“I shall not repeat (Marco Polo’s) story of the Old Man of the Mountain, who used to administer hashish…to his younger disciples when he wanted to give them an idea of paradise.”

*The Poem of Hashish* by Charles Baudelaire
(Translated by Sallie Sullivan)

He was seventeen going on a hundred as he waited on the darkened doorstep.

He knocked again, harder this time.

“Come on, come on,” he muttered.

Then the door swung open and there was Lloyd, ugly old Lloyd, sporting an illegal smile if he ever saw one.

“Heyyy, Jamie, c’mon in.” He stepped inside, escaping the brooding twilight. “You wanna take off your shoes? I washed the floor this afternoon.”

“Sorry.” Jamie pulled off his huge Nikes, set them on newspaper with three other pairs of running shoes.

“Everybody’s in here.” Lloyd led him down a hallway festooned with posters of rock ‘n roll icons—he called it the “wall of infamy”—and into the living room. Shaun,
Lloyd’s brother, had just popped Led Zeppelin’s “Houses of the Holy” into the CD player.

The music helped. Some of the propaganda Jamie had been force-feeding his conscience began to sound pretty convincing. It’s going to be all right, he reasoned. Nobody’s going to get busted, nobody’s going to knife me and take the money I earned working all those Friday and Saturday nights at fucking Dairy Queen.

“You already know Shaun. That guy over there,” Lloyd pointed at the couch, “is the one, the only, Doctor Demento, the master of disaster, the sinister, the unreal, the supernatural, the super-human, the totally-awesome-out-of-this-world dope sucker himself…Lyle.”

The man Jamie had come here to meet was in his early twenties. His seamless, adolescent face was plain, its features unremarkable, contours maddeningly vague. Though he was still a novice at the game, Jamie could see that possessing such a face had its distinct advantages. It was, he supposed, the perfect disguise.

Even though Lloyd had just made introductions, Lyle didn’t offer his hand or say anything. He sort of gave Jamie the once-over; it was a casual perusal at best.

_Dick_, Jamie thought.

Shaun cranked the volume a bit more. “Listen to that,” he urged, masturbating an invisible guitar.

“You wanna get high, amigo?” Lloyd asked him. “You can try some of the stuff you’re buying.”

“Sure.” Jamie debated sitting on the couch next to Lyle but in the end chose the floor. “What do you think of it? Can you give it a rating?”
Lloyd laughed and looked at Lyle. “I can only say this: it really fucked me up. Need I say more?”

“Right on,” Lyle murmured. Jamie didn’t see his lips move.

“I guess that’s as good a recommendation as I can ask for,” Jamie commented.

“Don’t worry,” Lloyd said, giving him a thumbs up, “you’re definitely getting your money’s worth.”

“I don’t sell shit,” Lyle intoned from the couch.

“That’s good to hear,” Jamie said.

“These people,” Lyle waved his hand regally, “these are good people, y’know? Excellent people. My kind of people.” Jamie tried to look attentive. “They have good taste in music, they’re generous…they make me want to do good things for them. Hey, have I ever ripped you guys off? Have I ever said no? Let you down even once?” The two brothers dutifully shook their heads. Lloyd caught Jamie’s eye and smirked at him. “No way. Not me.” Lyle looked at him. “I hear you’re looking for two o-zees.”

“That’s right.”

“I think I can help you out there.”

“Great.”

“—but…see, the thing is, the price I’m asking is pretty steep. Four hundred for two ounces. Best I can do.”

Jamie nodded. “That’s the price that was quoted to me.”

“That’s the price and if you wanna tell me to stick it, I’ll understand. The town’s pretty dry right now. I don’t mind hoarding it for awhile.”


“It just so happens,” Jamie dug into his pocket, “that I have four crisp, new one hundred dollar bills right here.” As he held them up he was thinking: well, that’s that. Jesus, this is one of your humble servants. Please don’t let my dad find out about this. Let me have the dope sold, the four hundred back in the bank, plus a few extra bucks for my trouble. If I can manage that in a week at the outside, I swear I’ll read the Bible faithfully, try to make it to church more often, even sacrifice my firstborn child to you—JUST GIVE ME THIS ONE FUCKING BREAK!

When Lyle saw the money there was a flicker of interest, a tantalizing glimpse of inherent humanity. It was gone in a blink, quickly defaulting back to his normal, zoned out state. He slowly, almost reluctantly rose from the couch. “Would you care to step into my office?” Jamie and Lloyd followed him down the hallway to the kitchen. As the three of them sat at the table, Lloyd stuck a match to the joint he’d brought along. While Lyle rummaged through a white plastic grocery bag, Jamie toked up. The stuff smelled good and by the third or fourth hit, Jamie knew it felt good too.

“My compliments to the chef,” he said in Lyle’s general direction.

The dealer wasn’t listening. He was setting up a small, but elaborate scale. While Jamie watched from a nearby cloud bank, he meticulously weighed the dope.

“Okay?” Lyle asked.

“Looks fine.”

“I don’t want you thinkin’ I ripped you off.”

“Don’t sweat it.” Jamie handed him the joint.

“You want me to divide this into quarters for you?”

“That’d be great,” Jamie said. “I was wondering how I was gonna manage that.”
“If you’re gonna deal, you gotta have a good set of scales.”

“Huh-uh. This is meant to be a quick score, something to get me some fast spending money. My dad’s got this Vulcan death grip when it comes to money. Every time I want to buy something it’s always SAVE IT FOR COLLEGE. Fuck, what am I supposed to live on now?” Lyle trimmed the buds with a small set of scissors.

“You think you can get rid of two o-zees that fast?”

“I have to. If my dad finds out what I’ve done, he’ll cut my balls off.”

“You could say you were merely showing a healthy interest in the capitalist system,” Lloyd kidded him, “trying to comprehend economics by becoming involved, goddamnit! What we’re talking about here is fucking supply and demand, man. That’s what the whole system operates on. That’s it in a nutshell.”

“I’ll say it was a project for Social Studies. Along with, like, a thousand word essay—”

“—like when they make you write about ‘How I Spent My Summer Holidays’—”

“—only this time it’ll be ‘How I Turned All Of My Friends Into Hopeless Junkies’—”

“—‘And Made A Tidy Profit At The Same Time’!” Jamie and Lloyd yukked it up, flying high, getting off, but Lyle remained stiff, unsmiling.

“You guys sure talk a lot,” he grunted.

“Hey, man,” Lloyd said, “chill out. We’re just baked.”

“Shit,” Lyle sucked the dregs of the joint. “This stuff doesn’t do much to me any more.”
“I don’t know what planet you’re from but us Earthers are right fucked up, isn’t that right, James?”

Jamie nodded, listening to his fingertips hum.

“That’s okay for you guys but, me, I’m a connoisseur.” Lyle dug into the plastic bag again, retrieving another pouch of dope. He threw it across the table to Lloyd. “Here. Roll us a nice joint out of that.” Lloyd looked down at the baggie. Then he looked at Jamie and they both looked at it. The dope was black, jet black, and it appeared damp, like freshly turned dirt.

Lloyd picked up the baggie, opened it, stuck his nose in and took a whiff. Immediately he recoiled, dropping the baggie on the table with an exclamation of disgust. “Whoa, that’s…Jesus…”

“What’s wrong with you?” Lyle asked.

“What the fuck is that?”

“It’s dope, best dope in the world—”

“It ain’t dope. It smells like…I dunno, man, you smell it.”

Jamie took the bag, sniffed tentatively, was assailed by a thick, rancid odor and he too thrust the pouch away. “He’s right,” he told Lyle, “the stuff’s gone rotten or something. I wouldn’t smoke this if I were you.”

“What do you guys know? I’m telling you, you smoke this shit and you’ll get off like you’ve never gotten off before.”

“Yeah,” Lloyd cracked, “I hear you get off pretty good when you die. I ain’t interested in finding out for myself.”
“Gimme that.” Lyle took the baggie, peeled off a slip of rolling paper, peppered it with some of the black dope, rolled it into a neat, tight cylinder. “There’s nothing like it in the whole world,” he told them. He lit up, took a good, long hit. “Best shit ever,” Lyle breathed, offered the joint to Jamie.

Jamie was already ridiculously high at that point and feeling cocky as hell so he took the spliff, gave Lloyd a shrug and *phhhhhhhsssst!*

The stuff was wicked, harsher than the scummiest homegrown he’d ever smoked. It coiled and writhed in the back of his throat and Jamie suddenly pictured a cluster of larvae hatching in his mouth, white, bulbous, eyeless heads erupting from wet flesh; he almost gagged.

But it was dope, amazingly good dope, with a kick even harder than pure honey oil. It was bouncing around his skull, looking for the washrooms, finally giving up and pissing all over his cerebral cortex.

He handed the joint to Lloyd, who regarded it with distaste. “Good,” Jamie croaked.

“Smells bad,” Lloyd complained. He managed two quick puffs before he squeaked, shook his head and started hacking and coughing like a terminal case. Jamie laughed and laughed; Lyle favored them with a tight, absurd smile.

“Fuckin’ guys,” he said, starting another joint. “Keep smoking, pal,” he advised Jamie. “Remember: too much reality can be detrimental to your health.”

Jamie raised the joint to his lips. It took a long time to get there. As Lyle looked on he took three fast hoots, then one long, slow one before passing it to Lloyd.

“Right on,” Jamie said.

“Now you know why I call this stuff Oblivion,” Lyle took the spliff from Lloyd.

“This shit’ll take you there. Never-Never Land.”

A couple of years later someone remembered Shaun. Lyle rolled another joint of Oblivion then carefully, reverently sealed up the baggie. They walked into the living room in time to catch the opening riffs of Pink Floyd’s “Comfortably Numb”.

They knelt in a circle, passed “Oblivion” around like a holy relic, each of them sharing a moment of intimate communion with it before reluctantly surrendering it to the next pilgrim. And the music was like a chorus of angels, even when it turned on them with a snarl, sawing into their guts, ripping glistening coils of intestine from their stomachs, hollowing them out like Halloween pumpkins.

Jamie felt nothing. He was past the point of no return and saw no road signs indicating the way back. He decided to hang on and hope for the best. But the thing he was riding didn’t want to be rode and more than once he ended up flat on his back, staring up at the ceiling. He heard someone laughing. He didn’t care. Nice ceiling. He walked around on it for awhile, scuffing chunks of plaster on to their heads. No one seemed to notice so he gave up and swung down. He skulked about looking for something to munch on, then thought “fuck it” and headed off in search of a 7-11.

He did all of that without moving a muscle.

This is very bad, he thought. He wondered if the others were tripping out like this. He bugged his eyes out at them. Well? But they didn’t seem to notice. Or maybe they were ignoring him. Should he be getting pissed off?

He had to breathe with his mouth open, that was important.
He resolved that if he lived through this he would definitely buy a quarter of Lyle’s 
fucked up dope. Then he came to the conclusion that reality was prejudicial to the norm 
and just as quickly forgot about it. The meaning of life is irrelevant. Be a seeker of truth 
of the highways and byways of vigilance…and don’t drive drunk.

WHAT?

Jamie shook his head. He was convinced he was having some kind of stroke or 
aneurism. Every so often he’d get a jolt, this rush, and everything would collapse in on 
him and he’d feel like he was suffocating. Total paralysis. Higher brain functions short-
circuiting.

_Bzzz bzzz bzzz_

Something was nudging him. It was the Lyle-thing. “Wannanotherone?”

“Ah…ah…”

“Do you? Here.” Another joint. Jesus, when would it end?

For awhile it seemed like it never would. The music played on and on; time meted 
out in four or five-minute increments. The Doors. Blue Oyster Cult. Sabbath. Iron 
Maiden. AC/DC.

It was during “Back in Black” that Jamie realized he was capable of coherent 
thought again. He could raise his head. Manipulate his fingers. Blink.

He checked his watch. Nearly midnight. Unbelievable.

Time sure flies here in the Twilight Zone.

Shaun got up, stretched, announced that he was heading to bed. Lyle gave 
indications he was preparing to leave.

“Wow,” Jamie said to him, “that sure was some wicked dope, bro.”
“No shit,” Lloyd concurred, “fuckin’ near blew my head off.”

Lyle shrugged modestly. “Glad you liked it. I like to initiate people every so often. Good people.”

“You—ah—wouldn’t want to sell any of—” Lyle was shaking his head.

“No can do. There are very limited quantities available and I’m a greedy kind of guy. I’m willing to give you a taste every now and then but that’s it.”

“C’mon, Lyle,” Lloyd whined, “lay a couple of doobies on us, for old time’s sake.”

Lyle kept shaking his head. “Nope. Besides,” he said with a half-assed grin, “I’m not sure you can handle it.”

“Are you kidding? I’ve done acid, mesc, DA, even that shit that guy sold us. Remember?” This directed at Shaun. “We thought it was angel dust only—”

“This is different,” Lyle insisted. “Don’t tell me it didn’t feel different to you. You never smoked anything like that before.”

“No, but—”

“But nothing.” Lyle’s face was animated now but…by what? Fear? Anger? Scorn?

“Oblivion is bad medicine. Habit-forming. If I gave you a couple of joints you’d smoke them tonight and don’t tell me you wouldn’t ’cause I know you. And then you’d come around asking for more. I’ve been smoking dope since before you were born but I still have a helluva tough time controlling myself, holding off harvesting my plants before they’re ready—”

“You grow it yourself?” Jamie asked.

Lyle looked nervous. “Yeah. Well, just Oblivion. It’s sort of a…secret recipe, I guess you’d call it.”
“Wha-a-at?” Shaun was skeptical. “Hey, dude, it’s just dope. You can only grow it so many—”

“IT’S NOT JUST DOPE!” Lyle’s fervor startled them. “It’s…” He rubbed his face. “Okay, I guess I’m fucked up enough to let you in on my secret.”

“A drumroll please,” Lloyd quipped.

Lyle glared at him. “I grow it myself, yeah. I started as a kind of experiment. About… I dunno, a year ago… no, longer than that. It’s not important. Anyway, I bought this really good grass off a guy. He said it was Thai, I dunno, maybe it was. It was so good I thought, hey, I’m gonna try growing some of this shit. I’ve tried a couple of times but the quality was never that good. I decided to give it one more try with these seeds.”

The smug look on Lyle’s face was making Jamie uneasy. He had a feeling he wasn’t going to like what he was about to hear. “I took extra care with this batch. I bought a big plant pot and found some lights at a garage sale.” Shaun yawned into his fist. “I needed some dirt, some really good dirt that had lots of nutrients and stuff in it. I was gonna buy potting soil—potting soil for pot, right?—but then one day it hit me like a shot. I told myself, stick to the natural stuff, man, don’t go for no store-bought substitutes. Now ask yourself: where’s the best dirt in the world, got lots of fertilizer, plenty of good, organic ingredients—”

“A farm,” Lloyd suggested, stating the obvious.

“No, man,” Lyle said, waiting a half-beat before delivering the punch line, “a graveyard.”

“…graveyard…” Lloyd repeated.

Jamie thought about the color of the dope, the smell, the… taste.
“Yup,” Lyle bobbed his head. “I figured, hey, the dirt there’s gotta be chock full of all the stuff plants need. And I was right! The very first seeds I planted grew into these beautiful, bushy plants. And the dope…” His eyes rolled. “Fantastic. Like…well, you guys know what I’m talking about.” Grinning slyly. “There. Now you know my secret. Is that freaky or what?” Without waiting for an answer he headed off to the kitchen to collect his things.

After he left the room the three of them glanced at each other. No one could think of anything to say. Shaun finally made everyone grin when he twirled a finger beside his head. Jamie nodded somberly.

Jamie’s eight quarters lay in a neat stack on the table. Weighed and bagged.

“You got something for him to put it in?” Lyle asked Lloyd, who speedily produced a brown lunch bag that did the trick.

“Did I give you—” Jamie started going through his pockets.


Jamie couldn’t remember giving him the money but it was gone so…

Lyle seemed a bit addled as he left. He kept checking to make sure he had his keys and his dope and mumbled about how he’d ridden his bike over and now, shit, it’s gotten so late and my bike doesn’t have any of those reflector things—

Jamie could tell he was angling for a ride but the idea of being trapped in a car with the irrepressible Lyle Q. Fucked didn’t exactly make his liver quiver or his dong long. So he didn’t say anything.

Finally, after a lot of stalling and the inevitable soul brother handshakes, Lyle literally stumbled out the door.
“That guy is a fucking wing-nut,” Shaun declared, once he was gone.

“He’s harmless,” Lloyd said but he didn’t look so sure. “Just a bit of a flake.”

“I’m with Shaun,” Jamie spoke up, “I think he’s nuts. That shit about the graveyard and the dirt—”

“He was fucking with you,” Lloyd said.

“He did a good job.” Jamie’s stomach was churning.

“Forget about it.” Lloyd feinted a slap at his head on the way to the sink but Jamie didn’t react to it. “Even if he did get dirt from a boneyard, what difference does it make? A friend of mine grows pot in pigshit. Disgusting, huh? Tell me what the difference is.” Pouring himself a glass of water.

“I’m not sure,” Jamie said. “All I know is that I’m not feeling too good right now.” He pulled out a chair, sat with his head down.

“You’re not going to power-puke or anything, are you? ’Cause like I told you, I just washed the floor.”

“Can I get some water? I gotta get this taste out of my mouth.” Jamie emptied the glass in a couple of gulps but it didn’t do any good. He shook his head, signaling Lloyd for a refill.

“Forget it, I’m telling you,” Lloyd said, moving to comply. “Think about all the money you’re going to make on this deal. You could sell it for, say, seventy a quarter…but you’d be smarter if you sold it by the gram…say ten bucks a gram, fifteen if you’re really greedy.”

“But if I sell it in larger amounts I’ll be able to get rid of it quicker.”
“But you’ll make a lot less money,” Lloyd argued. Jamie twitched his shoulders.

“Well, it’s up to you.”

“Can you put out the word for me? Be careful, y’know, but let people know I’ve got some if they’re looking.”

“Sure, no problem,” Lloyd agreed. “Of course,” he continued, “since I’ll be acting as your agent you’ll have to make it worth my while…”

“Jesus, are you ever a prick, Lloyd,” Shaun observed.

“No, man,” Jamie said, “he’s right.” He rolled a good-sized joint from his stash, handed it to Lloyd. “A down payment.”

“Thanks. I always like a nightcap before I turn in.” He lit up. “Ah…” Then Jamie took it and bore down hard, drawing in so much smoke his eyes watered. “You’re turning into a real dope fiend,” Lloyd told him.

Jamie let the smoke out slowly. Fuck. Shit. Piss. That taste wouldn’t go away. It clung stubbornly to the back of his throat, tickling his gorge. He helped himself to another glass of water.

Then he was high again. But, he thought, this is nothing like Oblivion. This is a silly, frivolous sort of high. Like you’re drunk, only smarter.

He left soon after the joint was finished.

“Thanks a lot,” he said to Lloyd as he tied his runners.

“No problemo,” Lloyd grinned, “I really dig the commission.”

Then he found himself outside, alone, in the possession of two ounces of marijuana with a firm intention to traffic. The long, dark street loomed before him like a cell block and his every step was remarked upon by prying, preying eyes. By the time he got to his
car, he was a nervous wreck. He popped in a *Rush* CD but Geddy Lee’s screeching had him thumbing “Eject” within a few seconds. He drove home slowly, both hands on the wheel, an ordinary, law-abiding citizen in every respect. He even wore his seatbelt.

He pulled into the driveway, cut the lights (check), engaged the emergency brake (check) and made sure the keys were in his pocket and *not* in the ignition (check).

As soon as he heard the television droning downstairs he knew he’d made it. He went into his room, locked the door behind him.

*Yeah!*

He dragged a chair over to one wall, climbed up, pushed a ceiling tile out of place, put the dope up there. Then he let the tile fall back. *Perfectimundo!*

Brushing his teeth and gargling helped, but the vestiges of Oblivion remained. He began to wonder if he would ever be rid of it.

He went downstairs and spent a few obligatory moments with the folks. He supplied them with a largely fictitious account of his evening then had a brief “discussion” with his father. Actually, his father did all the talking and he just stood there and went “yes, sir” every once in awhile. But it wasn’t so bad this time because they were trying to watch some kind of nature show on PBS. Another one of those programs about how humans are screwing up the environment and killing a bunch of innocent animals in the process. His folks loved stuff like that. Once they got around to showing oil-slicked sea otters, Jamie stood up, mumbled “Night, everyone” and beat a hasty retreat upstairs.

He flopped on to his bed, mashing his hot face into the cool pillows. His head felt like it was overflowing and at first he didn’t think he was going to be able to sleep.

But he did.
And he had this dream.

In the dream, he was Tony Montana, that guy Al Pacino played in “Scarface”. He was a made dude. He had it all. Drugs, money, women, guns. Only he knew it wouldn’t last. And he knew that when the end came it would be swift and terrible. And he knew that for his sins he would burn in the fires of hell for all eternity. And for a fraction of a second—that was how long it took to escape the soul-piercing pain into fuddled wakefulness—Jamie felt those flames upon him, felt his flesh melt away and his essence spill out and he saw that it was black…