crowns. They're blue, orange, yellow, and pink. Starting from the left was the face of man, the next was part man part elephant, then part man part dog, part man part monkey, before materialising as just man once more. I would spend my time in front of that stage, staring wide eyed in amazement, tears almost streaming down my face as my mind twisted with the confusion of colours; and from the looks they gave me, and from their smiling expressions.

Although the music hadn't started there yet, my curiosity and excitement was reaching a crescendo, knowing that those distant bass lines meant that somewhere it was on. It was on big time!

As we passed the next figurehead of those immortal Gods, emanating vibes of peace; there it was for all to behold, the minimal stage in full throw. Maybe a thousand pairs of hands in the air, shirts off, beers going down, and sunglasses hiding eyes wide open, as the stage pounded out its sound. Whoomp, whoomp, whoomp, whoomp, thundered over the cheers of the crowd. The electrifying static energy was palpable. Several hundred were on the sand around the sunken pirate ship, two or three hundred more under the red and white striped shade, and another two or three hundred more were dancing in the ocean. The gentle waves crashed around them along with the odd surfer riding the green room.

'Woo hooooo!' That was us, hugging each with other high fives flying.

'Bryce come with us quickly we'll show you where we stay. You can drop off your stuff at ya' tent then come back and party with us, sim?'

'Sim amigos. Yeah fuck yeah!!' We unloaded the car making sure nothing was left behind. I joined the others through the minimal dance floor. The place was fuckin' wild man!

It was the first stage to get up and goin'. People had been waiting on that beach for days, waiting in Brazil for weeks, and waiting in their homes for months. They'd saved up, worked hard, made sacrifices, and now they here.

On that dance floor, it was on baby!

Universo Paralello had begun!

In full earnest it had begun!

We rushed through the sweating mass, eager to join them. My new found Brazilian friends pointed out their camp. Typical to what I knew of them, it was right beside the bar. Class.

'I'll see you here soon amigos. I wanna' have one last chance to eat and fuel my body before we begin.'

'Nada Problema Bryce. We're going to do the same. Don't rush, we'll see you within the hour ok?'

'Ok!'

I made my way away from the stages towards my little dwelling, and unloaded the shopping. Jack in the box and Tucu were drinking beer with the twins under their awning. Jack in the box with that Joker style grin, came over with my little Fear and Loathing collection.

'Amigo here. What is this one?' pointing at the MDMA.

'That's MDMA amigo, here you want to try? Hey also I brought lunch as an Obrigado for breakfast and for looking after my gear. Hey that was lucky amigo. Police were waiting out on the road, we got stopped and searched. They say they see gringo and think, 'Ha! Money.' But not this gringo, amigo.'

'Sim? Police?'

'Sim, Police, obrigado amigos for looking after my stuff. Here, I brought food for us.'

I walked over to the others and offered out the rolls, cheese and luncheon meat, also I opened a jar of fat plump olives for us to share.

'They quickly gossiped amongst themselves, the only understandable word was MDMA, which is the same in every language.

'Aah MDMA.' said the big boys. How much?'

'One hundred and sixty real.' about forty pounds. 'That's very expensive; in London is around one hundred real.' As per usual the way I spoke changed slightly so as to make it easier for them to understand.

'Bryce. If you get more can you buy some for us? We will give you the money. You cannot get MDMA in Brazil. It is only the gringos who have it.'

'Nada Problema amigos. Here eat your lunch and then let's all have some.' We toasted what might be the last supper – for a while anyway. I put some into a bottle of beer and we all shared it. The taste of ear wax lingered in the throat.

'Hey, I'm going to meet up with some people I met on my trip to Itubera, you guys wanna' come?'

'Obrigado, Bryce but Tucu and I want to have shower. Then we are going to pack down this shelter to take with us, so we have cover from the sun. Where will you be?'

'Somewhere down by the main dance floor. I'll see you guys down there eh?'

With that I went back to my tent and checked my pockets. Yes passport, wallet, phone, everyone's favourite switch blade, the acid, the weed, and the stoopid fat papers with no glue.

I decided to leave the Coke and the MD's, and them deep in my back pack. One fat line, ah fuck it two. Then off I went. It was party time!

I joined the guys from my shopping trip down at their place with the Minimal pulsing nearby. I was received with more hugs. Something I was starting to associate my holiday in Brazil with. It was much better than then feeling of being cleaned out that I had come to relate it with earlier in my adventure.

'Bryce, welcome amigo! Here take some LSD.'

'Ok.'

And so it began. I was offered half a trip. Once again a Hoffman. I placed it on my tongue and sucked on it, trying to get all the goodness before eventually washing it down with some of that purple go juice, they had bought earlier. It was warm and thick by then, and sickly sweet.

We gathered a few more of their friends and went down to the main stage. The first act of the week had just begun.

Alf had been true to his word. The speakers hanging above us were crystal clear and loud. Fuck they were loud. We found a place under some shade about fifty feet back and just to the left of the centre stage. In true Hoffman style the acid came on hard and fast. First the tingling rush through your body, starting in your chest before spreading to your fingers and toes, and the giggles, then the pastel colours, everything taking on a stark contrast to its surroundings. Standing out and framed like an expensive painting.

They had strung sprinklers between the palms, to cool those underneath with a fine mist. Nearly all of the ten thousand people must have been there. All loosening their joints and getting warmed up. All waiting for the acid to sink its teeth and shake them around like being in the jaws of a rabid pit-bull. Every face had a smile. The sun was hot, but we were sheltered

under an orange and white cloth that stretched out in every direction, another similar one on the other side of the dance floor was yellow and blue.

Like everyone else, mouth was a permanent Cheshire grin, a true sign that I was in Brazil.

‘Here Bryce take some more LSD.’ from my friend. Opening my mouth I received another dose, not even bothering to see how much I’d been given. It was just tongue out and chew. The sensations were ever increasing; I had to get a video of this, but I struggled to work out how my phone worked. After a complicated few minutes I managed to keep myself together long enough to push record.

Man, I had to let my friends back in London know, so after spending another fifteen minutes, most of it with one eye closed to stop the visions, I managed to get out.

‘Dancing in the sunshine picking acid from my teeth.’ Then finished with a quote from Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. ‘And then Zang!’

Wow the acid was making me feel good. Made me wanna’ share.

‘Hey you guys want some MDMA? I’ve got a gram of it back at my tent. But hey you can’t bring everyone. I didn’t wanna’ bring it with me ‘cause I’m still a little rattled by the police earlier so I left it with the coke back at my tent.’

‘Yeah man. Hey guys lets go, Bryce has some MDMA.’ A cheer from the shopping crew confirmed they were up for it and the four of us floated on clouds back to my place, with a quick stop off to buy some hard fought for beer. It’s always harder queuing up to buy stuff when ya’ wrecked. I was proud of myself for going into town earlier and sorting out my cash situation. Jesus, now I was wasted it took all my nerve just to stand at the bar and order four beers.

We got back to my palace in the sun and I rack up four fat lines, half MDMA and half cocaine. I was gonna’ have to get some more coke soon. I’d ask Hiro to sort it out.

‘Here guys have a line of this! It’s coke and MD mixed. The single guy was in like a fox to a rabbit, but the other two held off.

‘Everything ok? Don’t worry it’s good shit.’

‘Obrigado Bryce, but we don’t do cocaine. I don’t mean to be rude can we just have a line of the MDMA?’

Brazil eh? Less people do cocaine here than in London. This is s’pose to be South America man! Oh well whatever.

‘Of course you can dude. Here are you sure?’

‘Yes I’m sure amigo. Obrigado though!’

‘Cool as, more for us then.’ I said and winked to his friend. Help ya’self dude lets finish off these other two, so I can make some more. He didn’t need a second invite.

I made them good ones. One for him and one for his pretty girlfriend.

‘This is gonna’ hurt amigo but hey, get stuck in. No pain no gain eh?’

I’d gotten’ over my little paranoia of the Police. My friends reassured me they would have been paid off, to make sure they kept their distance. So I decided to bring the MD’s and Charlie with me.

‘Hang on let me roll a Rastafarian sized spliff for the walk and we’ll head back to the rest of your friends.’

They had a quick gossip amongst themselves, before flying at me with a big group hug. ‘Obrigado amigo you seem so great. I wanna’ see you go craaaazy! Come on lets party!’

With the acid coming on strong and the MD removing any question marks the LSD created, we nearly ran back. Positive energy and bright auras surrounded us. The mixed sensations from the drugs felt close to a mild electrocution, and with happiness oozing from each and every one of us, we made it back to the dance floor.

I’ve mentioned my tattoos but we were surrounded by some outstanding ones. You’d see the odd angel wings down the back, a lot of really nicely detailed tribal stuff, and then

passing by; one I recognised from my time at Ban Sabaii, a club on Koh Phangan island in Thailand.

It was a thin Buddha with all the bones and muscle fibre showing beneath a translucent skin. He was surrounded by astrological signs and sitting in the meditative Lotus position, legs crossed with hands facing up resting on his knees. It was all fine lines, done in red and blue. It's one of the most detailed tattoos I've ever seen and I'd recognise it anywhere.

'Hey excuse me. Were you on Koh Phangan back in April?'

'Ya'. I've been travelling for a year now.'

'Hey fuck I think we partied together back at Ban Sabaii.'

'Ya' is a good chance. I can't remember though, Koh Phangan is a bit of a haze.'

'It is for all of us mate. Hey how's it? My names Bryce. Where ya' from?'

'Switzerland. Nice to meet you again, Bryce. How's this place eh?'

'Fuckin' awesome dude. Hey anyway I won't keep ya'. We're here for another week I'll catch ya' again soon.'

'Cool, see you then.'

I didn't know how, but I knew that Tattoo, and the more I thought about it. The less it seemed that meeting him here was an accident. I started becoming sure that the reason I originally Googled, psy trance parties in Brazil, was because of a conversation with that guy. In fact I became positive of it. The acid put a vague conversation in my head.

I was happy as a pig in shit.

'Hey Bryce you want some more LSD ? I wanna' see you go craaaazy man!'

'Yeah but hey let's try mine.'

Theirs were a little rough looking and mine had all been carefully wrapped in foil. They came from a good source too, that being Hiroyuki.

I unwrapped two, tore them both in half and shared them out amongst the four of us. Although they had another five or so friends with them, fuck it, they were all lovely but I'm not made of money. These were the guys I'd been on the adventure with.

Sure enough mine were stronger. Much stronger! I decided to text my friends back in London. 'Dancing in the sun picking acid out of my teeth.' send message. My phone went to the sent part and there staring me in the face was the same text from before. Jesus how much time had passed between now and then? How much acid had I taken? Fuck LSD's not a toy man. You can't just keep sticking it in your mouth and expect everything to keep going ok. I needed a little more MD to mellow my racing mind and lessen any question marks that might start to surface. I poured nearly half a gram into my beer and asked my friend to hold the drink while I closed the bag and put it away. I turned around and received an empty bottle surrounded by six or so grinning faces.

'Where the fucks my MD man?'

'We finished it! Obrigado amigo!'

'But you didn't even save me any. I hadn't even had a mouthful!'

What the fuck? Using cunts. That was rude man. Fuck these guys. I decided to slope off, get another beer and try again.

'I'm just going to the bar, back in a moment amigos.' then went to a bar on the other side of the dance floor.

Manned up I got another beer and made my way to right in front of the stage, I made sure they weren't around, and tipped the last of the MD in, then necked the beer in less than a minute, like I was drinking in some frat party boat race.

I danced there for a while letting everything wash over me. The MD's bringing inner peace once more.

After a timeless while I started to miss the guys, so I went back to look for them. With the sun setting in an orange and blue haze over the beautifully tranquil ocean in the background, I found the one with the single friend on but not the others.

‘Where are the other guys dude?’

‘Oh amigo. My friend go craaaazy so they take him back to the tent.’

This didn’t come as a surprise, they were starting to go wild when I left them. We had taken a lot of LSD and the MDMA mixed with that purple sweet crap they drank can’t have been good. I remembered Alf and the Goa stage and thought it would be a good idea to find them. Find some more veteran cooks to hang out with for the night.

‘Amigo can I have some more of your MDMA?’

‘It’s all gone dude. You guys fuckin’ took it all before and didn’t even save me any!’

‘Oh. Well I’m going to see my friends then.’ and with that he was off.

Rude fuck!

I bid the main stage fair well and with wide, unblinking watering eyes, started towards the everglades with a purpose of finding that little rickety ol’ bridge towards what would be the strangest night ever.

A CONEXÃO DE Índia. PASSE TEMPO COM LEGNENDS

(The India connection. Spending time with Legends)

The bridge rocks up and down, feeling like it could fall to pieces at any moment. There's masses of humanity trying to push their way through. Some going my direction, some coming towards.

Was it built for this many? Certainly doesn't feel like it.

It's long too. This is taking fuckin ages. I don't remember it being this long last time. Were there any branches in it? Have I taken a wrong turn? 'Excuse me mate. Does this take you to the Goa stage?'

'Yeah, just keep heading that way.' pointing back over his shoulder.

I could hear the music now. It was loud and the bass seemed to ripple. Why hadn't I heard it before? Must have been too caught up in myself. Oh well can't be long now.

Fuckin' Jesus look at all these people. This bridge is only two feet wide, why didn't they make it bigger?

Oh how'm I gonna' get past these fullas?

'After you dude.'

Check out this guy he looks fucked up.

Note to self; try and not get that fucked up! You're out here on your own!

Jesus that music's weird. Dooga, dooga, dooga, dooga, continuously. And the random sounds wrapped around it? Fuckin' crazy!

Sounds like someone made them with an accordion or some shit. Like there's some crazy gypsy on the stage bouncing from leg to leg, while wrenching that thing between his arms with all his might. And somehow he's managing to keep in time with that rampant beat.

Oh thank God, there it is. There is light at the end of this tunnel. A pink and blue one but a light never the less.

Ha!

Finally I stepped out of the wobbly world that was the bridge. Felt like I'd just spent a day on that thing! The journey over it took so long I made friends and shared drugs with them. But hey, there I was, in that land of ancient culture and dance, which was born in South West India, and here it was now, hidden deep in the heart of Brazil.

My foot touched solid land and it was like I had stepped into a new world. The air was different, clearer, I could breathe more deeply. With my lungs full, I could feel the freshness and purity of it, with just a subtle hint of the oceans salt on my tongue.

There were little glowing crabs up in the trees, and what looked like jelly fish strung up between the palms and the stage.

'Excuse me; are there little crabs and things tied up over there?'

'Sim Amigo. It's cool eh!'

'Oh thank God I thought it was just me. He, he, he. Have a good night eh dude.'

Where's Alf? He's gotta' be here. At least it's not too crowded and there's some space between people so you can get through.

Fuck I gotta' have another look at that tree. That's weird man. Crabs. What a creepy thing to put up.

Everything's glowing here. There's no main lights so to speak of, to drown out the blackness. Just a couple of big illuminated purple fuzzy orbs making anything of colour light up like the moon.

There he is. Fate eh?

That was easy. Right there under the coconut tree. Alf, his sister, the BFG and Hiro too! 'Hey guys how's it! Fuckin' awesome eh? Fuck this music's crazy man. What the fuck is it?'

'Hey man great to see you!' Big hug. 'Great eh! They're playing proper old school Goa man. All the classic stuff!'

It was strange stuff alright. Now it sounded like someone was opening and closing a cash register, timed with the bass going one hundred and seventy beats per minute.

‘Have you tried the acid?’ asked Hiro.

‘Yeah dude, yours is the business. I had some Brazilian guys giving me theirs all day and it was half assed. We took yours and I think it might have broken one of them. I’m all good though. I’m fuckin’ flying brother!’

‘Cool man glad you like them. You want a joint?’

‘Fuckin’ eh I do. Hey how about I give ya’ a hundred reals, if you come across any coke can you pick it up for me? I trust ya’. It’s not like you’re going anywhere is it?’

‘True, but nah I’m fine, if I come across any I’ll pick some up for ya’. It’s not like you’re going anywhere either!’

He passed me a fat joint. It had the dense smoke and sweet smell of good quality hash. It cut right through me, right through the drugs.

One good lung full, and as I’m holding my breath; Zang! For real!!!

It hits me like a thunder bolt. So strong I nearly stumble. Everything starts to get green and orange lights streaming around it. The colours flow around all the silhouettes in the night.

The trees with the crabs, the crabs themselves, even the jelly fish. Fuck!

What the fuck is that! Fuck Jesus I haven’t noticed him before.

Over on the right, a big fuckin’ blue guy resting on one knee was playing the flute in the most beautiful fuckin’ garden. There were two peacocks behind him pecking away at something on the ground.

‘Check that out!’

But the thing was, the peacocks were actually movin’ about looking for food, and he’s waving that big fuckin’ flute around.

It’s gotta’ be the wind blowin’ the picture.

I lick my finger and hold it in the air, nah, no wind. I gotta’ check this shit out. It’s like someone’s cut a door into another world.

I crept around the side to get a better grasp of the situation.

No it’s just a painting. A fuckin’ good one though. It was like a window to a universe created out of fluorescent ink.

Hey where have the others gone? Ah fuck it I’ll look in a minute, I need a cigarette first.

Click, light, smoke. Ahhh that feels good. The first deep inhale seemed to time itself with a big shiver down my spine. Who could ask for more than to be in this wonderful, magical place?

Oh this cigarette is so good I wanna’ smoke two at once. That’d be strange though, socially odd. But I can think it can’t I? You know what I need? I need to buy a big fat fuckin’ cigar. Something I can really taste.

‘Excuse me mate is there a bin around here?’

‘Yeah, tied to the other side of that post over there.’

‘Thanks. Hope ya’ have the best time ever!’

‘S’cuse me please, s’cuse me.’ as I try to reach the post that’s five metres away but might as well be five hundred metres away. The more I walked towards it the further it seemed to be. I was trying not to invade any ones space or fall into them and received a hundred smiles and handshakes on the way.

What? No bin. That’s cruel man. I believed him.

All the way back now, the fag butt I was tryin’ to bin, a smouldered black stub no longer smoking.

‘Hey man there wasn’t any bin over there. That was mean dude.’

‘Yeah there is man, here I’ll show you. Pass me ya hand I’ll lead the way.’

‘Thanks dude.’



Back through the people and their now familiar faces. 'Hey how ya' been? Like this? Fuckin' awesome eh? And this music, fuckin insane eh!' More hugs, more handshakes, more smiles, more friends.

'Here man here's the bin, told you.' And he pointed at a half full black bag tied to the post.

'Oh, dude sorry, I was lookin' for like a proper bin or something. Domestic blindness I guess. Anyway cheers.' and threw the cigarette butt in.

'Is that all. Just for a fag end?'

'Yeah man. See all this litter on the floor. Not one bit of it is mine. Not even one cigarette butt and I'm proud of that man. Not one fuckin' fag end dude. Look how beautiful this place is, I haven't come all this way to Brazil to fuck it up and leave a mess everywhere. Especially here where it's so fuckin' pristine. It's bad enough that we're dancing all over it. Not one butt dude is mine!'

And with that I went off to find Alf again, still with the chasers of orange and green encircling the world around me.

There they are, Alf, his sister and the BFG. Hiro was gone though. Fair enough.

'This is cool eh!' pointing over at the blue guy but meaning everything.

'You like that? It's a classic Hindu scene of the God Shiva, and the one behind the stage that's Ganesha.'

There was a big fuckin' elephant statue being carried up onto the stage. Whoever was carrying the shrine must have had balls of steel, 'cause they were bringing it up through a flaming tunnel, and fire was licking the edges all around them. Ganesha was sitting on top of what looked like a giant pink lotus flower, placed upon a cushion. This Lord of success and destroyer of evils sat crossed legged with each of his four arms, carrying something different yet symbolic. All the while his trunk was waving this way and that.

'Fuckin' amazing! How the fuck are they doing that? I'm goin to see what's goin on, back in a minute.'

Through the crowd again, faces coming and going. Edging ever closer for a more thorough examination of what was before me. And there it was, my mind's eye slowly came into focus once I got close. Once again the 3D TV I had for vision had been tricked.

It wasn't a statue at all, but another well painted, detailed banner.

Ganesha's got a fat human body to signify the earthly existence of humanity, and elephant's head to symbolize the soul. Is Trunk which was swinging all over the place although there was no wind, represents the Om. All this was leaning out over the DJ and the insane mechanical music he was playing. A monster of a man himself, he goes by the name of Laughing Buddha.

How much time had passed while I tried to figure out what all this meant? Why had this great Lord flown here here on a pink lotus through a flaming tunnel? What I was doing here?

'Hey we got you a beer man,' said Alf, bringing me out of my trance. 'This music man, it's classic, straight from Mother India. They were playing these tunes at the parties when I was there.'

There must have been about twenty fuckin' sounds going at once; the bass and endless dream of noise would pause briefly just to load up again and send what was left of my mind into the star-filled sky. It was packed with old raw electronic sounds. Not the finely tuned orchestral music you hear in a lot of House and Trance music these days. To me it was like they'd gone out and recorded the rhythms of the world themselves. Everyday noises, like tractors, chainsaws, cash machines, and all kinds of other weird stuff. It would pause every now and then for effect, allowing me to think they were gonna' give you a chance to piece my reality back together. But no; it was timed perfectly, and at just the point before all the

dots connected again. It would seize those fragile pieces in its fists and drag them back out into the cosmos.

The whole time that elephant was centre stage swinging his trunk and four arms about the place, while Shiva was over to the right waving his flute in that perfect garden, with the peacocks fluttering around. All the while little jelly fish floated above, orange, pink, yellow and green along with the crabs strung up in the coconut trees.

Everything encompassed by the orange and green neon chasers. It was pure magic. Like nothing else in the world.

The psychedelic experience eh! It's in a league of its own.

Our brains had had enough, so made our way back to the main stage, so we could collect our thoughts. There were still about a thousand party goers and the volume of the music had been turned up a notch. It was almost painful.

The wind was starting to blow a gale, and they had pulled a plastic sheet across the front of the stage to protect the expensive equipment used by the producers and DJ's from the approaching storm. I wanted one final joint before heading off to bed and asked Alf if he knew where Hiro was, so I could buy some of that charris off him.

'He could be anywhere man.'

'True. Fair enough. I thought it might be a long shot.'

We danced away for a couple more minutes before hey presto who should walk past? Hiroyuki himself. Fuckin' awesome, I was gonna' top this night off and hit the hay.

'Hey dude, can I get some of that charris off of ya?'

'Cool. How much do ya want?' and pulled out a big black ball that resembled Play-doh.

I took a hundred reals worth and rolled a joint big enough to match the experience I'd just had. We puffed it down and with our ears close to bleeding from the noise; I bid my friends farewell.

When I passed the pirate ship I saw that a few hundred were still tearing that place up too. The music was significantly slower and more mellow there, thank fuck for that. I was glad fate had put me beside that stage for when it came time to sleep.

DEZEMBRO 31, NOVA VÉSPERA DE 2008 de ANOS

(December 31<sup>st</sup>, New Years Eve 2008)

I woke up to my eye lids feeling like weights were attached to them, it was like I had blinked and the earth had gone from night to scorching day in an instant. My mouth felt and tasted like some small creature had died in it. The tent was hot enough to fry an egg in and I couldn't get out the door quick enough. The Minimal was still pounding, boom, boom, boom, boom, bloop, bloop, blip, bloop. Although loud, it was much better than the continual, dooga, dooga, dooga, raap, raap, raap, raap, of the Goa stage, when it comes to sleep and trip over's anyway.

The first call of the day was a shower, as well as a scrub of the teeth and tongue. I needed to scrape off the excesses of the night before.

The shower cubicles were put together just for the festival and lacked a certain amount of privacy. Typically you had a few buff guys – shavin' like a chick should be – slowly drying themselves down with their big cocks swaying like Ganesha's fuckin' trunk. Fuckin' fags.

Away from all the noise of the party a strange kinda' silence was happening just to the side of the showers, silent except for the sound of twenty sets of teeth being scrubbed. It was surreal, utter peace and quiet; you could hear the birds in the trees and the cicadas in the bushes. People were wide eyed and looking around at each other. All were smiling, or as much as you can while brushing away and foaming at the mouth. The magic that had been building over the last few days could be felt there in that place. I guess 'cause it was without all the other distractions that surrounded you inside Universo Paralelo proper.

Here on the outskirts, where the trucks picked you up and dropped you off there was a moment for quiet contemplation. Just the soothing sound of the water from the showers splashing on the concrete floor calming you the way a Japanese water garden might and the rhythmical synchronised sound of teeth being cleaned.

It was New Year's Eve and we all knew it. This is what we were here for. The electricity of it was caressing us. The energy of it giving me Goose bumps on that thirty something degree day. Once again I didn't know the time and once again it didn't matter. The only time it would matter today; would be the stroke of midnight.

I tramped back to my tent, feeling alive and ready to share my morning breakfast with Jack in the box, that wild grin of his, and the darling Tucu.

This too was a silent affair; I think it was a combination of the lack of common language, the lack of sleep, and the comfortable lack of a need to fill the silence. Breakfast consisted of tinned tuna straight from the can, granola straight from the bag and washed down with honey, and olives from the jar. Granola's fuckin' great, it fills you and keeps everything working but isn't too full of raisins and shit. It's good sustenance. Raisins are fuckin' gross. Raisins, peas and baked fuckin' beans, bluurgh! Later on I'd make sure I got an Acai in for the vitamins and energy boost and that would be me sorted, we were making sure the day with a good grounding.

The boys rose from their tent. 'Ah Bryce, Bom dia. Hey did you find some MD?'

Oh fuck, I'd completely fuckin' forgotten. Little white lie.

'Oh I never saw the guy man, he could be anywhere but I'll stumble across him at some point. It's not like he's going anywhere.'

It was kinda' true; I didn't know where Hiroyuki was and would have to wait until I stumbled across him.

'You want to come for swim Bryce?'

'Fuckin' eh dude! I couldn't think of anything better.' Apart from a line of course, and then a swim.'

'Sorry amigo. Um? I no understand. You speak so fast. You want to come for swim?'

'Sim amigo, Sim.' And grabbed my towel to let him know I understood.

I checked my Charlie, just under a gram left, so I decided to hold off and save it for a proper go in the afternoon.

Down on the beach, the scene peppered with candy striped awnings, it seemed like most of the festival inhabitants were camped up for a day of relaxation before the anarchy ahead. We were all hustling for shade under Jack in the box's one.

I was sat eating my bowl full of acai, granola and mango having earlier ventured up past the good ship Minimal to get some beers and a last healthy meal before the onslaught. Only Werner, who had been confident in his predictions, knew what was coming. Predictions gained through veteran knowledge.

The acai was rich, sweet, cold and purple. The pieces of nearly frozen mango in the sorbet like mix helped to cool me as I sat about marvelling at the situation I now found myself in.

I was with the locals and practising my Brazilian, and taking enjoyment in the idea that I was getting more of a cultural experience through coming on my own, 'cause it forced me to go out and meet people. Would I be sitting there on the beach with those people if I had five friends with me? Or would we just be hanging out in our group, missing all these opportunities for a more diverse experience? And to go with all that, there wasn't a cloud in the sky, the surf was perfect and the light wind took the edge off the heat, fuckin' perfect! Yet again Brazil was postcard picture fuckin' perfect!

With my beer finished and the guys watching my stuff it was time for another dip. I was out there splashing about, really wanting to body surf the waves and missing most of the time, and not really giving a shit 'cause it was fuckin' invigorating man. I was in love with a country and its people.

To the right you could see the pirate ship with a thousand people dancing all over the place. They were, up on the deck of it, all around it, under the shade. Man they were spread out all the way down the beach. They were even raving in the ocean, it was fuckin' amazing. There were thousands of people everywhere. In the near distance, the big Buddha heads sparkled blue and gold. Further up, about a kilometre away you could see the chill out dome. Universo Paralello was massive, and every single one of us was lovin' it! The up for it crowd down by the ship were cheering and whistling, soaking up what the DJ was trying to get across. There were even the surfers again!

The queues were gone from the voucher stands, the beer here was cheap, and we were high on life, high on good times and of course a lot of us were high on drugs too. Later, all of us would be.

Ol' Rinkadink or Werner – the only guy out of that bunch I'd ever actually heard of – words, could never be truer.

While floating out in the waves, I spied back on the shoreline a figure jumpin' around all over the place, his arms flappin' about everywhere. I just had enough time to think, fuck I hope there's not a shark and then for the first two beats of the Jaws theme tune, daah, dah, before realizing it was Allesandro! Holy shit Allesandro, tanned as fuck, big smile, no shirt and just a rucksack on! What the fuck? It just doesn't get better than this! I caught a final wave back in and greeted my old friend by kicking water on him.

'Bryce! How are you? I made it. And what's best is I didn't even have to pay! I've walked about twenty miles today up the beach. I got dropped off from the island next to Morro de Sao Paulo at a small fishing town about forty miles away and have spent the last two days walking here.

'You fuckin' what? What about the bus tickets?'

'I am never in a hurry to go anywhere my friend, so I sold them. Last night I camped on the beach, drank some rum, had a fire, and looked at the stars. Today I am here, and I find you straight away. Unbelievable! And the best thing is I didn't have to pay a thing, a guy asked me if I had a ticket and I was like. Hey no man I am just on holiday, look I only have

this small bag and want to see what's going on. He was cool, he was like. Yeah go ahead as long as you do not stay the night it's fine. Perfecto!

I'll give you perfecto man. My tent's just on the other side of those sand dunes. You can leave all ya' stuff there while ya' check things out. It's totally safe we're all keeping an eye on each other's stuff. I've even got some food. Hey you wanna' get high man? 'Cause I got just about every way to do that too! You can crash in my tent any time y'a want Allesandro. My house is your house.'

'Oh thank you Bryce. You are a true friend.'

'Da nada dude.' and I meant it. 'Here come meet my friends.'

'Amigos, this is my amigo from Italy, Allesandro.'

There were Bom dias, hugs and handshakes all round. Allesandro's easy smile made him easy to like. He fitted in straight away.

We whiled away the next few hours, everyone taking their turn to walk up to the raging pirate ship with its mad cap bunch of early starters and their grinding jaws and lollipop suckin'. They were gettin' on down to that that crazy minimal, hootin' and a hollerin' with their fists in the air, while doin the minimal shuffle.

I decided it was time to break a momentary silence, and begin the New Year's celebrations as only one would when in a paradise like Universo Paralelo.

'Hey, you dudes wanna' take some LSD?'

That grin which made it obvious to why he got the tattoo crept its way across Jack in the box's face and with a 'Sim amigo,' I pulled out the three trips I had left, then tore them in half and divided them amongst the six of us. Although I was officially out of acid I was completely one hundred percent confident in being able to get more later. We sat in a circle all facing each other and as one, placed the little thick piece paper on our tongues, grinning like the cats that got the cream.

Enough chillin' for one day, it was party time, so we packed up our little picnic and stopped at our tent site quickly to show Allesandro where to find a shelter if he needed one later and went on down to the main stage. While there were no queues I stopped off to buy more beer vouchers from the ticket office at the bar near the good ship Minimal. This time though I followed Jack in the box's advice and got them to agree to how many beers I was going to get, before handing over my cash. It was going to be a fun day.

Everyone one was there. Thousands and thousands of us. We set up camp for the day about fifty metres back from the centre of the stage, just in front of the twirling, sparkling fans. They were spinning gently in the wind reflecting a kaleidoscope of rainbow flashes. We had brought the awning with us so we had plenty of shade, and ahead there were always the sprinklers to cool you down when it got too hot.

As I've mentioned, the stage was pyramid shaped and there was a string of Hindu Gods lined up along the back of it with different animals blended with human features. I recognised Hanuman the Ape who helped Lord Rama in his expedition against the evil forces. A symbol of strength perseverance and devotion, and to the side was another version of Ganesha the God I had travelled on a journey of the mind with the night before.

It was time to start on the Charlie but where was I going to do it? I wasn't walkin' all the way back to the tent, and it was a little too windy to chop up where we were. I remembered the toilets to the left behind the stage. So that would have to be it, reduced to sniffin' lines in the toilet again. Just like England, might as well have stayed in England, fuckin' ridiculous – except the price for coke in Brazil was cheaper. But at least in that moment of my life that was all I had to complain about; lines in the sunshine, hidden behind a toilet door. So me, my Thai fisherman's pants and my Fear and Loathing collection made our way through the manic crowd, and on to oblivion.

It was mayhem; a cloud of sweet smellin' charris smoke engulfed us all. Everybody was smiling and welcoming. The crowded dance floor was filled with interesting characters, amazing tattoos and a feeling of family. It was like we'd always known each other. Beers would be offered as you glided by, spliffs and chillums would be passed. 'Feliz ano nova's,' would be shared along with the odd happy New Year's. And through that mix of individual characters there was Gaudi and Llana.

'Hey, guys. Here it is eh? New Year 's Eve. Whenabouts are ya's playin?'

'I'm playing the midnight set tonight,' Gaudi said.

'You're fuckin' what? Dude, that's the fuckin' prime time set. Fuuuuckin' eh Dude! That's fuckin' awesome man. Hey I'll be on the dance floor for ya' man! Hey look sorry to rush but I gotta' go to the toilet. See ya's later!' What good guys!

The bogs, like the showers, looked like they had been purpose built for the festival. But hygiene wise they were the cleanest festival loos I'd ever been in. As soon as a person finished some elderly ladies went in and mopped it all out and made sure they were pristine for the next raver.

Those who have been to the mighty festivals of England will know, that apart from the miserable cold and rainy nights, the portaloos are something that will stick in your psyche, kind of fuck ya' head up like the first time you see Hellraiser. Their rich stench of disinfectants and foulness can be smelt from two hundred metres away. On that day though my cubicle was fresh as a daisy.

The toilets were open topped and once the door was bolted behind me, without the slight breeze, the roaring sun hit with full force.

I pulled out the coke and managed to balance one cash card on my wallet, while I chopped up a good portion of the stuff into a New-Year's-Eve-in-Brazil sized line and put that shit away faster than a Japanese bullet train with no brakes.

Straight away the sweat was streamed from me and as soon as I opened the door, the light God-sent breeze felt like a supportive friend.

A quick walk through the water they had spraying over sections of the crowd and once again feelin' like a million dollars, I grabbed some beers for everyone and went to join them.

Jack in the box boogied on over, a rhythmical movement to his step and that wild grin on his face.

'Oi amigo, you want buy some coca?'

'Fuckin eh dude! Where from?'

'Come.' motioning me to follow.

He led me to a group of guys who were busy dancing about the place. Their gear must have been good 'cause some of them looked properly fucked up. You know how it is, fingers all tense and shit, a sign of someone wired out of their brain.

Jack in the box had a quick chat with one of them, and after a ruffle through a bumbag stuffed with cash that was wrapped around his waist, the guy produced a little baggy with a solid rock in it.

'Hi amigo. Ingerlish?'

'Sim amigo. Is this your Coca?' It looked good, had an almost bluish sheen to it.

'Quanta costa?' (How much)

'Oitenta reals.'

'Oitenta? Eighty reals? Your fuckin' kidding me. I can get it in London for that price. What the fuck, this is Brazil dude. Here look this is what I've already got and this cost Cinquente reals.' pulling out my gear.

'But amigo look how good it is. Look how greasy. This is the best there is! Here touch it.'

It was true. This was fuckin good gear. I wiped my finger across the top of it and it left a feelin' like Vaseline on the end. *Fuckin' good gear.* But this was Brazil and there was no

fuckin' way I was payin' the cunt eighty reals for coke. Besides I was sure I could get some later when I caught up with Hiroyuki. So fuck that guy. It was fifty reals or nothing.

'So what it's greasy. Mine's greasy too.' I pulled The Mans' gear out. Go on, your turn, you touch it. Nada Oitenta real, Cinquente real! You've got no chance of getting Oitenta real outta' me dude.'

'Nada gringo. Oitenta real'

'Oh gringo now is it? Sod ya' then. Tchau amigo.' With that I spun on my heel and me and Jack in the box went back to the others. What a prick I'd gone from amigo to gringo pretty fuckin' quickly. 'Oitenta real! Who the fuck was he?'

Jack in the box laughed and slapped me on the back before recalling the story to the others, all of whom laughed as well with an admiring look in their eyes. With them I felt like an amigo, NOT a gringo. To me there's a BIG difference.

The sun was burning hot and I was glad we had the awning with us for a bit of shelter. There were day-trippers everywhere. Some were stood dead still, staring up at the sky, some danced, and one dude spent about half an hour staring at the glittering wind mills that were just behind us, with tears streaming down his face through lack of blinking and obvious vivid hallucinations. Another guy danced past, shoes off with a back pack on, a kind of house for rent sign stickin' out the top, with a giant version of the of the Hoffman image attached to it. Like the pied piper a group of people followed this Tambourine man until he paused to collect their cash, dishing out LSD like ice cream.

Jack in the box joined the crowd of excited kids and proudly strode back over with a strip of trips and divided them up amongst us. Allesandro pulled out some small metallic instrument that he placed between his lips and plucked away at it. The instrument made a strange liquid doinging sound that seemed to time itself with your feet stomping on the ground. It created the strange sensation that it was you making that noise whenever you stamped your bare feet into the dirt.

I along with a lot of other people, like to rave with my shoes off. I like the connection with the Earth. The oneness of it. The feeling of peace and sense of freedom; there's nothing like dancing to good Trance with feet in the dirt. It's not like the other dance floor scenes like House with its fashion conscious go getters and queues out the front of its clubs or Drum and bass with its harder crack smokin' image.

Psy trance is about the person, the people, the spirit, and the sounds. There's none of the preconceptions of style and image. Hippy people have got this bang on the money and I was proud to be one of them. (Although don't tell anyone. He, he, he,)

The day passed in the blink of an eye. Allesandro had earlier declined more acid and said he was going to go back to the tent so he could he get some stuff, wishing us a great day, and sending us good vibes for a happy new year in case we didn't see him before the countdown.

We smoked joint after joint alternating between charris and weed, and we drank beer after beer, not altering that pattern at all except for who went to the bar. It was a blissful day. I had none of the visuals from the night before, my system now, quite topped up with LSD and my tolerances to it that much stronger.

It reached a point though where I felt I 'd taken enough acid, and remembering playing with fire is playing with fire, I was content to see my way through the day with the buzz I was already on. Of course I got stuck in to my Charlie – cocaine's not a drug so to speak. It's a way of life!

The day passed in an emotional blur and Mr Sun set with all his glory into the dark Atlantic.

The others wanted to go back to the camp and clean up before the night began, so I bid them farewell till later, and decided to go find my Scandinavian family.

I journeyed through the crowds along the main track that led towards Alf, the chill out dome and the lost world (Goa stage).

Sellers had set up their wares for sale; homemade trinkets, bangles, ear-rings, necklaces and the like. Things made from wood and shell, nice leather pouches and boxes to store your 'Tobacco' in, all sorts of shit. They were a nice bunch, easy to chat to. One guy even pointed to small pieces of hash. It was different colours, different textures, some sticky and wet looking, some dry and crumbly. Of course there was the obligatory Play-doh like Charris.

I saw a Brazilian girl that I recognised from Morro De Sao Paulo. She said some mates of hers had gone to get some mescaline, saying that I just had to wait with her for a while. Having never tried mescaline and only with legend to go by, without question I was willing to give it a go. After a couple of hours and a fair few spliffs I decided that there was more to do and see than sit around waiting for something that might not show up. So with a sweet, 'Tchau' and a 'Feliz ana nova,' I bid that natural beauty good bye and continued towards where I thought the others might be.

That's one of the things with hippy chicks. A lot of them are so beautiful, yet they wear no makeup. Many have unkempt hair, because they're roughing it and like me, clothes that haven't seen a wash for a while. It's because of this complete down to earthiness, that the simple beauty of hippy chicks shines through. The women in almost one hundred percent of the cases are strong, independent and get along. Not like in the rest of the world, where women, I feel, can have a tendency to treat each other with suspicion and open dislike. Let's be honest here, in general chicks just don't like each other.

I crossed that Indiana Jones of a bridge and searched for my friends. They weren't to be seen but that didn't matter. I had after all, travelled here on my own and like I say, when you travel on your own you have to be prepared to spend time by yourself. Simple fact. Although it is always nice to feel like you belong to a group. But I had that. In fact I had more than one group. I had two who I felt almost related to, It felt like we'd known each other for more than a few days. I felt I could trust them with my money, my drugs and my friendship. And coming across something like that gives me a warm feeling every time.

The land of Goa was just getting started. I looked expectantly for my other good amigo Ganesh, but to my shock he wasn't there. He was gone! Another figure had taken precedence to watch over us and the place didn't feel the same, but I also wasn't quite as high. My mind had a much clearer view. I rattled about to that crazy music with my flip flops beside me, taking the odd peek at the crabs in the trees and getting a laugh from it every time.

It must have been getting close to midnight so it was time to make my way back to the main stage and to see if I could find my Brazilians. Yes I was content on my own, but of course I would prefer to spend my New Year's with familiar faces. Yes I could just have just said 'Hello,' to the person next to me and started a new friendship, but I wasn't really in the mood to talk, but yet wanted to feel part of a group. Besides; you've gotta' be at the main stage for New Year's right?

There was no wind at the Goa stage so an outdoor line would be just the ticket to motivate me for my walk. So sitting right there in the middle of the small crowd I racked up a good one and begun the journey, noting there were only two fat lines left.

It was a carnival out there. At the beach end of the bridge, I could hear the sound of trumpets and strings coming from the smaller stage that was down towards Alf's. A Jazz band! Just what the doctor ordered. A while there listening to manmade sounds and I was ready for the countdown.

On the way another familiar smile came out of the night. It was a face I recognised from Morro de Sao Paulo, the island of wonder. This figure was a man in his mid-thirties, with a small dark beard and a turban. You know I like to criticise people for judging books by their covers, but back on the island, I too had been one of them. I'd never really put much effort



into getting to know him, because I judged him by what he wore, yet at the time I would have been wearing some shitty pants that I'd hacked the legs off, so who the fuck was I to judge? Anyway I haven't got anything against people who wear turbans; it was just that when I first saw him on the island, I just presumed we would have nothing in common.

Although we'd never really chatted back on Morro de Sao Paulo, at that moment in time, we both looked at each other the way old friends do. And hey at a party like Universo Paralelo, a face is a familiar face. So we greeted each other with a hug and smile and together went to the main stage. I remembered that I hadn't seen him with anyone on the island, so now he had someone to share the New Year with. Fate had brought these two solo but not lonely travellers together to spend this moment in one another's company. Two souls, who although their paths had already crossed, had not yet shared a beer.

Beer time it was. We got two each, he insisting on buying his own. My preconceptions had led me to believe that when I heard his voice it would be Asian sounding due to his garments and skin colour, but no this dude sounded more like Chong from the Cheech and Chong films. It was uncanny. But that's where the enjoyment comes from opening a book and finding out its contents, rather than just glancing at the cover and thinking you already know what's inside.

Neither of us had watches so time eluded us, but it turned out we just had time to kick off our footwear and get into a groove when the countdown began.

Like the first day of music everybody was there crowded in front of the main stage. We were stood in the centre about fifty metres back, stompin' about with dust up to our knees, digging small holes with the rhythmical stamping like Shaolin monks do with years of practise.

Then all of a sudden the music went quiet.....

'Dez, nove, oito, sete, seis.' The final countdown, man I would have sung the song but I had a New Year's tradition to keep. So I unwrapped the last of my coke, taking the two seconds I had left to bash it about into to lumpy piles and then put away half.

'Cinco, quatro, três, dois, um! feliz Ano Nooovoooooooo!!!'

'Happy New Yeeeeaaaaarrrr!!!'

'Everyone hugged everyone, feliz Ano Novos and happy New Year's where thrown about the place like early teens in a pillow fight.

'Amigo. Feliz Ano Novo!' I said to Chong. 'Would you like the last of my cocaine? It's good stuff.'

'Nah maaann I don't do that stuff. Obrigado maaann.'

Brazilians, puh! What is it with them and cocaine? Oh well. More for me and I knocked it back in one. After those five long days, Morro de Sao Paulo's coke was gone; I'd finished The Man's gear. I spent a few moments thinking of him and how his Ano Novo had gone. Was he with friends too?

'Was that really the last of your cocaine maaann?'

'Yeah dude.'

'And you were goin' to share it with me? That's cool maaann. He flashed that all-Brazilian smile, 'Hey I've got something to share with you.'

Ooh exciting stuff.

He pulled out a long but thin joint, and I remembered seeing him smoke ones like that at the Sunset Bar, way back in a different paradise. I'd judged him about that too when I saw him those few short weeks but a lifetime full of experiences ago, thinking he was short on cash or something.

'Shhhhh don't tell anyone about this maaann. It's hydroponic skunk. I grew it myself.'

Skunk! Fuckin eh! My lungs were heaving from all the charris and outdoor stuff I'd been puffing away on, and man it was good shit too, tasted fuckin' awesome.

‘Fuck this *is* good shit man!’

‘It’s Jack Herrer maaann!’

Jack Herrer is an award winning strain that cleaned up at the Cannabis Cup in Amsterdam some years back, and that thin but tasty spliff lived right up to its name.

Stood in glazy eyed wonder Gaudi came out onto stage and his baselines began to swing. The tidy lookin’, baseball cap wearin’ American kid played some stompin’ tunes to us dirty foot, tripped out, shirt off, unwashed ravers, and members of the select family of Universo Paralello two thousand and eight, and with our hands in the air and our feet in the sand we brought about the New Year in fashion.

Behind us a small stage had been erected at some point and strange yet interesting shows were being performed, fire jugglers and breathers that sort of shit. There was one that twirled some crazy glowing cube, and others doing street performance style magic. Those like me who were lucky enough to catch the show, were fuckin’ blown away.

It was in that crowd that I spied first Tucu and then the others, and with a loud, ‘Feliz Ano Novo!’ I was with my Brazilian family once more.

The ever quiet Chong said his hello’s to them and then bid me farewell, before disappearing into the night. The god’s gift of companionship and fate for the magic of the countdown disappeared with him, and then delivered to me the new gift of this group of locals who I felt the strong bond that spanned generations with.

‘Feliz Ano Novo amigos! Shall we dance?’

‘Sim amigo. Let’s smoke some charris.’

I’m easily influenced and another doobie was just the ticket, so we made our way over to the right hand side of the stage and kicked our flip flops into a pile. Under the shade cloths that gave so much protection during the day, Jack in the box rolled up a fat Brazilian sized spliff. As soon as we’d had a few puffs, he started on another; breaking down the lump of charris into little workable balls. I added a fat bud I’d been saving for just such an occasion as this and together we put enough into it to knock down a large bull.

A group of guys beside us were packing a chillum, which is a straight pipe made out of stone with one end drilled wider than the other so you can fill it up and smoke ya’self silly. The plumes of smoke engulfed us all , so I thought I’d ask, ‘Oi amigos can we use your chillum?’

‘Oh no it’s just for us.’

‘What? Why not? We’ve got our own Ganga dude. Don’t worry about that and hey, I’ll clean it out for you after.’

Jack in the box cruised over all wide eyed and expectant with childish excitement on his face.

‘Is that weed? You can’t put weed in here man. It’s only for hash man.’

‘What? What the fuck dude? It’s all the same. It’s New Year’s dude, who gives a fuck? Besides look at all the charris mixed in with it. Here show him fulla.’ I said pulling Jack’s open yet loaded hand towards him.

Two of his friends came over wearing what looked like suspicious faces. They looked like brothers, both were white but with over sized wavy brown afros, big flares and open topped Hawaiian shirts. The three of them shared a brief discussion of shaking heads and wobbly haircuts, before confirming for us, that these kids didn’t like to share with the other kids. The penny started to drop for Jack in the box and with a disappointed look then a, ‘Oh well fuck em,’ shrug of the shoulders he pulled out a skin and back flipped the sucker.

Back flipping is where you roll the joint backwards and therefore use less paper cause the sticky side is in the centre rather than the outside of the spliff. It takes some skill but you can taste the lack of excess paper.

## In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

He explained what had happened to the others and we all shared a good hearty feliz Ano Novo laugh with it, while the guys, barefoot, with wild flares and silly afros, bounced about in front of us.

'Oi amigos. You been to the Goa stage yet?'

'Nao amigo where is it?'

'I'm not telling. Come with me. I've got a surprise for you all.' And with that we bid the main stage fare well for a time.

I led my family to that far off land, one with a heart of culture, history and magic. This time I was being the local guide and them the star struck fresh faced tourists.

1 DE ANOS DE NOVO DE JANEIRO DIA

(January 1<sup>st</sup> New Years Day)

They were all there. As soon as we crossed the bridge there was my Scandinavian family, all except Hiro. Fuckin' typical. I guess the boys would have to wait a little longer for their MDMA. Such is life though.

Miguel and Serafina were there too. Just a little to the right of the others, who were under the crab tree as usual. Both groups had spent the New Year together without realising the future and one of the six degrees of separation would link them soon enough.

The BFG spotted me as we were walking over and I was received with big smiles and open arms. It was like being hugged by a football team. First the Scandinavian crew yelled and rushed towards me. Miguel had then turned, hearing the yell over the rapid throbbing music and saw me being swallowed by this group of friends, yet strangers to him, but that didn't stop him. In the middle of that Brazilian New Year's morning party, I could hear his voice loud and deep tearing towards me. Next, Jack in the box, Tucu and the boys. I couldn't see a thing but I knew each voice well, recognised each one's individual laughter.

By the time I was released from that grip of love and had a chance to gather my bearings, all three teams were introducing themselves and were already acting like old amigos, offering drinks and spliffs to one another.

'Hey dude do ya know where Hiro is?' I asked Alf.

'Nah man. He'll be around at some point though. It usually takes him a couple of hours to do a round. You know how it is.'

'Yeah fair enough. If ya see him can you let me know?'

'Cool man, hey you want a beer?'

'Yeah dude I always wanna' beer, but hey I'm buying. How many of us are there? Have ya' been introduced to everyone yet? These are my Brazilian neighbours. This is Tucu, Jack in the box and the boys. These two are Serafina and Miguel.'

I checked Alf. 'Tequila dude?'

'Nah man, no fuckin' chance.'

'C'mon man, have a fuckin' Tequila with me man. It's New Year's and when in Rome dude!'

'What the fuck's Rome got to do with it?'

'Oh well you know, we're in South America. They make Tequila in Mexico. That's good enough innit'? C'mon have a fuckin' Tequila with me.'

'Alright. Fair enough. It is New Years.'

'Fuckin eh it is, and besides we're in Brazil, at this fuckin' sweet as party! What could be better than this? Bar keep ten beers and two double Tequilas!'

'Oh fuckin' hell man!'

'Toughen up. Sounds like you need a double!'

So pretty much two quarter pint Tequilas later, ten beers in hand and a sour puss lookin' Alf in tow, we were back on the dance floor, feliz Ano Novan each other, and enjoying that crazy fucked up music. Goa trance, it's so complex, so almost.... violent, yet so hypotonic.

We danced like that, buying beers and sharing drugs, like people living true freedom from society do, and were without a care in the world.

For now anyway.

After a few hours Jack in the box's family said their farewells and bid us a 'Novos Anos bons.' (A good New Year's.)

We partied away and gossiped whenever we were able to pull our minds away from the music; mostly we partied in silence simply lost in the enormity of the sounds washing over us.

'C'mon,' said Alf, 'let's have another shot man.'

'Yeah fuckin' eh! When in Rome in dude.'

In response I got a shake of the head, big grin and a, 'Follow me man.'

'Two shot of your cheapest nastiest cachasa please, and make them doubles.'

'Whatever dude, I said. You don't give a shit? I don't give a shit. I bet the Romans didn't give a shit either, and I reckon they were drinkin' nastier shit than those, on New Year's Eve two thousand and eight years ago.'

'They wouldn't of had New Year's two thousand and eight years ago man. It's a Christian calendar thing. Jesus had apparently, only just been born remember! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!'

'Whatever! Let's never mention that again then. Now let's have these fuckin' big shot of shit you've so generously splashed out for – after that nice Tequila I got you – and forget everything that just happened. Which shouldn't be too hard 'cause my head's all over the fuckin' place. Fuck, I'll be lucky to remember tonight at all.'

That's one of the things with acid though. You can usually recollect everything. It's not like booze where people say they black out and don't remember a thing – Usually with bruises on them, or doing the walk of shame.

Two quarter pints of meths tasting cachasa later, two sour pusses were back on the dance floor.

'Hey you want some acid man?' Alf asked.

'Does a bear shit in the woods? Fuckin' eh I do!'

Didn't ask what type, didn't look to see how much of it there was, just threw it in my gob and washed it back with a beer. It was all just blending into one big tingling, brightly coloured mind trip, with audio sensory output set to full tilt anyway.

Everything was going lovely jubbly and it felt like nothing could shatter the calm and the innocence.

A tap on the shoulder. 'Oi amigo. You change?! You change?! Demanded not asked, by a local looking teen with some money in his hand.

'What? What the fuck. Get the fuck away from me.' turning back around.

Tap, tap, tap a little heavier this time. Why me? In the middle all this crowd and all these people why was this cunt determined to be hassling me? 'Get the fuck away mate. I haven't got any change!'

'Nao, you change!'

'Alf. Alf! This guy wants some change man can you help him out?' I know cold eh? But all's fair in love and war. Although I was mindful that Ganesh might have seen and karma would strike me down in the near future. But hey, he was only a painting right?

Two minutes later.

'That guy ripped me off twenty real man, what a fuckin' joke. Here in the middle of this place. That's fucked. Oh well it's only a few Krone. (Norways currency) Not letting that ruin my buzz. But what the fuck though man?'

A little of the innocence evaporated, but not enough to really take anything away from that special place, and that special time. But hey, although it's sad, I feel all gringos come to expect it in Brazil on occasion, or any third world place for that matter really. But hey such is life innit', and it's better to walk the long road than to sit in the office chair.

'The thought of cocaine crossed my mind and that little man inside my head starting scratchin' away again.

'Hey dude. How long do reckon Hiro will be?'

'He should be around any minute. Hey look there he is. What the fuck type of coincidence is that? Fuckin' funny eh? You'll have to do that more often.'

'I will! That's twice now. Like lighting a cigarette for the bus eh?'

'You do that in England too! We do it in Norway man. Fuck that's life man, it's crazy how that shit gets about.'

‘Hiro my brother! Feliz Ano Novo dude!’

‘Hey and a big, feliz Ano Novo to you! Guess what?’

‘What?’

‘I got that coke for you!’

‘What?! Awesome! You are fuckin’ kidding right? I was just like, where the fuck is Hiro? Gee I hope he’s got that cocaine and here you fuckin’ are! Ask Alf. Hey Alf did I just magically summon Hiro out of the darkness?’

‘Yeah it’s true man. Fuckin’ funny!’

‘How much for the charlie?’ like it mattered.

‘Forty reals.’

‘Sweet! How much did you get?’

‘One gram man.’

‘What? One gram? Oh dude. Ooohh man. Oh well fair enough, beggars can’t be choosers, next time ya’ come across any, can you get me five more? Here look I’ll give ya the cash now dude.’

‘Sorry man. Fuck it, next time five it is. But don’t worry about the cash in case I don’t see ya’. Anyway, it’s s’pose to be good stuff though man.’

‘We’re in fuckin’ South America so it bloody well should be my brother! Feliz Ano Novo dude. Cheers eh, I really appreciate it. Even though there’s only one. Can I get some more trips off ya too?’ then handed over the cash.

There was nowhere to chop the coke up and besides I didn’t have time. Now that I was so close to having another line, I the little man felt like he was creeping around under my skin. I crumbled that shit onto the spot at the back of my hand. (The little groove that appears at the back of your thumb muscle and in between the tendon when you squeeze your thumb against the pointer finger. That’s how they used to do it with their snuff back in the old days. It’s a good tradition to keep alive). I hovered that up with both nostrils flaring wide in the night and powder ended up all over my nose and face. I must have looked like a sticky handed child with his bag of sherbet sweets.

It filled my lungs, and choked me briefly before a hot flush swept through from top to bottom, like a falling elevator in flames.

First came the cold sweat, then the automatic gag reflex that usually hits you when you’re about to throw a whitey.

I just had time to plough my way to the back of the dance floor and have a quick scout around for those thieving kids, before droppin’ to my knees and puking my guts out. It felt like a thousand beers were passing through my lips, the tequila. Then, oh, no! Not again! The quarter pint of cheap nasty cachasa! That started me off all over again.

‘Bllaaaarrggggghhh! Hhhaaaaaawwwww. Bllaaaarrrrggghhh!’

I could taste all the different stages of my night comin’ out one after the other. Oh, no, right there in the centre of that pile of streaky goo was the trip I’d dropped only about two minutes before. What was I going to do? Actually it wasn’t even a question. Another quick look over my shoulders to make sure no one was looking and I chowed that fucker for a second time with the guilty pleasure of a kid eating a crayon. Fuck it. Why not? A swig of my beer and the acid was back in its rightful place.

A quick wipe of the face to tart myself up a little and I was back with the others like nothing had happened. Maybe they hadn’t notice.

‘Are you okay man?’

‘Yeah I’m cool, I’m cool!’

‘Well in that case. Bah, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. When in Rome eh! Why don’t *you* have a double shot of toughen the fuck up man!’

In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

'Whatever dude! I don't wanna' talk about it, let's never mention that again! He, he, he. Well that sobered me up a little. You want another beer? I gotta' start all over again. What a waste of fuckin' money!'

The night continued like that. A warm friendship on a warm night and for the first time it didn't even rain.

Dawn's early light broke through slowly, allowing time for the senses to adjust. It was time for another video, so five minutes after initially pulling out my phone and then finally managing to figure out how to unlock it – although I'd owned the fuckin' thing for over a year – I got about forty five seconds worth. The BFG, the loud noise, Miguel and Serafina along with all the rest of the crazy crowd. There was even the old white haired guy who'd asked us for drugs during the night and had obviously scored at some point, gettin' his groove on as well.

The energy of the gathering had taken hold.

A DANÇA NO ZOOLÓGICO DE ZUMBI. A VERDADE DO PROFETIZA EXPÕE SE NESTE NOVO AMANHECER.

(Dancing at the Zombie zoo. The truth of the prophesy exposes itself on this new dawn)  
Mr Sun clawed over the horizon, bearing his wraith of heat on his shoulders. Within minutes of him finding us his glare was enough to stare down the hardest man.

Miguel came over mopping the sweat from his brow.

‘Hey do you guys feel like a swim? It’s fuckin’ way too hot to party.’

We hit the beach down by the chill out stage taking what shelter under the shrubs we could. Celsius wise the temperature must have been in the mid to late thirties and it can’t of been more than an hour after sunrise.

I’d topped up my tank on a large acai with mango and papaya, the frozen mixture once again serving as a great source of nourishment.

We rested for a while. None of us really saying much. There were a lot of tired looking faces floating past or just zoning out in whatever shade could be found. The chill out dome was rammed with pale figures, everyone was unable to sleep in their tents because they were like five hundred degrees inside. You unzipped it and a puff of steam would come out, Werner’s words were coming true.

*‘You can’t sleep during the day and everyone makes the mistake of partying from tomorrow once the music starts without a break. By January the first everyone’s ready to pass out. They’ve been on acid for days, and they forget.’*

They forgot alright. We’d all forgotten, but usually it rained during the night so you’re forced to bed. Last night though there was no rain and today there was also no wind. Apart from the distance thrum of the bass and the Mr Sun smiling above, Mother Earth herself was silent. Like she was standing back in shock, taking a deep breath and waiting to see what would happen next.

‘Hey dudes, I’m gonna’ go for a shower and try and eat some more food before the day gets under way again I’ll catch ya’s later.’

With those final comments, New Year’s Eve was finally over and I took a few hours rest before we started all over.

I passed out on my hammock which was strewn on the ground under my much loved shade cloth. Waking at some point later in a sand covered sweat, my mouth felt so rough that even an animal would have more dignity than to die in it.

I almost ran to the showers, imagining the cooling sensations flooding over me. I wasn’t to be let down either, the final drips of the acid allowed me the most wondrous sensation from the millions of tiny drops splashing over my body. After; once again the silence of the tooth brushing area with its powerful aura was an easily taken bliss, the soothing rhythmical sound and flow of rejuvenating energy, feeding our minds for the challenges still to face.

I saw the boys and instantly the MD came to mind. Fuck it I’d forgotten again! Dam it man! Oops!

‘Bryce MD!’ in that bullish voice.

‘Nada MD amigos I not see my friend. Sorry. (Another little white lie) But when I do I’ll definitely get some for you.’ Fuck it. I hate bullshittin’ like that but I couldn’t just tell them ‘Oh sorry I forgot again.’ Oh well they could just as easily have asked someone I s’pose.

You couldn’t spend more than a minute in your furnace of a tent so with all of us lulling outside our homes, our family shared a breakfast of granola with honey, tinned tuna and olives once more.

The others wanted to hit the beach but I had a date with the main stage, in the hope of catching Rinkadink and to go up onto the stage with him.



I was rolling a big, smokin'-a-joint-whilst-standing-on-the-main-stage sized spliff when I noticed Jack in the box searchin' around everywhere for something. He started pulling out his blanket, then his bags, even the blow up air mattress. (Oh what I'd have done for one of those. I was only sleeping on the ground on top of my hammock.)

'What are you looking for dude?'

'Sunglasses. They are good ones. Adidas. I have only just buy them before we come here.'

'Yeah I know the ones. They're cool man. Fuck I hope ya' haven't lost them you'll be fucked without sharkeys for the rest of the trip.'

'What? Sorry I no understand, you speak so fast.'

'I hope you find them dude. You're gonna' need them.'

'Sim amigo. I leave them here last night before we come out to party. Oh I do not know. If you find them can you tell me amigo?'

'Sim, of course dude. I'll keep an eye out to see if anyone's wearing them. Hey anyway I better shoot off I wanna' go check out a fulla' playing on the main stage who I met the other day. Hope ya' find ya' shades man.'

I was off; choosing to take the path down the left hand side of the camp site for once. You know how it is, mix things up a little. The grass hadn't been trodden down by the masses there and it was quieter on that route. It was nice to have some time to myself. I sorted through the faces of all the amazing people I'd met, and carried on walking with a smile on my face that began in my heart.

As I skirted round the back of the shops, I could hear the pumping sound the good ship Minimal cutting loose with its warped melodic tunes.

Coming up to the main stage there were the toilets, which was a good excuse as any to stop off for a line. I came to the back stage area of the main arena and there were a couple of security guards sitting at the entrance of a little taped off space they had made. But as Werner had said, it wasn't like fenced properly or anything. It looked like they weren't really paying attention anyway. Seemed like no one felt the need for a heavy security presence.

Remembering Werner's words

*'Ah it's alright bru. Universo Parallelo isn't like most other festivals. They don't really have security. You can just walk behind the stage and straight up to where the guys are playin'. Just look confident like you should be there and no one will say anything. Trust me bru it's lekker.'*

Like a drunk trying to walk past the bouncer in a bar, I lifted my head, puffed out my chest and looked straight ahead as I passed. Not a word, sweet as. Someone told me it was ten to nine so Werner had to be around there somewhere. I heard that guttural droning accent again. South Africans! They'll know where he is.

'How's it fullas'. Hey do you know where Werner is?'

'Yah bru we've swapped sets with him. He's playing at two now.'

'Oh fuck I met him the other day and he told me to come down and check his set. Guess I'll have to smoke this big fat joint by myself.'

'You can smoke your big fat joint with us.'

'Really? Cool. Can I come up on the stage too? I won't get in the way, promise.'

'Yah lekker bru, come on we're about to start.'

I climbed the steps behind them. First I could see the guy already playing, dancing about. Then came the table everyone set their stuff up on. Next was the palm trees in the distance, before the final emergence of several thousand people, shirts off, hands waving and shoes beside them. The flow of energy from the crowd was directed straight at us. Fuck I hoped someone I knew saw me. Even if I did have hippy fisherman's pants on.

The boys set up their computers and the other shit that people use when they play live, and I sparked up the joint as the guy playing wound down his last tune. The crowd roared and he thanked them with a salute.

The music sounded different up there on the stage. The bass crisper. More bang, bang, bang, bang, rather than whoomp, whoomp, whoomp, whoomp.

As the first initial beats rang, the partiers let out a tremendous riot of noise. Their hands went in the air and it felt like they were cheering for me. I thanked them by waving back like I was part of the crew. Hey c'mon ya gotta' make the most of these opportunities.

I checked out the crowd, keeping out of the way of the guys but still acting like I was s'pose to be there and maybe in a kind of a way, if ya' view it differently, I *was* s'pose to be there, or else I wouldn't have been. The events of my life had brought me to that situation and that experience.

Most people were just wobbling about, some were all over the place waving hands like they were casting spells, some just stood and stared almost completely motionless. All the time the ranks of the crowd swelled as those who had gotten some rest, swum, showered and eaten rejoined the troops.

A native Indian guy was there. He wore a full dress of blue and white feathers wrapped around his shins, biceps, and as a crown upon his head. He was wearing small shorts of what looked like leather; he had his face painted too and a wooden spear in his hand. He motioned from left to right, eyes closed, twirling every now and then. Sometimes he'd open his eyes and you could see they were rolled right back in his head, before the lids drooped again, sealing him off from the outside world. He was chanting something, who knows what he said but I was glad that he had come to experience our culture, our rites of passage.

I'd heard that to get permission to use the tribal land, the organisers of the party had told the local tribe which owned the area, Universo Paralello was a gathering of young people, here to celebrate a type of coming of age ceremony, if you like. That they would be taking drugs and listening to this music to put themselves into a trance and find their inner being. Some would have bad demons that may come out and make them afraid and if they found these lost souls they were to help them and let the medics know.

I wondered whether this shamanic figure lived in a village nearby in the forest. Were the people westernised? Maybe they still lived in the jungle and curious, the witch doctor had come to join us. Maybe taking some crazy psychedelic bush drug and uniting with us in this state of trance, maybe he was asking *his* Gods to watch over us.

People moved back to give him his space, looking but not staring. We smiled and you could feel a sense of pride amongst us. Pride that we had been graced by one like this. Energy flowed from the man, and it affected all those who laid eyes upon him, refilling our reserves and reawakening our desires.

As I like to say, it was time to get the party started! Feliz Ano Novo to me, so I pulled out a trip, placed the whole thing on my tongue and waited to ride the Merry-go-round once again.

After about forty five minutes, I thought I'd better get off the stage before it all came on strong and I tripped over something, or fucked up in some other way. So I bid those new friends who'd let me share that wondrous experience with them a fond farewell, and with a big wave at the crowd, from whom I received a wave back, I left the stage and made my way to the bar. It was definitely beer o'clock.

When I reached the bar to the left of the stage – if you're facing out to the sea – I spied a guy I recognised from London. He was a little fulla' with long hair and he was hangin' onto the bar like it would fall over if he wasn't there to stop it.

'Hey you alright dude? Why don't you come over here out of the sun?'

I received a dirty look in exchange.

'C'mon fulla it's alright let me get ya' a bottle of water.'

'Ola.' to the bar tender. Um beer and um agua obrigado. (One beer and one water thank you.) Here you go fulla try this and come sit down for a minute.'

I gently took his arm and led him to some sparse shade provided by a palm tree. The people sitting there saw me leading him over and a couple of guys jumped up and helped sit him down, giving up their spaces freely and without thought.

There was a few concerned looks, the penny starting to drop that this could be any of us in the not so distant future. One guy fanned him with his shirt and another lightly poured a small amount of water over his head, and it was only a few minutes before he started to come round, his eyes seeming to be able to focus on what was in front of him.

He managed a slurred and mumbled. 'Hey thanks guys. I didn't know what to do. I was so thirsty but I didn't have any bar tokens. Couldn't for the life of me remember where any of the ticket places were and although I was waving money about, the girl just wouldn't give me anything to drink. It was all I could do to not fall over.'

'Fuck that's rude eh? I saw that dude, fuck man that's fuckin' terrible. Well hey, look, you feelin' alright now? Let's go for a walk and I'll show ya' a voucher place just round the corner.'

There was one just around the other side of the bar, but stuff like that's pretty hard to find when you've got, not just double but swirly vision too. You know you're in trouble and a blurry eyed, panic rises inside you. A stranger in a strange land, your survival instincts kick in, but when ya' can't see straight and can't tell your left from your right it's fuckin' difficult man. It's fuckin' dangerous.

I thanked the guys who had helped us. Once again, this scene had produced wonderful people, ready to help a stranger without a second thought. I showed the guy to the token place, he got himself sorted and after about fifteen minutes looked like a new man. All be it a slightly dishevelled one.

DE VOLTA AO FURTO

(Back to the thievery)

The waves of tiredness mixed with the LSD were overpowering, but there was nothing else to do. We were only about halfway through the festival, and it had to be close to forty Celsius, so there was no other choice but to man up and power on through. I spied a pasty looking Miguel though the crowd. He looked like I felt.

‘Hey how long ya’ been here for? Did ya’ see me up on the stage?’

‘No man I just got here. Were you really up on the stage? How’d you do that?’

‘I met a fulla’ the other day who was s’pose to be playing now but he swapped his set with some other guys. He reckoned to just look like I should be there and no one would say anything. So that’s what I did. It was fuckin outrageous dude, the view from there is unreal. You can see everyone, and they all look fucked up man I can tell ya’ that. It’s like a scene from a Zombie movie.’

‘Oi, bom dia amigos.’ from a young looking guy as he came running up to Miguel before sharing a sweat filled hug with him and then me.

Miguel shared a ‘Bom dia’ and a, ‘Great to see you,’ with him before saying, ‘Hey this is my friend Bryce from New Zealand. Hey Bryce this guy’s selling coke if you want some?’

‘Fuck yeah! How much is it?’

‘Vinte real amigo.’ Twenty reals

‘That sounds fuckin’ sweet to me dude here you go.’ pulling out the cash.

‘No not here amigo, back at my tent. Let’s go.’

We went back to his camp which was somewhere down near where Alf lived. He pulled out the coke, which was in twisted up little white plastic bags. Taking one, I handed over the cash and made my way back to Miguel. I managed to tear open the baggy which had been melted shut and rubbed some on my gums. There was an initial out of place salty taste then within a split second my entire mouth went so numb I became afraid I might bite my tongue off without realising.

Yes good coke makes ya’ teeth go numb but not ya’ whole mouth, and not so suddenly like that shit did. With good uncut coke it should take a few minutes as it works its way into your system.

I’d been ripped off again. This time though it was a problem I could solve. I was already on my way back to Miguel anyway, so I would have a word with him. It was his fuckin’ friend after all.

I saw Miguel dancing about in the same place where I left him.

‘Oi amigo. Your friend sold me shit man. I dunno’ what it is but I can’t feel a thing throughout my entire mouth. It’s weird dude.’

‘Really? That’s strange. He’s a friend of mine. Did you try it before you paid amigo?’

‘No. He was your amigo so I just presumed I could trust him.’

‘Hey I’m sorry man but this is Brazil Bryce. You should always try before you buy. Look it was twenty reals right? Here’s twenty reals I’ll take it and sort it out with him when I see him next.’

‘That’s great dude, I really appreciate it.’

This cheered me up. Miguel had a dab of it before lookin’ at me with a grin.

‘Hey this is what we call Sao Paulo Cocaine. We’re all doctors remember. This is just some mix of pharmaceuticals that he must have put together. I’m really sorry about that Bryce. Don’t worry, you’ll still get high from it. It’ll be a good mix of Pharmaceuticals. Look I’m going to find Serafina, she’ll sniff this. Hey, I’ll see you later eh.’ and with that he disappeared.

I boogied away for a while, the acid not really able to sink its teeth in due to the sleep deprivation, and also ‘cause I had been taking it for nearly three days now.

Werner had been right. There were shattered corpses everywhere. People had brought their blankets from their tents and we're just lying on the dance floor. Some couples were passed out arm in arm, others were beginning to argue. The mood was changing. The innocence was evaporating in that stifling heat like so much rain fall would.

Jack in the box came trotting over looking fresh as a daisy, and as usual excited as a child at Christmas.

'Oi amigo, come join. We are here.' pointing to their usual spot just back from where I was.

Some of the trinket sellers I'd seen over the last few days had set up their wares just to the right of us, and a small but ever steady growing number of gringos were sitting in front of them under the scant shade of the couple of palm trees.

Jack in the box came over to me. 'Bryce, see those people? Those guys are stealing their money. Watch, they are asking gringos if they want to buy drugs and taking the money, saying they must wait. See. The ones that take the money are disappearing and are not coming back. One more come and look after the stuff they are selling. Next, *they* ask gringos if they would like something. So be careful and do not buy anything from them.'

'What? That's fuckin' crazy man!' I checked this scenario out for a while and it was true.

There was some white guy with a fuckin' ridiculous looking gnome hat on or something, sittin there with his ever-increasingly pissed off looking girlfriend. They were being kept waiting by some scruffy looking fuck with dirty, long, greasy hair and shorts that looked like they hadn't seen a wash since the late nineties. He looked friendly enough and seemed to be mingling amongst the group which now had grown to about twenty odd gringos. This continued for a quite some time. Some local would bring them over, sit them down and take their cash before walking off in the direction of the chill out area.

I couldn't believe how long people were sitting there though, a couple of hours passed and still the guy in the silly hat sat there. The unwashed guy would somehow manage to sit there with each of them for a few minutes though and calm everyone down. I felt sorry for those people and completely understood how they felt. I was after all far too aware of what it was like to be ripped off in Brazil.

But there was no one walking around selling gear now like there had been for the last few days. As you can imagine, there can only be so much drugs at a party this far away from society and when they are gone, they are gone. There's fuck all anyone can do about it. You would see the odd person rock up into the crowd and pull out a sheet here and there. Only to be mobbed by those not sitting and waiting under the palms. I asked one of these guys how much the acid cost now and the price had more than doubled to fifty reals, fifty! I s'pose in times of famine and drought, prices for food always go up. It's sick really but that's the way of the world.

I was glad I had met Alf and through him, Hiro, and had a reliable source. It was only a matter of having to wait till I saw him. I was fine though, I still had more on me and that would see me through the night. I was pretty close to the end of my endurance any way.

I couldn't shake the urge to say something to that dirty fucker, ripping off gringos left, right and centre ,and finally I caved in to it.

Cruising over to him, 'Oi amigo. Tu du bem?' (How are you?) 'You have a cigarette for me?'

'Nada gringo.'

I was a gringo. This showed the lack of respect straight away. 'You want to by some druggy. I have LSD, Cocainya, MDMA, Marihuana, anything you like.'

This pissed me right off.

‘Yeah I’m sure you do dude. Hey why don’t you get one of these gringos here you’re stealing money from to give me one, or maybe I tell them what is going on eh!’ pointing over to the guy and his stupid hat.

I couldn’t believe that clown and his hat. He had sat there for fuckin’ hours letting that cunt placate him, while his steaming girlfriend had slowly lost it and eventually walked off. He though, was still sat there. He had even bought a beer for the grubby fuck at one point. I had lost all respect for him. Although truth be told, I’m not really that much better.

All those times I had been ripped off in Brazil, and I had let it happen to me again. I’d let my guard down for one minute and BAM some fucker had made off with my cash.

He was a bit foolish really. What if I set a toilet roll on fire and put it under his tent while he was in it. Tents go up real fast. When I was younger that is exactly the type of thing I would have done. Locked the fuckin’ zip shut and torched the cunt.

I went back to the others, vivid images of hate burning through my brain. Although I wasn’t really feeling it, the acid obviously had some legs, so I checked myself and fought to regain control of my head. Just because I couldn’t feel it, didn’t mean it wasn’t there blowing the windmills of my mind.

Shortly after my conversation with the scrawny fuck, the guy watchin’ the necklaces and bracelets, this band of thieves had been using as a front for their criminal network, swept it all up and silently vanished. Leaving only the tassel haired mug, who himself waited for no one to notice then he too simply stepped into the crowd and disappeared. None of those sitting and waiting had seen it.

After a few minutes, a few of the gringos started to notice they were alone. The penny started to drop and as they slowly accepted what had happened to them, they too faded off, forlorn – and hopefully wiser. A piece of paradise had been stolen from them along with their money.

But if they were anything like me they would be suckers again in no time at all, ‘cause desperate situations lead to desperate measures.

Mr Sun set in his usual outstanding kaleidoscopic pattern of magic colours, like a firework’s night exploding across the sky. As the evening cooled, I wasn’t in the mood to party and called an early evening. The drug abuse from the previous few days – or should I call that weeks – was constantly trying to get the better of me, and the effort to stay sane in that place of wonder, was becoming a concerted battle I was afraid I might lose if I didn’t get a good night’s rest.

I got back to the tent and rolled a joint, this time big enough to put a man whose brain was racing a thousand miles an hour to sleep. My head was repeating the same vivid thoughts of theft like an old broken record.

I remembered Allesandro and on opening the tent up, I found his bag was gone. Like the boys MD, I’d completely forgotten about him. Come to think of it, was his bag here this morning? Oh well, he must of moved on.

It was while I was sitting there in the calm candle light smoking my fat doobie, that I spied a wallet in the dust beside me. When I opened it I came across Allesandro’s smiling face on a drivers licence in the front window pocket, and a crisp twenty pound note in the cash part, along with a few real. A twenty pound note? Really? Where the fuck did this guy get Pounds from? He’d never mentioned that he’d been to England before. Yes his English was good but anytime you meet someone and say you live in London they always mention it if they’d been there before. A finger of doubt and suspicion started to worm its way inside my poor brain.

My poor inner self, was already filling up with insecurities and unhappy images due to the abuse it had suffered.

In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Parallelo'

I made up my mind. Tomorrow was going to be my last day of acid. I still had plenty of it left so I'd take one for breakfast to get me started and take the day from there. I'd make it a cracker of a day.

Jay Om was playing at two o'clock.

JANEIRO SEGUNDO. O ÚLTIMO HOO HAA

(January second. The last hoo haa)

The sun, the heat, woke me and it took a few seconds to put everything together. ‘That’s right, I’m at Universo Paralello.’

Recollections of the last few days run through my mind, coercing me to my final decision from the night before. I’d finish off the acid I had on me, then leave that shit alone for the rest of the party.

The weed was long gone but I still had a few joints of charris left, three trips and about half a gram of Charlie. Then and there, I took a Hoffman. No doubt about it, no issues. I was looking forward to my final day of madness. I took that fuckin’ thing whilst laying there in bed, in my fuckin’ sauna and it was on.

I had close to an hour before the acid soaked in and I wanted to wait for the sensations before I hit the shower and the tooth brushing zone.

The first thing I had to do though was get outta’ the fuckin’ tent and get some food into me.

Unzipping the front door to my little cottage, I was surprised to see none of the others up. But then again, after the last forty eight hours, I imagined most people there could have slept through a hurricane.

The fuckin’ heat man, it was phenomenal. A swim before a shower had to be on the cards. I was on a time limit too, ya’ know, a countdown. There’s no fuckin’ way I was going near the ocean once the LSD had taken hold. Ya’ve gotta have some smarts about you and not do shit like that when ya’ fucked up. I always somehow manage to get newspaper articles in my mind.

‘Bryce W James, drowned while high on LSD off the coast of Brazil’. Everyone I’ve ever known would say. ‘That fuckin’ Bryce eh? He was always wrecked on something. Typical. Drowned off the coast of Brazil high on LSD.’

I’ve got a little more dignity than to go out like that thank you very much! There’s gotta’ be better ways to be remembered.

Besides, thoughts like this are part of your survival instincts. They keep you alive by stopping you doing something stupid. Something stupid like swimming in the ocean tripped out on acid.

So I ate my breakfast of granola, olives and my final tin of tuna, then hit the beach because it was there. I bounded out into that outrageously perfect and glamorous surf, before hittin’ the showers where some fucker with shavin’ balls stood out in the open towelling himself off with a smile and a glint in his eye. Then I soaked up that energy of the tooth brushing place.

I rolled a joint and – keen as a bean – was on my way to the dance floor.

I took up position on the right, under the yellow and gray shade cloths.

Ganesh had reappeared, at the main stage and Shiva was over the other side on the left.

Those morphing Godlike faces were still in the middle, flying on their clouds over a fuckin’ desert. One of them winked. It was Hanuman, the one that was a mixture of man and monkey. What the fuck? He had a big smile on his face and the cloud his head was on, was flying through the air as sand dunes passed by beneath him. I checked out some blue fulla’ about three down from him, he had like some old fashioned, ends twisted moustache and a red crown and next thing I know, he winked at me too.

Nice!! Today seemed like it was going to be a visual day. Might have to take another hit and really push the hullocinations.

‘Hey man how’s it?’

Alf! There was fuckin’ Alf, his sister Mariana and the BFG too.

‘Hey guys, Happy New Year’s!’

‘Happy New Year to you too man!’



I told him about the scam from the locals I saw the day before and how glad I was that I came across them, and through them, I was able to score off Hiro and not be part of the mix of 'gringos' being ripped off. Also I talked him about my family of neighbours and how great they'd been.

I was shuffling away barefoot on the dance floor with a Brazilian sized smile on my face when who should come up to me? That mother fucker who'd sold me the shit coke the day before.

'Ola amigo. You like the cocainya?'

'No I fuckin' didn't actually. You've got a fuckin' cheek tryin' to sell that shit to me. I'm havin' a good day here so I think you'd better just fuck off. By the way Miguel will be lookin' for you too.'

'Nada amigo what was wrong with it?'

'Don't amigo me dude. Fuck off!'

'What was the problem?'

This dude's gotta be kidding me. 'Listen here mother fucker. I'm really outta' my head right now and I'm fuckin' seeing things, so why don't you do me a favour and go talk to someone else.'

He stood there for a moment lookin' at me. 'Then if you are seeing things then surely the coke is good?'

What the fuck! 'Dude you know exactly what I'm talking about so, go away before I lose my fuckin' head.' and with that he was gone. What a fuckin' joke. What a fuckin' cunt!

It must have just been that time of day, 'cause next thing ya' know, the guys from the trip to the Ituberá conga lined past.

'Bryce! Hey, come party with us. I wanna' see you go craazy!'

'Nah I'm cool guys. I'm sweet as.'

'Come Bryce, join us.'

'Nah I'm fine, obrigado though, but I'm just chillin' with these guys.'

He grabbed my arm. Come Bryce. Hey I go crazy myself the other night I hope I didn't scare you?'

No. You took all my MDMA and didn't even save me a sip so you guys can fuck off too.

'Hey let go of my arm. I'm cool dude. Obrigado though.'

They all look at each other a little confused and with a shrug of his beautiful girlfriend's shoulders; they congaed off into the crowd.

Yes, I was a little tough on them but I was happy where I was, and I certainly wasn't in the mood to conga and go craazy with *that* fulla. Right then, Alf and his family were all I needed to fill my time.

It was amazing. I still felt like the world was full of wonderful people and nothing could take that away from me. Yes there was only the odd shmuck out there trying to steal my sunshine. In general though, even those few people had been harmless, and besides, I was in Brazil baby, at the best goddamn rave in the world!

I felt so great in fact that the only thing that could make it better was a fat line on the beach. There wasn't even any wind, so the weather was perfect for it. I could chop up outdoors in the sun, on the most beautiful beach in the world, and life would be perfect.

'Hey do you guys want some Charlie?' I wasn't exactly gonna sneak off and not share the last of what with them. They'd given me so much that even if we were lost in the desert and I only had a sip of water left, Alf would have gotten half.

I got a unanimous 'No we're ok.' from them and secretly pleased as a pig in shit about that went off for a last day on the acid sized rail line

Hey no matter how much I wanted to keep the gear to myself. Like the water, I still woulda' shared every last drop with those people. Still, I was glad I didn't have to.

‘Why don’t you take just one drug at a time,’ the BFG said. ‘That way can get the different sensations from each one?’

It was a fair enough comment.

‘Hey man that’s just how I’ve always been. Ya’ know, I’m in Brazil man, so I’m gonna’ do cocaine like there’s no tomorrow. That’s why I’m here. It’s just me I guess.’

Hitting the beach directly between the Buddha heads turned went left and made my way past the chill out dome. I stopped a part that must have been almost level to where the bridge to Goa released you back into the real world.

I sat there, just on the left hand side of the track that lead out and chopped up my Universo Paralello sized line on my Universo Paralello guide book. The breeze was perfect and apart from the burning sun, – which by the way is better than the snow that was more than likely happening in England – and life couldn’t have been better.

Some young kid with a deep tan and short cropped hair ran passed. He kept looking over his shoulders behind him. What the fuck is he up to? He ran down close to where the water broke and waved down some guy on a motor bike.

What the fucks goin’ on here? He’s either just been robbed or he’s lost his mind and with that, his insecurities have come to the fore; making *everyone* against him.

He looked really upset and the guy on the motor bike was already on his radio.

I didn’t think it was cool to sit there anymore. So I smashed that fuckin’ exaggeration of a line and went back to join the others.

It was a state of carnage. Like previously foretold, part of the dance floor was sleeping, either *too* afraid, *too* hot, or simply didn’t wanna’ miss out on *too* much fun.

It was video time, and after the usual fuss I got the camera workin’ and filmed some more. The couples sleepin’, the palm trees, the blue sky and Alf with some guy jugglin’ orange balls next to him. How the fuck was he able to do that? In this place, where everybody’s been fucked up for days, he was doin’ that. There was Alf, shirt off, hair tied up in a bun with a fuckin’ chopstick through it, and his sister with the BFG! I managed to take in all that before I tripped over and whacked him in the face with my phone.

I had to tell him my story from the beach about the guy lookin’ over his shoulder.

‘Ya’d never guess what I just saw dude. I was just tryin’ to have a quiet little line to myself, and some kid comes runnin’ past lookin’ over his shoulder, like he’d been robbed or something. Then just as I’m about to smash that shit up, he waves down some security type fulla’.

‘Yeah man?’

‘Yeah man! I’m sure something was up dude. Hey fuck, check that out!!!!!’

There he was; being carried by four burly security type guys with fluorescent vests on.

They carried him as he writhed; a look of confusion on his face. They were taking him down the other side of the bar, I’d scraped that guy off the day before, and he looked like he didn’t know what the fuck was goin’ on.

Jesus, that could be me. That could be any of us. I doubled checked myself and my acid for breakfast and then confirmed in my mind that to stay positive was to stay sane. Everyone here was a friend. The liars and the fiends had already been pointed out to me by my Brazilian family, so I knew who was who, and what was what.

I was here with my Scandinavian blood, part of a peaceful crew. The BFG, Alf and his sister, Ganesha too. And although not as dominant in my thoughts as a few days ago, he and Shiva provided a familiarity, to go side by side with my crazy group of winkin’ smiling, zooming over the desert, cloud flying Gods.

Everything was, ‘A ok.’

The day passed. My amazement of the flying heads kept a grin on my face.

## In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

'Hey guys do you know the time? I gotta' a friend to meet, whose playin' over on the Goa stage at two.'

'It's nearly one o'clock man. I don't think we're up for it just yet, but you have a good time man and we'll see you later.'

'Without a doubt dude. You guys have a fuckin' good time too!' There was hugs all round, and brimming with the energy of love and confidence, I dropped my last trip of Universo Paralelo and went to India.

Jay OM E O HOMEM COM A TATUAGEM DE BUDA

(Jay Om and the man with the Buddha tattoo)

Stepping into this now familiar land I spied Jay Om sittin' under the shade of the crab tree with a lap top bag beside him.

There wasn't many people around 'cause according to the program, the music didn't start till six.

'Hey, how's it dude?'

'Bryce, my friend, great to see you. Check out this guy playing now. His music's good but the sound is distorted. Wait till I get up there and you'll hear the difference.'

It all just sounded like a big dooga, dooga, dooga, dooga, mess to me, so I was keen to see my friend clean that shit up.

He was on in about fifteen minutes, so we rolled a fat, my-friend's-about-t- play-Universo Paralello-sized doobie and smoked it up before he went back stage to get prepared.

I spotted the man with the Buddha tattoo sitting behind where I was, so went and joined him and a couple of people that he was with.

'Hey how's it? Ya' had a good time at the festival?'

'Yah, it's been great eh! I think I remember you from Koh Phangan now.'

'Yeah dude? Did you go to the Shiva moon party around March last year? I'm sure the reason I'm here is 'cause we met in the after party at Ban Sabaii. I've got an image in my head of your tattoo and me sittin down on the beach outside Ban Sabaii club. It's the only time we coulda' met. I don't remember any other. When I got back to London I already had it in my mind that I was goin' to a party in Brazil for New Year's. Fate drew the cards and when I Googled New Year's parties Brazil, Universo Paralello was the first one that came up.'

'It's funny how fate's finger pushes you like that sometimes. I'd just found all the details and was scrolling through some forums and there was some Aussie girl and her partner lookin' for directions, so I was able to pass them on to her. She's a bit of a whimsical wanderer. We said we'd try and get in touch with each other at the party but it had been utter carnage. Besides, we didn't even know what each other looked like. For all I knew she could be dressed in blue spandex with a great big yellow wig leading a Monkey named Coco Loco around.' I carried on; my speech picking up pace. 'I hope she had a good time. Anyway it's hard not to really, as long as you come prepared and don't let the locals get the better of ya.'

'What does that mean?'

Like an old man recounting a war story, I saw the opportunity to go over some of the crazy goings on I'd come across during the last few days. I offered him some acid, but like me last night; the man with the Buddha tattoo had burnt the candle from both ends and was taking a well earned day off.

Jay Om came out on the stage and started pulling out his big grey-laptop-trance-machine. The other guy started winding down and handed over the reins of the wild horse to my friend, who like a rodeo cowboy took to the saddle and opened the gate.

Boom, boom, boom, boom, he was right, his sound was much clearer. How'd he do that? The song started ramping up. It was crystal clear and made a mockery of the white noise sounds from the guy before.

'Hey it was nice to meet you,' the man with the Buddha tattoo said, 'but I have to go and meet some friends. If I don't see you again here, hopefully our paths will cross again on this open stage of a world and I'll see you on yet another trance floor in yet another foreign land eh.'

'I hope so too dude. Don't take this the wrong way but without either of us knowing, or either of us remembering. I think you may have had a major affect on the course of my life

dude. Here's to that day eh!' and with a hug, the criss-crossed paths of our lives separated once again.

Even then I didn't realise the overall influence that techni-coloured blurred memory – from that crazy little island, on that crazy little beach in the gulf of Thailand – would have over me.

I sit here now around two or three years later, recallin' the tale, hoping to share my journeys with others. I chose Universo Parallelo to start with 'cause it seemed the least complicated and I love tellin' the story of Pablo and Tiago. It's always a show stopper that one. Writing about Morro de Sao Paulo was much trickier. You could get a lot of people in trouble if you go into detail about your behaviour in a small place like that. And that's the last thing I want. Especially to people who had done so much to restore my faith in a country so full of imagined dreams.

Brazil, she's hard fuckin' girl, not nearly that post card image you imagine. But she's as sexy as her women, and this experience I will take with me forever.

I have rarely suffered such a yo-yo effect of emotions; I was driven by such crazy highs and such bottomless lows. Always during those lows though, as I was looking up from a fox-hole, deep in despair, every time a bright Cheshire grin and an extended hand were there to help pull me out.

You've gotta' love the Brazilian people. Many of them have dealt with so much in their lives, yet they always find a reason to smile. I was told the average wage for a hard worker is six hundred reals a month, so I understand completely that some resort to stealing from the rich white gringos that splash their cash around. I'd been averaging well over twice that a week on booze, drugs and alcohol. The rest I just wasted.

I wanted to roll a fat joint for Jay to smoke while he played his tunes and after a quick rummage through my pockets, realised I had no skins. A couple just to the right of me were happily puffing away on a joint so I asked if they could lend me one.

'Of course amigo, here you go.'

They handed me over a see-through one. See-through papers are made of glucose or something like that I think. They have a plastic like texture but no taste when they burn.

The second acid trip I had taken earlier was coming on strong and as I think you can imagine, while in that hazy little world it's very difficult to roll a joint with a paper you can't see. Things just don't seem to add up. I'd mixed a lot weed with charris and filled it with cocaine too. It was going to be proper if I could only get it together for a few moments to finish the job.

I'd been at it for about five minutes and looking around in despair I saw the couple were chuckling away to each other.

'Would you like a hand with that?' the female of the two said.

I was beaten and out of options, so with my bottom lip sticking out, replied, 'Yes pwease.'

'Come sit with us amigo, let us help you.'

Gotta' love the place eh?

I joined them and they laughed at the cocaine, but built the spliff for me anyway. We went through the usual banter of introductions and where are you froms, before I was offered the chance to buy some more charris if I liked.

The guy pulled out a big roll of the stuff about five centimetres in diameter and just under ten wide. He unravelled it into a strip nearly twenty centimetres long.

'I made it myself last week, harvested the plants and everything. This is pure Brasilia through and through.'

'Yeah? That's fuckin' amazing dude! I'll take two hundred reals worth.'

'Cool as amigo. Here come with us back to our tent where we've got some scales and I'll weigh it out for you.'

‘No it’s cool man, just give me what you think is fair.’

‘Nada amigo, I might not give you enough.’

‘I can’t leave dude, my friend’s playing and hey, besides I trust you to be fair. We’re all good people sittin’ here in the dirt. Let’s just make an honest trade. I’ll give you two hundred reals and you give me what you think is worth two hundred reals, and if I agree then everyone’s happy. Humans have been bartering like this for thousands of years man, we don’t need scales and shit to work out a deal.’

‘Ok man. If you’re sure, then that’s cool. It’s just that you seem like a nice guy and I don’t want you to miss out.’

‘Dude if I’m happy with what I’ve bought I’m not gonna’ feel like I’ve missed out am I. So come on, this is what it’s all about, people being true to each other.’

He tore off a massive chunk, must have been just over half the size of a golf ball once I’d squished it back up. It smelt amazing. So fresh!

‘Hey obrigado amigos, I’m gonna’ join my friend up on the stage and give this joint to him.’

I made my way round to the back of the stage where once again there was no sign or need of a security presence. There was just some fulla’ with a goat-tee and long brown hair sittin’ there amongst the spaghetti of cables.

‘Ola amigo, my friend is on stage can I join him?’

I received an American accent in reply, ‘Of course man, hey, welcome.’

I edged my way around the heavy canvas painting that had replaced Ganesh, and starting to feel very jaded handed over the fat mixed up spliff to Jay. ‘Cause the paper was see though you, you could see all the buds and quality hash mixed together with a large quantity of coke. It was one to be proud of.

I was back on one of the stages for the second time in one day and felt like the king of the world. A be it a bit of a wobbly king. King of the world, never-the-less, the bundles of cables that powered that machine of sound were everywhere, and I started getting a little paranoid I might trip over something and fuck the whole thing up, so I made my way to the back again.

The American guy turned out to be a sound technician. He was cool. We smoked a joint and I got us a couple of beers.

He pulled out an ioniser, which is a small device you can use to smoke weed through. Basically it works on the theory that THC – the key ingredient in marijuana – burns at a temperature of one hundred and seventy five degrees, (Or some shit like that) and you heat it up with a hot air gun type thing and the vapour collects in a big plastic balloon type thing. This way you don’t have to fill your lungs up with all the tar you get from smoking weed. Some people like them, others say they don’t work. Me? I don’t give a fuck, I’ll take everything going.

‘Hey man, I just bought a load of charris from the guy sittin’ just over there. Should we stick some in?’

‘Well I’ve never tried smoking charris through it but we’ll give it a go eh.’

‘Fuck yeah.’

We chucked some in and it worked a treat. The hash tasted like a freshly mown lawn smells; certainly got me high.

I was really starting to buzz. ‘Hey dude I think I’d better stand on the other side of the fence in case I fall over something.’

The fence was only three feet tall and mad of moveable barriers.

‘Cool as. Thanks for letting me know, but look, let me go get us some more beers and then you can. Until then you’re in charge of the Goa stage. The next guy should be here soon just get his name and check it on the list.’ before handing me a clip board full of science fiction like names.

'What?! Fuck yeah!' I had moved up in the world.

Jay had been playing for about forty five minutes by then and when the next DJ/Producer or whatever they're called showed up and I carried on like I had been there all along.

'Name please.' then scoured down the list for it.

'Yes hmm, the three o'clock appointment. Yes, no problems that I can see. You can have a chat with the guy on stage and ask if he doesn't mind you setting up while he finishes his set. Otherwise leave it there for a minute and you can smoke some shit out of this crazy spaceship device with me.'

'I'll choose smoking some shit through the crazy spaceship device please.'

'Nada problema amigo.'

The real sound guy was back a few minutes later.

'This is the next act he's on in ten minutes.'

I received a laughing 'Thanks man.' and we all had another big hot air balloon full of ganja.

It came out that I wasn't really the person in charge. 'You did that very well my friend,' the next guy on said. 'Played the part very professionally, I never even suspected.'

I moved around to the other side of the little barrier for my own safety. There *was* a lot of electrical equipment about the place.

The sound guy looked over to me.

'Hey can you mix man. I've got some CD's here and this guy's happy to wait half an hour so you can have a go. Doesn't matter to me, I'll just move everyone back thirty minutes.'

The DJ or whatever he was, nodded in approval. 'It's cool with me man Get up there and blast some tunes.'

'Oh dudes! I don't know how too. Ooooooh! What? Damn it! All these years spent around this music and I've never really tried. Just sat back and listened to it.' Oooooh fuck, oh well such is life eh! 'Hey thanks, though guys. That's fuckin' wicked! I really fuckin' appreciate it. You guys've made a day I didn't think could get any better, even better!'

I got a paper from the sound guy and rolled a just-been-offered-to-play-the-Goa-stage-at-Universo-Parallelo-by-these-guys sized spliff, then sparked it up and went to get us all beers.

When I came back, I sensed a darkness in the Force emanating from around the corner of the stage. It was a chillness in the air and the feeling like the world has shifted off her axis.

There he was, The Stranger himself. He hadn't even bothered to show up and watch his mate's set. Sum's that mother fucker up in a nut shell. I took up my position on the public side of the barrier and handed the beers over. My joint went around and The Stranger who had seemed to position himself between me and the others passed the joint on without giving it to me.

The sound guy noticed his little slight and went 'Excuse me. You missed Bryce and besides, that's *his* joint and he bought me *this* beer. Who are you anyway? He's got more of a right to be here than you. No disrespect to you here Bryce. The guys Trippin' balls and offered to stand on that side of the fence so he didn't break anything. I fuckin' respect that man!'

'No disrespect taken here dude.' Oh I coulda' hugged that man! A great day that had gotten better was now even *better*. Too cool!

Jay had finished his set and came out from the stage.

The Stranger looked at me, 'Well anyway, I think that we should leave them to talk to Jay.'

I looked at that creature with disbelief. Whatever you fuck.

'Hey Jay, that was fuckin' cool man! But look I gotta' go. Hopefully I'll see ya later; otherwise I'll check ya back in London.'

To the sound guy I gave a fond farewell and a hug. Then I turned my back on The Stranger and walked off over the wooden bridge towards the afternoon sun. With a smile to rival the craftiest Cheshire cat for a companion.

I reached the main stage and kicked my flip flops off at the spot Jack in the box and the family usually played.

The guy on the stage had everyone in the palm of his hand, twisting and warping our mentalities. All the Gods of India were there too, looking down upon us with their unflinching gaze. Or was it unflinching? The one in the centre on the left, who'd earlier in the day winked at me, winked again. Then the one next to him and then the next. They were all doing it. A humble smile upon their faces as their crowned heads on magic clouds; flew at what looked a million miles an hour over a vast desert background. One after the other, wink, smile, wink, smile. And zoom!! It was like they were racing each other with a purpose to their haste.

I checked out Ganesh, but today his attention seemed to be elsewhere. We'd shared our moment and now he was filling someone else's waking dream.

I partied like that. To quote the song, 'Lost in music, caught in the trap, no turning back, lost in music.'

The visions settled with the sparkling sun. Allowing father night to fill our emotions while holding onto the warm blanket Mr Sun left behind.

It was bliss.

They'd put some laser up which wasn't really having much effect. It was lost in the night sky, the same way we were lost in the music. Hey at least the organisers had tried. But to me it wasn't really that sort of party anyway. Lasers and lights weren't what it was about. It was about the other details, the crabs in the trees, the Hindu Gods and the people. Man, it was about the people. They'd gotten everything so right, that the half hearted attempt at a light show was more of a distraction than an awe inspiring attraction. If you want an awe inspiring light show you need to go to Awakenings in Amsterdam. Now there's a God dam fuckin' light show for ya'.

Eventually the wind picked up, a warning of the coming rain. I called it quits for the night, the party and the drugs. My time here was almost complete.

I woke the next morning to the usual insufferable heat. Allesandro appeared and I gave him back his wallet.

'Bryce you would never believe what happened last night. I was sitting next to a group of people when a security guard came up and in front of them all, he said...'

'I was watching you and when these people weren't looking you went through this girl's bag.'

Familiar alarm bells rang in my head

'I said, I don't know what you are talking about. But two more came over and they made me empty my pockets. My wallet Bryce! My wallet was gone. I said, you accuse me of stealing but someone has stolen from me. What are you doing? Where is my wallet? And here it is. I lose it and you my friend. My true friend you find it and give it back. Hey tomorrow I am leaving. I am going back to Morro de Sao Paulo. Would you like to come with me?'

'Yeah I dunno'. I'm s'pose to be goin to Santos, just south of Sao Paulo to meet some friends, but ya' never know. I'll decide in the morning.'

'Well hey Bryce, I have to go meet some people. Look I'll come by in the morning and see what you want to do. Brrrryyyyce my friend. Thank you for giving my wallet back. Come with me. I shall make sure you have a good time.'



With that he was gone again.

I treated myself to the pleasures of the cooling shower and tooth brush area, cleansing my core.

On my return there was Jack in the box.

'Bryce, I find my Sun glasses. I find them sitting beside my tent. I am such a fool I not look properly.'

Yeah? I wondered about that too. Had the thief suffered a fit of guilt?

I was done with the heavy shit. My final day at Universo Parallelo consisted of beer, spliffs and some MD the boys had finally managed to track down. They'd paid two hundred and fifty reals but at least they'd finally gotten some.

I called it quits early. Without the mind bending substances I'd used to fuel the last few days – actually call that the last few weeks – I had no desire to try and thrash it out one more time, so I got a good night's rest before the start of my long journey the next day.

Morro de Sao Paulo first? Or straight to Santos with a night in Rio? I couldn't decide. Fate would let me know I guess.

Boom, boom, boom, boom, on my tent, then Allesandro's pleasant accent. 'Bryce, wakey, wakey.'

I rose like the dead. Fuck packing up my tent. I'd leave it there.

'Sim amigo what!'

'Bryce I am going. Do you want to come with me?'

'Give me a minute. Give me a minute. Fuckin Jesus I feel bruised man, like I've lost a fight or something.'

It was time to leave. My dream in that land of wonder was over. New journeys awaited me.

Jack in the box was up too 'Bryce, amigo, brother. We leave today.'

'I leave today too brother. Hey I'm going for a shower. Can you watch my bag?' Not wanting to say anything, but also not sure whether to trust my belongings in Allesandro's presence.

I stuffed my shit into my bag and rolled up the hammock and hit the showers.

On my return, an excited Allesandro explained his plans.

'I have no money Bryce, but if we walk up the beach for two days it takes us to a small fishing village where we can get a boat to the island.'

The mother fucker actually sounded excited about this prospect!

'What? Two days! How far is it?'

'How far is it? About forty kilometres Bryce'

I was half the man I used to be. I felt like a shattered corpse. Felt like someone who'd taken more LSD in the last week than some people take in a life time. I'd done so much God dam cocaine, I wasn't even sure I could look at it again without pukin'. And that mother fucker was tryin' to talk me into spending the next two days walkin' in the searing sunshine up some deep powdery sandy beach? Where, even in good health, it would be a hard slog in the nearly forty degree Celsius heat. Let alone the fragile state I found myself in.

Besides all that though, I felt sort of obliged. I liked Allesandro, even if I did have an undercurrent feeling that if I nodded off, I'd wake the next morning to no backpack and no Allesandro.

I didn't have it in me to say no to this charming individual outright, so there was only one thing to do.

'We'll put it in the hands of the Gods dude. So I'll toss a coin and let fate decide. Heads, it's to the beach and north with you to Morro de Sao Paulo. Tails and it's south to Rio and the

two beautiful Brazilian girls. (Shows how fucked up my mind was eh? I shoulda' just ditched the cunt. But hey I was gonna' stick by the Gods decision. Ganesha would show me the way.)

Coin, flick, spin.

It soared through air, end over end.....

Landing on the sandy soil.....

'Tails it is!!!!!!! Allesandro. Amigo, I am going south.'

'Bryce you are crazy. You put your life in the throw of a coin. I like that. Goodbye brother. Thank you for being so honest, I am glad I met you. Good luck on your journeys!'

'You too amigo. You too.'

I turned back to Jack in the box and a tearful looking Tucu, with open arms.

We had a last family hug before taking some pictures together. And with that, I turned my back on Universo Paralello. Mindful to thank her and the Gods for all they'd given me, then went to wait for the truck back to the buses, where I was promised I could get a ride to Itubera and then from there; on to Rio.

In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

# Part 3

A ESTRADA

LONGA

NA ESTRADA

I sat on that fuckin' truck and it felt like the weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders.

Man.

I could breathe.

What the fuck had I just put myself through?

That was a heavy experience.

But, I've done it!

I've flown half way round the fuckin' world on my own, for this party.

And man.

I've made the fuckin most of it!

The bus dropped me off in Itubera. I fucked about for a while, trying to sort out how I was gonna' get to Rio and from there onto Santos to see the girls. Turned out I was gonna' have to change at some hick town in the middle of God knows where and carry on from there.

At that God knows where fuckin' place, I would have to spend the night. From there I'd go on down to Rio. From Rio it was another God forsaken bus ride down to the girls. This was gonna' be hell.

This meant three fuckin days on the road at least, and all I wanted to do right then was curl up into a little ball and quiver. Poor me, poor, poor me.

I dunno' if you've ever done long bus journeys before, and by long I don't mean two or three hours, I'm talkin', eighteen, twenty four, thirty six. Dam one time me and the beautiful Justyna did a fifty two hour mission from Poland to Greece! Fuckin' nightmare!

The only upside to nightmares like long bus rides is, although at the time it can be mind numbingly boring. When you look back, some of your quirkiest moments can come from them. I've got some good bus and train ride stories, but they're based in Asia, and at the moment we're finishing with Brazil.

I was on that fuckin' bus, and once again I couldn't sleep. Man, it's like they make those seats outta' something uncomfortable on purpose.

Bastardos I know, but hey such is life. The seats are uncomfortable. Whatever, deal with it! They're more comfortable than the seat on the train that takes me to work back in London.

So I'd suffered twelve or fifteen hours of hell on the bus, only to be dropped off at some depot in the middle of what looked like an industrial estate, with no idea where I was.

There was fuckin' nothing there! Except, (thank God I happened to look to my left) a rundown shitty, hotel on the other side of some manic fuckin' road.

Push the cross the road button.

Wait.

Beep, beep, beep, beep.

Cross.

Lovely, just have to keep it together long enough to sign in. Pay for the night up front and get to my room.

Done.

Deep Sigh!

I threw myself onto a mattress for the first time in a week.

Click. Switch on the fan.

Strip.

Breathe.

Sweat.

Shower.

Shower like I've never showered before!

Cold water only!

Suits me fine!

I didn't need a hot shower. I needed cooling off, scraping off and passing out.

I didn't even wanna' smoke a joint. I still had some of that beautiful charris that I'd scored off the fulla' while Jay Om was playing.

I didn't even wanna' look at it!

All I wanted to do was pass out, but I still had to go back over the road though and buy my ticket to Rio before that happened. I needed to get south. I only had a week left in the country and there was still a lot of road to cover. I didn't wanna' waste any of my time in a place like this.

Oh my God I felt bruised all over; beaten up. As I've said, 'Like I'd lost a fight.'

The TV was all in Brazilian. I stared at it for a while then made the decision to get up off my ass, go over the road and get the fuckin' ticket.

Pushing open the door on to the street a dry, smelly, grit filled wind hit me right in the teeth, putting a layer of dust across my dried out tongue.

Down to the traffic lights again, unable to lift my head up to look straight 'cause it made me feel ill and dizzy. It felt as if there were small creatures doing their best to haul me down by clinging to my shoulders.

It was hot. The light was red and the traffic was starting to queue up, so I skipped between a few of the cars and made it safely to the little island in the middle, with its three quarter foot high curb.

I say to myself, 'I can do this. It's not far. Only gotta' get across to the other side of the road buy the ticket then it's bed time, so keep it together ma, keep it together.'

As they would say in Brazil, 'Nada Problema.'

**BANG!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

**Deep in breath!!!!**

**No time to yell!!!!**

**No time to scream!!!!**

**KABOOM!!!!**

**They were screaming!**

**Both of them.**

To my left, one inch on the other side of the traffic light, two feet in the air, was a metallic pickle green Chevy Impala or something like that. And it was going fast. It had hit the island just beside me at such a pace that it now had no wheels on the ground. Not thirty centimetres away, there was a man who looked in his late thirties with wild eyes, his mouth frozen in a scream!

The world was still.

In his arms was a child. Limp. Wearing pink pyjamas. You could see, normally she would have had olive skin, skin that would go with her tight, curly, black locks. But at that moment she was pale, yellowish, almost blue or green.

The car was so high in the air the guy's face was eye level to mine. Next to him, was a woman, her face a torn sculptured mask; a different photographic moment of torment. Both hands were on the wheel, arms locked like her gaping jaw.

Boom!!!!!! As that wild throw back from the seventies of a machine hit the ground with an ear blistering screech of the tyres.

There was pointing and yelling as they took a hard left and just as suddenly as they appeared, they were gone.

Breathe in.  
Breathe out.

One more time.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Feel the air inside you. You're still alive!

Come on heart, the lungs haven't given up so you can't either. You need to do your part too and beat again for me.

Please.

Whoomp whoomp, whoomp whoomp. Like the music.

I could feel my thick pulsing blood start to move again.

Both hands were clutched like a vulture's claws around the post that had kept me three inches from death!

Three inches. Literally.

Come on heart keep going. Don't let me down.

I looked at the guy parked behind me, not able to speak. Willing myself to breathe, willing my heart to keep beating. Trying not to pass out. An expression on my face that cried out, 'Did you just see that?!!!'

It looked like he had, but didn't really understand what had just happened either.

Beep, beep, beep, beep. The cross the road sign was flashing. I had to keep going. Like Indiana Jones, I was halfway across the bridge and it was just as far either way. There was no point going back. If I went back to the hotel room I'd never come back out to get the ticket to Rio and I'd be stuck there for another day. I couldn't do that, I had to keep moving.

There was nothing else left for it but to look both ways, then gingerly put one foot in front of the other.

Beep, beep, beep, beep.

And I'd better do it quickly too, before the little cross the road sign stops beeping.

That was that. I manned up, although be it a not even a glimmer of my former self and made it to the front of the station.

The world was carrying on like nothing had happened. I was like a returning fuckin' war veteran or something and there was no parade for me. I just wanted to say to someone, 'Do you know what I've been through? Do you know what I just fuckin' did? What nearly happened to me?' I wanted to yell it out on the street. Get some fuckin' attention for it or something. No, everyone just carried on like everything was fuckin' normal.

Maybe I needed to get my head together a bit.

Ha! Look at that guy. He's selling ice cream!

'Can I have a big ice cweam pweathe mithter?'

'Oh that's right, Brazilian.'

I just pointed at the picture of the one with a flake in it.

'Obrigado amigo.'

I stood in the wrong queue a couple of times but hey, nothing could make me feel any worse, after my adventures trying to cross that road.

Hey, fuck it though! I'm alive! You know what? I think I deserve a beer after that little episode, as a celebration to life and to the achievement of not giving up – when that's all I wanted to do.

I accidentally found myself in the right queue. The guy behind the bullet proof glass spoke almost better English than me and was very helpful. Next thing ya' know I had a ticket all the way to Santos and my beautiful girls, along with a forty eight hour stop off in Rio.

Life was sweet again! I'd overcome a lot of challenges, but had stuck with it. I had not curled up in the foetal position on an island in the middle of a busy Brazilian road like I wanted too and cried.

Against all obstacles, I'd actually done it. I had the golden ticket. Like fuckin' Charlie and his God dam chocolate factory. 'Cause I've got a golden ticket. I've got a golden twinkle in my eye.'

It was time for another deep breath and then to find a bar and a pharmacy that supplied strong sleeping tablets. I think it was another twelve or so hours to Rio and there was no fuckin' way I was gonna be awake for a minute of it.

I felt a bit more together, the adrenaline had sorted me right out. Unlike shortly before, I was now wide awake to everything that was going on around me. On the other side of the depot was a market type place and I checked that out first for a pharmacy, and then for a beer.

The guy at the pharmacy tried to charge me ten pounds for some sleeping tablets and even the lady beside him had looked at the fulla' a little funny. I eventually got them for five.

Back towards the depot there was a big open pub with no one in it and a barbecue roaring out the side. Sold.

'Ola amigo. Um bia por favor.'

He pulled out a seat, set me up a table and sat an empty plate right there in front of me.

Next thing ya' know he's over by his, cut out of a forty four gallon drum barbecue, and lifting off a dozen fat sausages that were on a big skewer thing.

'Ah amigo. For you.' In a very stuttered English. But hey, he'd tried, the same way I had.

There was no one else around, in the market or the pub. Quite at home he unfolded another chair and sat beside.

We said nothing apart from.

'Mmmmmmmmm, nom, nom, nom.' as we crammed his wonderfully cooked and greasy sausages into our mouths.

The fat was running down our chins and fingers, both of us smiling away in a pig trough of silence.

I bought us a couple more beers each. After, we shared the same dirty cloth that he'd used to wipe down the tables to wipe down our faces, and then shared a warm embrace before I carefully made my way back across the busy road to the hotel. I shoulda' tried to get some coke off of him, but I think my mind had blanked all that shit out for a while.

Neither of us had said much more than hello to each other, but I felt like I'd made yet friend in that vast, cultured and wonderful country.

SEU NOME É RIO

I slept man. Nothing stopped it. I was so fucked and mentally trodden on, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry at what I'd been through?

I dunno' much about the next bus ride. I must have taken some of those sleeping tablets and properly knocked myself out. I don't remember anything about pulling into Rio. I do remember somehow I'd already sorted out the place I was gonna' stay at, but I don't know how I did it. Even crazier in Brazilian I had the address of where I was going. I wasn't too sure how I had accomplished this but hey, you gotta' go with the flow sometimes.

I got there and it was new age looking, even had a climbing wall.

My name was booked and I'd already paid?!

Once again, it was the middle of the day and there was no one there.

I didn't wanna' sleep on my own.

They had a couple of big bean bags down by reception. I'd use them and listen to the people walking in and out while my eyes were shut and waited for sleep once more.

As I checked in the beautiful girl at reception said, 'We are going to a rave tonight in a Fevala. Would you like to come?'

'Sim, quanta costa? Actually it doesn't matter. Look, I'm going to sleep right here if that's ok?'

'Sim, ok to me.'

I woke surrounded by people. There was a Scandinavian chick talking about how she'd just spent seven days in some retreat of silence. No one had said a thing. She was talkin' now though, I'll tell ya that.

She was trying to learn more of the language and all I can remember thinking is, 'Try hard' but in a cynical way.

I fell asleep again, and next thing I knew there was a different beautiful looking girl gently shaking me by the shoulder with her warm hand. With a smile she was waving a ticket in front of my face and saying, 'Hey bro. I got told to wake you up when the van get here.'

'What? What? What van? What do ya mean?'

'Bro. You've got a ticket to the rave tonight. When I started my shift I was told to wake you up when the van to the party arrives.'

'What?'

A slow recollection of what I'd done to myself crept its way to the surface of mulch.

'Oh that's right. Oh God.'

But that was it. I was in Rio baby and I had a ticket to a rave. All I needed now was some cocaine and I was away!

Cue the Duran Duran hit!

Her name is Rio and she dances on the sand  
Just like that river twists across a dusty land  
And when she shines she really shows you all she can  
Oh Rio, Rio dance across the Rio Grande  
Her name is Rio she don't need to understand  
And I might find her if I'm looking like I can  
Oh Rio, Rio hear them shout across the land  
From mountains in the north down to the Rio Grande

Do, do,

And with that, I got in the van.



## In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

There was girl with dreads and a German accent, that had come from my guest house and three Irish, two boys and one girl. Apparently we had to pick up a few others and then we would be off.

'Ola amigo. Are you in charge?'

'Yes my friend. How can I help?'

'Can you get me any coke dude?'

'Please no. Don't say that. No I cannot. And please do not try and ask anybody tonight. The party is organised by the Police. You will get us all arrested. I will get in much trouble because I bring you to the Favela!'

Whoa! Wasn't expecting that.

Certainly ain't South East Asia.

'Ok. Sorry dude. I completely understand. I'm cool.'

'I hope you understand. There will be big trouble. You may get robbed or killed. This is the Favela.'

'Whatever. No coke. I get it.' Should have stayed in fuckin' bed.

We pulled up at a gas station for supplies. There was about ten of us in the van by then and only me and the Irish bought beer. Everyone else got a Coca Cola each; I can't call it Coke anymore.

Mmmmmmmmm, Coke. That's why.

It was a good drive through the winding streets of Rio. Eventually we pulled up outside some ginormous theatre like nightclub that looked like the ones in London. There was people everywhere and a huge queue out the front.

Stumbling out, we look around gawping at the scene. Like Nottingham on a Friday night at closing time it was total fuckin' carnage. People everywhere. No trouble though. It was all a bursting balloon of laughter.

They ushered us off to one side, before letting us through the V.I.P line. The one reserved for the gringos. You could see the locals knew it too, as they stood there in the hour long section.

The guide from the van grouped us together. 'Now listen to me. You are all totally safe here. We have an area reserved up on the balcony above us, looking at the stage. You are totally welcome to come down here and party with the local people. You are in no danger here. But please. Do not go outside and walk around the streets. Now listen ladies, the Brazilian men are more than likely, more forward in their behaviour than what you're used to. That is ok. If you feel uncomfortable about their behaviour to you, just be assertive. Politely please though. Do not be rude. The Brazilian men are very proud and do not like to have someone make them lose face. However they are respectful and if you say how you feel, they will understand without thinking twice about it. They are forward because they love women, not because they disrespect them. Whatever you get up to, remember. Meet me here in this spot at three am. This is Brazil guys. Have a good time.'

With that, he showed us to the upstairs gringo area. I bought the girl with the dreadlocks a drink and we went downstairs and joined the party!

I remember the DJ, who by the way had the crowd in the palm of his hand, kept playing some sample that sounded like a frog was croaking.

They seemed to love it though. And I loved it by the end too.

Raap-raap. Raap-raap.

The place was heaving. The guys were very forward in their behaviour and did dance closely to the German girl but they danced closely to each other as well. Grinding on one another, like guys at the old gay Fist parties at the Fridge in London

They could always spot the gringo and would smile that Cheshire cat smile and shake your hand. It was magical, even if I was tired and three sheets to the wind.

It was a typical rave, hot, sweaty, great sound, lasers and other lights. It was a real professional set up, with about a thousand happy go lucky kids having the time of their lives.

We all met up at three, went outside and got a hotdog. They put sweet corn on them though. Sweet corn on a hot dog? Dude come on.

I remember thinking, I'm gonna' get properly poisoned from eating this, but no, in the long run, everything was fine.

We all piled into the van and two Irish voices piped up.

'Where's Connor? Where's our friend?'

The guide counted us quickly and checked his note book. Realisation came across his face.

'Where is your amigo? Huh? The other one? Huh?'

'Dunno, haven't seen him for hours.'

'Why did you not say something?'

'We were havin' a good time. Didn't really think about him.'

The dude looked panicked. He got on the phone and must have called the search parties out. Three or four other guys showed up, all on their phones and about thirty minutes later they brought him to the door, a mixed look of relief and disgust on their faces.

He was trolleyed big time, but otherwise the dude was fine. He had the incoherent grin of someone who'd put themselves out there and in turn been rewarded for it.

In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

### A MENINA DE IPANEMA

I woke up in a bed and it was the next day. It was dead hot and the place was empty once again. That fuckin tune was crankin' the moment I remembered where I was. I'm not usually a fan of Duran Duran but today I was.

I was sorting through my bag and came across a big bud from the weed I'd bought all that time ago on Morro de Sao Paulo. Fuck it felt months ago but in actual fact it was only nine days. It's amazing how much you can fit into a week. There was only one thing for it. I was gonna' have to change the tune in my head and go to one of these famous beaches.

Copacabana or Ipanema.

Which tune meant more to me?

At the Copa (CO!), Copacabana (Copacabana)  
The hottest spot north of Havana (here)  
At the Copa (CO!), Copacabaaaanaaaaa  
Music and passion were always the fashion  
At the Copa....they fell in love

Or

Tall and tanned and young and lovely  
The girl from Ipanema goes walking  
And when she passes  
Each man she passes  
Goes Aaah!

When she moves it's like a samba  
That swings so cool and sways so gently  
That when she passes  
Each man she passes  
Goes Aaah!

Oh - but he watches so sadly  
How - can he tell her he loves her  
He - would just give his heart gladly

But each day when she walks to the sea  
She looks straight ahead not at he

Tall and tanned and young and lovely  
The girl from Ipanema goes walking  
And when she passes  
He smiles  
But she doesn't see  
No she doesn't see  
She just doesn't seeeeeeeeee

Now when I was a teenager my friend Michael used to come over to my place and bring this tape he had of an Aussie comedian called George Smilavich or some shit like that. On that tape George used to sing his own version.

It was pretty much the same song but after the final line, 'She just doesn't see.' Old George here would add 'Because she was blind' and we'd fall about the place laughing after drinking two litres of Fanta as quickly possible and flying on the sugar rush. (Yes you can see all the warning signs were there)

So it was a pretty simple decision really. The girl from Ipanema it was. The song had more history in it for me.

I'd smoke a joint on Ipanema beach in recognition to my two decade old friendship with Mike. Besides, the Copacabana song isn't even really based in Brazil is it.

I got directions to the bus stop and waited in the sun with a good solid tune playin' in my head. The ride took about an hour and I don't remember havin' to change anywhere either.

I was dropped off a couple of hundred metres back from the beach, lost in a labyrinth of high rise apartments and hotels.

A quick walk across some busy roads and the beach opened out in front of me. Making my way down some steps on to the sand I kicked off my flip flops and ran down to the pounding water's edge. It was uncanny; there was no one there at all. Sure it was a little windy and cloudy but hey it's Ipanema baby, come on!

I sparked my doobie and thought of the good times and mischief me and Mike used to get up to. Like the time we got his brother to buy us beer when we were about fourteen and drank it all through a funnel before heading down to the local roller skating rink. We were playing with this big stick we'd named Jimmy Giraffe, and pretended he was eating from the trees. Jimmy the Giraffe had a Scottish accent and would say. 'I'm Jimmy Giraffe, Umm, yum, yum, yum.' as he munched leaves off the trees. It was silly, innocent, and fantastic. That was one of the first times I got drunk and I love it to this day.

I smoked the joint and walked left along the shoreline.

It gave me a chance to reflect on my surroundings and the film City of God.

When you stand on the beach and look back on Rio, she seemed to me, to be a place built for the rich. The city was awash with high rise buildings right up to the sea. It's kind of in a valley, the shape of an amphitheatre and on the hillsides around it are the Favelas. I'm not talkin' one or two shanty houses here. I'm talkin a wilderness of forgotten people. Millions of them, as I said earlier while Jesus stands arms open in embrace for those who can afford to live under his gaze, his back is turned on the, over four million souls who live behind him.

They weren't hidden completely behind Christ the Redeemer though, they were everywhere. Like the amazing graffiti that covered the boardwalk walls, these dwellings covered nearly every inch of the near distance that wasn't the play land for the wealthy.

These people weren't even the cleaners and cooks for this town, like most locals in third world tourist destinations. These people had been left with nothing except machine guns and crack.

This might be an unfair and not completely educated opinion but that is the impression I got, and I reckon a lot of others get the same feeling too.

It's not fair, God dam it, in this day and age to pretend like there's nothing's wrong with the situation. You can't just ignore millions of people in poverty, right next fuckin' door to you. These people are still part of the one true race, the human race! To do nothing about it, to carry on with our lives and not put any effort into rebalancing the way we all live in today's society isn't right. Why are the newspapers and news shows making us concentrate on celebrity haircuts and pretend wars against threats that never really existed, when they could be influencing us to get out there and help one another? Our Governments are spending billions a day on fear and fighting instead of education and food!

In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Paralelo'

Why?!

Anyway..... Enough of that.

An ol' boy came trotting across the deep, wide beach that is Ipanema, with a look that said drug dealer about him.

'Ola Amigo.' he said.

'Ola, tu du bem?'

'Marihuana?'

Now there was no one else around and I'm pretty sure that if there were any cops watching me, I'd be a sucker for a march to the cash machine.

'Nao, amigo, obrigado.' And for once in my life, walked away.

I came to a headland at the end of the bay, where some guys were doing some amazing Capoeira and checked them out for a while before finding my way back to the bus stop, my guest house, and an early night's sleep.

The following day, Santos and the girls would be waiting for me, and I had no desire to explore this farce of a town.

## DUAS MULHERES BELAS E UMA VIAGEM ÁCIDA

As the sun set over the amazing depths of the Atlantic for the second to last time for me, I arrived in Santos to find the girls waiting for me in Ana Carolina's car. It had taken countless fuckin' hours, but I'd made it.

These two girls aren't just beautiful, there's something about them, a confidence, a glow, a cheeky glint in their eyes.

Ana Carolina was about five foot four, with an Italian heritage that added an olive colour to her smooth skin and sleek just past the shoulder dark brown hair.

Melissa at the time, had long mousy brown hair, a smile you could drown in, and a scar just on the side of her nose that added a wild beauty to her five foot ten persona.

'Hey do you guys wanna' spliff? I've got some awesome charris on me that this guy made himself.' Before going off into a spiel about my time during Jay Om's set.

'Sim, of course, wow. You have charris?'

'Of course, I would provide nothing less for my two favourite Brazilian women.'

I pulled the hash out for the first time since I had left the party. There was a good sized chunk left, about quarter of an ounce and passed it to Melissa

'Look it's good quality eh?'

She played with it in her hands, twisting it about with an excitable expression.

'Hey, what's this Bryce? Is that acid?'

'What? What acid? Nah it's just pot man.'

'No this! Look!'

She peeled a small coloured square of cardboard off the opposite side of it from where I was sitting. I'd recognise that shit anywhere.

'Holy fuckin shit. Look at that. Fuckin' eh it is dude! Ha! Not just that, it's a Hoffman too.' Going into another story about how all they had at Universo Paralello were Hoffmans, a sea of the fuckers. Enough to keep ten thousand people supplied for three or four days before things got desperate. That's gotta be thirty or forty thousand at least.

We found a nice hotel that the girls were happy with. Smoked a fat, I'm-meeting-up-with-the-girls-and-found-some-acid, sized spliff and called it a night with hugs and promises to see each other in the morning.

I kept getting flash backs of the sound of the car hitting the curb beside me like an exploding rocket. Often when I blinked I saw the twisted look of anguish and despair slashed across that guy's face. In the silence of my bed I could hear his scream, although thankfully mind seemed to block out the image of the child in his arms. She would just be a pink and white blur with damp curly brown hair.

To this day I still hear that scream. Still hear the explosion of the car as it hit the over sized curb beside me hard enough to launch it well over a foot into the air.

From the hotel reception I called the girls. Melissa and Carolina came and picked me up and took me down to the long, wide, and for some reason grey sandy beach.

Santos is like a harbour town or something. You've got this beautiful huge beach but you can't walk on the grass. There are loads of tanker ships parked up along the horizon to pollute your view, whilst they wait their turn to pull into the channel about two miles down to the left, where they could unload the goods they had brought. Maybe that explained the colour of the sand.

The beach was quiet at the moment but later, I was told little cafe's would set up along it, serving beer, Caiparinhas and food.

On a day like that though? Eating's cheating. You can keep your sandwiches thank you very much. Apart from booze there was only one thing I wanted to stick in my mouth that day, so I divided that acid into thirds and we had it for lunch.

We made our way left towards the shipping canal and the luscious green mountains on the other side. Palm trees were randomly peppered along the beach, giving you the constant reminder of where you were. The temperature in the south of Brazil was fantastic, more moderate. Not like the heat of Salvador and Pratigi beach.

I was in my camo shorts, which had actually managed to get a wash in my brief stay in Rio. Turned out I'd paid for the whole lot to get done while I was in my sleepy haze. Like the accommodation in Rio, I couldn't remember having it done, but I couldn't deny that all my clothes were clean and folded nicely. I'd actually managed to accomplish quite a lot while I was half a man.

The rave in Rio though. Jeez that took the piss. I didn't need to be quite that organised. But hey at least I had another story to tell.

The acid came on nice and smoothly, warming my inner core in the same way the Mr Sun warmed my skin. Both of the beautiful women I was with were in teeny weenie bikinis, and I could of walked behind them all day long, if they'd let me of course. I felt like the luckiest man alive that these two old friends from London had gone outta' their way to look after me.

We posed and took photos of each other, smoked spliffs and ate ice cream; it was one of those true California dreaming days. We were hippies in the sun and it was beautiful.

After a couple of dawdling miles we found a small aquarium and so I could get that touristy gringo feel, we went in and spaced out on the fish. I became quite attached to a big turtle and named him Boris. There weren't many people around so we could be ourselves and not have to get paranoid that we were tripping in a public place. The LSD made it feel like the aquarium had been built just for us.

Eventually some families did show up so we gathered our heads together and as one, trying to hold in that uncontrollable laughter, with lips pursed together and cheeks puffed out, arm in arm we marched back out into the wide open world.

It was nearly time for Mr Sun to clock out of work for the day. You could see he was checking his watch and waiting for the whistle to blow.

I gave him a deep bow and thanked him for all the support and comfort he'd shown me over the last month, along with his warmth and the spectrum of colours he had shared with me. He'd been my constant companion through thick and thin, I wanted to drink a toast to my friend, Mr Sun.

Some guy had set up a blue and white tarpaulin as a little cafe, right on the beach.

'Ola amigo. Mucho grande quatro tequila por favour.' I ordered, confident in what I was saying.

Sure enough, four big tequilas were brought to our little plastic table and to the three of us.

'To my companion and friend, the Sun!' and we drank these monstrous South American sized shots as one. The other I poured into the sand as tribute to the Sun, the Earth and the Gods of India, so that this moment could be shared by all of us.

We ordered three more Tequilas and gossiped about everything, especially the guy passed out on his chair at the table next to us. He was good and proper asleep. The owner of the cafe seemed to be familiar with the dude and proved it later by calling our attention, before throwing a bucket of water over him. We laughed so hard, the ever smiling Melissa, fell off her chair.

The whole time Carolina kept snapping away on her camera. While I had my shirt stuck on my head like some Arabian sheik or something, the whole scene around us colourful, comical and innocent.

If you ever get the chance, you can see all the pics, on Melissa's Facebook page. In fact you can see most of my holiday on my Facebook page. The videos I took at the party. There's Alf, The BFG, Miguel and Serafina. I've got pictures of Jack in the box and Tucu. There's

many moments and glimpses of the stories in this book. Moments that will be with me forever and now maybe with you too.

There's nothing like putting yourself out there in the sun, way out of your comfort zone.

I spend all fuckin' year workin' my ass off in some job I hate. Literally shovelling human shit and dealing with blocked urinals. The urinals, they're worst. The pipes fill up with this solid white sediment that I guess must end up as kidney stones if you don't piss it out. This stuff gets all over you as you saw through the old pipe and replace it with a fresh one. You can't pour acid in to dissolve it. Doesn't work like that, trust me I've tried. Anything other than having to get underneath and pull it all apart. When you do try and add acid to it, it gives off a smell like burning hair or something. It doesn't actually do the job and then you're left with blocked pipes that now have sulphuric acid in them too. Now the whole place stinks like fuck, you're worried about getting one or two drops of piss on you to start off with. Next thing ya' know ya' have to lay on the floor to get enough muscle to unscrew some pipe and the filth of the world ends up all over you. The worst thing with this is that I was usually doing it in the central business district, and while you're busy workin' some fuckin' cunt in a suit would just walk in and take a piss beside ya'. Like you weren't even there. Like the job isn't degrading enough, some suit wearing motherfucker pisses all over you.

And fuck, did I let them know they weren't better than me. For a start I probably earned more money than most of those cunts. But they'd argue back down their nose at you good and proper in a snivelling voice that, 'There isn't another toilet on this floor.'

'Well take the stairs then mate.' Fuck off!

Next thing ya' know, ya' boss has had a phone call that one of his guys has a bad attitude, yada, yada, yada. Such is life though I s'ppose. I could always study and get a higher status job, but this one allows me to travel whenever I get the cash together.

You can have as many job cuts and recessions as you like, guys like me have always gotta' be there, testing the emergency lights, checking the water for bacteria, shit like that. It's pretty much one of the most stable trades in the world. As long as there are big buildings, guys like me have got a job.

I used to run a bar that held over four hundred people and had a staff of another twenty working for me. But I packed it all in so I didn't have to lie in bed worried about my job and so I could make money and go travelling. Now I've worked my way up the ladder again and am part of the Estates management team; even got my own office. Still though, I'm a freelancer and can travel when ever I've got the cash again to do so.

Mr Sun wished me one final farewell over the Atlantic and took an early finish by hiding behind one of the ships in the distance. It was such a sight, such a natural beauty to compliment the beauties I was with.

The girls tried to sort some coke out but came up with nothing. Brazil, what the fuck? So we called it a night again and the girls took me back to the hotel with a promise to take me to the bus station in the morning.

Tomorrow I'd be heading back to Sao Paulo, where I had one more night left in Brazil before this trip was finally over and I would rejoin the real world and start shovelling shit again.

It'd been a long journey and I was down to the last few dozen hours of it. We had one last fat joint and I gave to the girls some to take with them, before hitting the hay.

There was some cool soap opera based in the Favelas on. I couldn't understand a word they said but, I could understand what was going on. Being the soap fan I am, I was hooked straight away before finally drifting off to dream Brazilian dreams.



## PARA ACABAR COM O COMEÇO

When I first landed in Sao Paulo, this may come as a surprise to you, but I was coming off of the biggest coke bender of my life. At one point I had a straw up each nostril sniffing coke off my girlfriend's tits. I think that's why I was able to handle the amount of crack and shit I did with the boys before eventually freaking out.

I got to Brazil presuming that cocaine would be everywhere. Everyone would be selling it, or at least able to get it. Instead I was faced with a wall of fear.

'No please do not even ask. You'll get arrested or robbed!' But that's not the impression you get of Brazil when you hear other people talk about it.

I think I have an understanding why though. There didn't seem to be any of the social middle class drug use that you get in England. All the people who seemed to do coke in Brazil, actually did crack and their lives were ruined. It's not like back in England where you get out of it on the weekends, and during football games, but still you go to work in the morning. It was different there.

When I first arrived in Sao Paulo at the start of my holiday and checked into my pousada, I tested the water. There were a couple of hippy chicks sitting around doing fuck all, as hippies do, and I asked them if they knew where I could get any weed.

I was looked at with suspicion, before receiving, 'No, I don't know anywhere to get weed from.'

I responded, 'What? Oh well fair enough. Hey look I've been told you can always score off the taxi drivers. I think I'm gonna' try it later on tonight. If I manage to score, do you want me to pick some up for you?'

'Oh, Christ, don't do that!' I was told, 'They'll more than likely drive you straight to the Police station than anything else!'

'Oh, fuck, well thanks for letting me know,' I said.

I sat around tired and at a loss over what to do next. So I rang my friend, Ana Carolina, and she promised to pick me up the next day and show me round Sao Paulo. Cool. I just had to entertain myself for now.

The place had no restaurant, which is something I'm used to in my travels, and if I wanted to eat I was told I had to go down the shop at the end of the road, buy my own food and cook it myself on the stove they provided. Fuckin' ridiculous right? But oh well, such is life I guess.

The day was hot and I was thirsty. 'Any where to get a beer from around here?' I said to the hippy chicks.

'Yeah there's an Irish pub just around the corner to the left if you like.'

An Irish pub! I'd just left the UK, and the only place nearby to get a drink was a pub that looked like the ones back home? No disrespect to Ireland but I'd just come all the way to Brazil man! And now I had no coke, no weed, and was going to have to drink in an Irish bar! What the fuck?! Oh well, if I wanted a beer that seemed like my only choice for the moment.

I hit that for a while, but eventually I got bored of spending my first day in Brazil, drinking on my own in an Irish pub. So I decided to find this shop they were on about, and buy some food, so I could cook it myself and have something to eat.

This was all fuckin' crazy, I presumed that by then – twelve hours after landing – I'd be strung out, drunk and close to disgracing myself. I felt like I'd already done the disgrace thing by only asking for a joint. The fuckin' look that tramp gave me. Grrrr!

I got back to the guesthouse – which had a big steel gate and a video camera you had to pass before they let you in – and fried up the steak I had bought.

Said hippy commented that I'd bought low quality meat, and then was good enough to mention, that I obviously hadn't done much travelling because eating rare meat in a third world country was a build up to disaster. Nice fuckin chick eh?!

It was while sitting there at the table next to the TV area that I noticed her over in the corner rolling a joint. The fuckin' bitch! What the fuck was this shit? That isn't the first time some hippy chick has looked down her nose at me while smoking pot and sayin' that they had no idea where to get any from. I've come across it a few times. I'm sure if I wasn't dressed the way I dress, which is pretty much the clothes my father bought me for Christmas, and was wearing the hippy uniform, I wouldn't of had any problems. But then again, in true hippy fashion, I probably wouldn't have been able to afford to buy my own weed and would of smoked everyone else's!

I didn't really know what to make of all this and the alcohol I'd bought from the shop at the same time I got the steak, was starting to wind me up. So I gave up on my first day in Brazil, having not been invited to join any conversations and made to feel welcome. I felt a little embarrassed and wondered what I would tell my friends about my first twenty four hours here in the land of Carnival, Samba, and Cocaine.

## FINALMENTE UMA ARTICULAÇÃO..... E TODOS ESSE JAZZ

(O segundo dia do feriado)

Well it was a new day and a world of wonders and beauty awaited me.

I'd be meeting with Ana Carolina soon, the sun was shining, (It was snowing in London) and I was in Brazil baby!!!!

Since they didn't sell food there at the guest house, – Fuckin ridiculous – I went up to a place I'd seen next to the Irish bar the night before. An omelette's always good eh? (As long as you're not vegetarian. It's the whole unfertilized chicken foetus thing I guess) Always tasty!

I was meeting Carolina at the tube station up the road. I had no maps as per the plan, only my sense of direction, and trust in the locals, to point me in the right way.

It was right next to a hospital. She was late, but then again all girls are.

Ana Carolina showed up like a vision of dreams in a short flowing skirt, and her eyes sparkled like a thousand diamonds in the sun. We'd only met a few times at this rave I used to run, called Se7en Sins, so I wasn't even sure what she looked like.

Se7en Sins is still going now, although I gave up promoting it some years back..

It was a wild party held in these gothic theme pubs that I used to work in. The parties were completely underground, invites only shin-digs ya' know. In those days it was all hard house, shared house, and two or three sleeping in a room. There were eighteen of us all together in the house in Stoke Newington. Eighteen! They were my closest friends for years to come. Most of the people I lived with at the time of this experience in Brazil, I lived with back then.

Se7en Sins was exclusive and debaucherous. If you ever came to London, you dreamed of going to a party like this one. We had a Halloween-do one time, and a friend of ours worked for a local popular magazine. He got all of us, (Except me of course, for fucks sake, not that I'm bitter or anything) in a double page photo shoot. On the night I was wearing a PVC Cone head, so I looked just like the guys in the movie Cone heads. Along with a little plastic, fluorescent cowboy hat stuck to the top, flower petal sunglasses, and a big black and red cape all married off with a big silk sash for a belt, and a giant gold cardboard belt buckle.

The toilet doors were disguised as book cases, and there were recorded voices playing in the cubicles. Totally mad. You'd walk into this crazy venue with its little goblin statues and working scientific experiments, and there'd be a fat line of speed waiting for ya, a good huff of poppers, and a free cloak room you could hang ya' shit in ya'self.

Everyone was friends. There would be no trouble or thieving. One time the manager of the place came up and said. 'Bryce I found thirty E's on the floor, so if anyone comes up asking for them. Tell them I've got them and they're locked up in the safe. They can get them back straight away. As long as they know the symbol on the front. Otherwise, they're mine.'

Anyway, back to Brazil a few years later, Ana Carolina took me shopping. I needed a belt, so that gave us a mission for the day. Me and my host walked around the streets until she found a place that sold suitable attire – like a good belt – before we met Melissa.

The girls took me to the forty second floor of some big sky scraper, and it gave me the best view of the concrete jungle, that is Sao Paulo.

We got to the top of the building, that was so high we had to take two elevators, and on arrival at the front doors, on that sunny Brazilian day with those two sunny Brazilian women, we were informed that no, because I was wearing flip flops and a jaws shirt that the marvellous Mish had bought me. I could not go in.

The girls being the girls, put on their charm, and with hands gripped as if in prayer, and puppy dog eyes that would melt an ice castle, the kind gentleman let me in.

It was all you can eat buffet.... And hell yeah we ate. It was fuckin' great. The girls tried to feed me a Brazilian delicacy that looked somewhat like artichoke. Just as a note: Through

experience, I've become sceptical of what some nations call a 'National delicacy. Turns out it was just some endangered palm species, hey either way it tasted like cardboard to me.

We chowed there and drank good red wine. By the way we were dressed I think the waiter wasn't sure if we were rich, extravagant and didn't give a fuck about money, or confidence tricksters.

The bill came and it was about six hundred reals, about a month's wages for the average the local, I only had a wedge of five hundred real notes on me, so I told him to keep fifty real for himself, and like a gangster with two hot chicks under my arms, went to do some more shopping.

We went to a place like Camden town in London, but instead of it being spread all over the street level, it was closer to Hong Kong. (I've got a good one about my twenty four hours in Hong Kong. Not as good as the twenty four hours in Japan though.) It was a building about five stories tall and each floor had a different style going on. One was skater gear, another, biker, the top one tattoos. Alternative shit like that. I was lookin' at some cool shoes, Airwalks I think, when I noticed the girls were putting the charm on again,

'Amigo, marihuana?' and sweet talked a big fat joint off the young fulla's that ran the shop.

Apparently Sao Paulo is apparently divided into different sectors and Carolina lived in the Japanese one. She had an apartment about four floors up, and even there she was paranoid about caught smoking pot. The Brazilians? They just don't seem to agree with drug use! It was odd, and not at all what I expected. Not at all like Europe.

We smoked and laughed. I was heading to Salvador Bahia the next day, and promises were made to see them in Santos once I was done with the north.

I made it back to the guest house and the hippy girls from the day before were sitting out the back with a couple of other people, and they were all smoking weed.

Some fulla' stood up and welcomed me, pulling out a seat beside him.

'Hey how's it?' before passing me the roach. 'Sorry this is the last of it. But if you want any let me know I can get it for you anytime.'

'Oh really? Wish I knew that yesterday.'

'Yeah man I stay here. No problems.'

He sounded American and seemed a nice guy. I already preferred him over the hippy chicks anyway.

Later we were all invited to a Jazz club by the young local crowd that ran the place. When we piled into the van a bag of crisps was passed around. I took a big mouth full and a fuckin' piece of corn chip dug itself deep into the already sensitive tissue, that my wisdom tooth has spent the last year or so, slowly gnawing through my jaw and gums to get to. I could taste blood straight away and knew that at some point in the near future it was all going to swell up and I'd be put through hell for a few days until the infection died down. I'd have to make sure to get some mouthwash or something, to help see me it through. I wondered if they sold mouthwash around there? If they didn't, what alternatives would I have to turn too?

We pulled up in some industrial looking type area and are escorted through a doorway, where upon entry to the club, the guys from the guesthouse gave us a drinks menu each and a pencil.

'Hey whenever you want a drink. Give them this card and have them put a mark beside each drink you order. Do not hand over money. You pay at the end of the night.'

Weird. Oh well whatever.

The place was ya' perfect Jazz club, dark, smokey, brown wall paper to match the brown couches and....hey... what's that? Sniff, sniff.....smelt like ganja.

In Brazil you would say, 'Universo Parallelo'

The air was thick with the smell of it. Like an ol' dog scenting his dinner, I followed the trail through a doorway leading to an outside area, where a whole different kinda' party was happening.

Who was I gonna' score off here man? Hmmm. I stood around for a while, not sure on who to ask and hoped someone would approach me.

After about five minutes I became frustrated of the non-action while everyone around me got high.

As I passed through the doorway back into the club itself, in the dark little corridor you passed through, was a fulla with a well looked after afro, and nice snappy clothing. So I dropped my shyness and put myself out there. 'Hi you have any Marijuana?'

'Gringo? No Marijuana.'

'Oh. Ok then. Hey do you know where I can get any?'

'No. Only coca.'

'Really? You only have cocaine?' Woo hoo!!!

'Sim, Ah yes, only cocaine.'

'Really? How much is that then?'

'Quanta costa?'

'Ahh, I guess so?'

'Vinte real.'

At this point I had no idea what Vinte real meant, but was pretty sure I was close to getting loaded. So I just pulled out some cash and handed a fifty over to him. He passed me thirty real change and a small plastic vile filled, with what I hoped to be, South American marching powder. Giddee up cowboy!!!

I went out through the little court yard again and followed the toilet signs. Then I cracked open the little container he had given me and had a taste. Yup, cocaine. Pretty cut but it was only five pounds, so who gives a fuck, right? The dream had been answered. Five pound cocaine, just like everyone had said. Not the best quality, but the ball was now rolling. The show was on the road, you could say. So as you can imagine I chopped up a giant, just-scored- my-first gram-of -Charlie-in-Brazil-and-it-was-only-a-fiver sized line, then hoofed that shit up, faster than a drag car goes down the quarter mile.

I was really proud of myself for this, and with an as yet unnamed smile – that would soon become recognisable across many of the faces I met in Brazil – I went to check on the others and grabbed another beer.

I saw one of the hippy chicks, grrrrr. It was the one though, who had pretty much said nothing. So at least the only words that had come out of her mouth hadn't been lies.

I sought for peace. 'Hey you wanna' drink?'

'Yes please. I'll have a Caiparinha.'

'Oh fuck that's a good idea. When in Rome and all that eh?' Pah, fuckin' beer. I can buy that shit in London. I'm in Brazil baby and they drink Caiparinhas in this country.

'Two Caiparinhas please boss.' I still wasn't up to speed with the amigo thing yet.

I passed him the drinks menu card and he put two marks beside the Caiparinha box and that was me, sorted.

I passed her, her drink, and we got chatting about what we were doing in Brazil, and where we had travelled before. I bought up the subject of the weed from the day before. You could see she was pretty embarrassed about it.

'Well I don't really know her that well. We only met at the pousada a couple of days ago.'

'Oh there ya' go then.' See, ya can't judge a book by the cover eh?'

'Well in that case, hey you want a line of coke?'

'Hell yeah I do. You have coke? Where did you get it from?'

‘The dude standing just over there, cheap as chips too. Have a big one, let’s finish it off and buy more.

With the barriers down, and a friendship blooming, the band came on. It was more dancey and jivey than just classic Jazz, if ya’ know what I mean. At the end of the day it was good music and that’s all that matters yeah? The club heated up and got smokier still. The ice filled Caiparinhas were flowing like, nonstop, and were a treat to the senses, and as the night progressed the club filled up with young smartly dressed late twenty something’s.

I went over to the guy I scored off earlier.

‘Can I have another one please?’

‘Another? Sim amigo.’

I took that as a yes and handed him another twenty reals. We got chatting.

‘You are gringo yes? How did you find this place?’

‘I’m not too sure what a gringo is but I’m from New Zealand if that’s what you mean. The people who run the guesthouse I’m staying at brought us. This place is cool eh?’

‘Sim amigo, yes. Cool. You are lucky they bring you here. There are no gringos. Here you can experience the real Brazil.’

‘I like it! This is fuckin’ great dude.’

‘Hey check it out. My friends are playing next. They are the greatest. Come, let’s go party.’

We went back inside and the hippy chick was standing there with a cute smile and two Caiparinhas. I introduced myself properly to the guy and we shook hands. My first Brazilian friend in Brazil, fuckin’ awesome. We partied, bought rounds and sweated until the wee hours of the morning. Finally the crew that worked at the guesthouse rounded us up and hustled us out the door back to the van.

First of all though we had to queue up and pay for everything that was scribed onto our drinks cards. I’d sunk cocktails all night, and my bill came to less than twenty quid. Fuckin’ eh! Some of the others who had been on the road for longer complained that it was expensive. Fuck them. Sixty pounds for a gram of cocaine and seven pounds a cocktail, that’s fuckin’ expensive dude.

I spent the rest of the morning with just me and the hippy chick gossiping about nothing. She was going to Colombia in a couple of days and I was welcome to go with her. It was a nice idea, but I had a partner at home, and besides, I’d already paid for my flight to Salvador.

Speaking of that, my plane was scheduled to take off in a few hours time. There was no way I could risk going to sleep in case I missed the flight.

So, withered and shattered from an all night bender, and with a half empty, hour old warm, flat beer in my hand, I clambered into the back of the taxi that would take me to the airport. From there I was off to the beautiful sounding Salvador Bahia. I was hoping it would be a quiet and peaceful holiday on the beach. Maybe get some pot from the guy who run the guest house and just chill the fuck out.

Who knows what the future holds eh?

DE NOSSOS PLANOS ELABORADOS, O FIM

This is it. My holiday's done. I was sitting on the plane, seat belt buckled being slowly pushed back as it accelerated and the wheels lost touch with the tarmac.

I'd woken that morning determined to finish off the charris before boarding the aircraft. If worst came to worst, I'd eat the shit before throwing it away.

A couple of friendly Spanish guys were just taking their backpacks off and were light heartedly arguing with each other over who got the top bunk.

I was all sleepy eyed but my day had a purpose to it. So I had to get motivated, I had to smoke fat, it's-my-last-day-in-Brazil-and-I've-still-got-all-this-ganja sized spliffs, until it was gone. It was that or chow it.

'Hey how's it guys. You just land in Brazil?'

'Yeah man, we're here for Carnival! Can't wait!' before punching his friend in the arm. Another quick tussle over who got what bed before, 'Hey sorry did we wake you?'

'Well actually nah, I'm on my last day and was just preparing myself for one final mission. But I'm in a bit of a dilemma.' and put on a worried look, 'You see I've got all this fuckin' charris here to smoke, and only about an hour to do it in before my taxi comes to take me to the airport. You don't happen to smoke really high quality hash, that some guy made fresh just the other week, by any chance do you?' And pulled out the – about an eighth of an ounce – squidgy black stuff I had left and waved it under their noses.

It was like I had hypnotised them. They stopped battering each other for a second and just stood there stock still, eyes swinging backwards and forwards, following the pendulum path of the charris.

'Yes we smoke, hey are you sure?'

'Hey man time's getting less and less. So look let's roll a big joint each, and do our best. We've got just under an hour now. Here's some rizla, you can keep them by the way, papers like that are hard to find and fuckin' more expensive than dinner here in Brazil.'

We rolled a big joint each, I encouraged them to not be shy and load it up fully, before we cruised down the road to smoke ourselves silly.

Them, in their first hour in Brazil, backpacks barely off shoulders, and me in my last hour, a veteran who didn't consider himself a gringo and could now make basic conversation with the locals.

We were surrounded by a great big cloud of sweet smelling smoke.

'Hey guys I gotta' go in a minute. It was nice to meet you. Look, take the rest of the charris with you. As long as you promise to share it with anyone who asks you, if you know where to get any weed from, unless of course you've already smoked it. And savour those rizlas dudes, it's just all recycled paper with no glue on it once they're gone. And hey one last tip, try and learn some of the language, the locals really appreciate it.'

'Hey thank you very much!'

'Da nada amigos. That means, 'It's nothing. See you've learnt some Brazilian already.'

'We will do. Brazil eh! Amazing! Hey by the way what's your name? This is the best start to a holiday anybody could ever have'

'My names Bryce. And hey it's not a problem. To me, *this* is what travelling is all about.'