

Truth, Justice and the Politically Correct Socialist Path

John Varley

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Ethnocentricity is a basic feat of the human condition, We tend to make judgements of right and wrong based on our cultural upbringing rather than any universal concept of goodness.

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Of all the scientists on the planet Xenon, only Mar-Lon was convinced that the world was headed for destruction. They laughed when Mar-Lon made his prediction before the Council of Eminent Scientists, Xenon's governing body.

"It's just a series of Xenonquakes," they said

Stung, Mar-Lon retired to his mountaintop laboratory with his wife and their infant son, Kla-Lon.

"Our doom is sealed," said Mar-Lon. "But our son shall survive the destruction of Xenon. I have constructed a spaceship with just enough room to carry him away. Quickly, there is no time to lose."

They sealed the tiny payload into the rocket, stood back, and launched Kla-Lon into space. No sooner had the rocket cleared the atmosphere than Xenon was blown to bits, just as Mar-Lon had predicted. So much for eminent scientists.

The rocket sped through the galaxies at pretty close to the speed of light for a time impossible to measure, due to relativistic effects. Finally it sizzled through the atmosphere of a green, watery, fertile planet, third from the sun, known to its inhabitants as *Zemlya*.

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The rocket plowed into the ground just west of the Urals, about two hundred kilometers south of Sverdlovsk, in the *Rossijskaja Sovetskaja Federativnaja Socialisticeskaja Respublika*, or the Russian Federated S.S.R. of the glorious Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It came to rest, smoking, in a wheat field of the Long Live The Heroes Of The October Revolution Collective Farm #56, not far from where Marina and Pavel Kentarovsky were munching on raw beets as they lugubriously surveyed the flat left rear tire of a twelve-year-old Spirit of Lenin tractor.

The Spirit of Lenin was an exact copy of a 1934 International Harvester except for cast-iron axles and, as Pavel often remarked, "the soul of a pig."

The Kentarovskys hurried over to the space capsule. A hatch popped open. Pavel leaned forward to take a look.

"Phew," said Pavel, straightening quickly. "This looks like a job for you."

Dutifully, Marina reached in and removed the infant. She stripped off his diaper, which had gone a thousand light-years without a change.

"A *malchik*," she said, which meant it was a boy. "We'll raise him as if he were our own child."

"Well..." said Pavel thoughtfully, remembering the three boys and four girls already filling the Kentarovsky household. "What if someone comes looking for him?"

“He fell out of the sky,” Marina pointed out.

“Well...” said Pavel, meaning he thought it might be all right to keep the child, while at the same time reflecting that someone had gone to a good deal of trouble to get rid of him.

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Back at the tractor, young Kla-Lon amused himself eating clods of dirt while Pavel sweated over the balky lugs of the wheel. Hurling an untranslatable Russian oath, Pavel kicked the machine, which promptly fell off the jack and would have crushed him except for Kla-Lon, who reached up and lifted it into the air with one hand.

“Put that down,” said Marina, who had firm ideas about raising children, even superhuman ones. Kla-Lon put it down, on its side.

The three of them stood in the Russian sunlight regarding the

Spirit of Lenin, then the two adults regarded the infant in silence. The little *makhik* grinned up at them. Marina lifted him and they began trudging back toward the Long Live The Heroes Of The October Revolution Collective Farm.

“Do you think we should tell the Commissar about this?” Marina asked.

“Well...” said Pavel.

“I don’t either,” said Marina.

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They named the boy Kyril. That was the name that went on his newly opened file at the MVD, who also took note of his remarkably short gestation period. This and other odd stories about his childhood were duly noted and passed on to the NKVD, and later to the KGB, with the result that Kyril Pavelevitch Kentarovsky was labeled from an early age as a possible spy, Jew, or reactionary element.

In the same way a cuckoo chick elbows the smaller fledglings from its adoptive nest, young Kyril quickly eliminated his various foster-siblings. One by one they perished in household or farming accidents. Kyril was entirely innocent of any evil intent. He was simply too strong. The elder brothers and sisters fled to distant relatives, while the younger ones kept the village undertaker busy. Kyril quickly became Marina’s favorite, as if he had been her own.

Pavel, too, loved the child, in much the same way he loved the State. In the spirit of experimentation, Pavel set out to discover the limits of his son’s invulnerability. It was not that he *resented* it when Kyril tossed the communal bathtub through the washhouse wall, Pavel reasoned. Nor was it as if he really *minded* the time the boy turned their home on its side and shook it until all the furniture fell out in a heap. No, Pavel assured himself, it was simply that he needed to find a way to punish the boy, should the need ever arise.

Accordingly, for about a year Pavel possessed no hammer without a broken handle. All Marina’s knives had bent points and dulled blades. Day after day, Kyril would return from playing in the fields with tractor tire marks on his face. Kerosene lamps, vats of boiling water, red-hot horseshoes, and anvils had a way of falling from tables onto the toddler. None of it had the slightest effect on Kyril. Pavel withdrew into a moody silence, and tended to sleep poorly and jump at loud noises.

Luckily for him, the Fascist warmonger Adolf Hitler treacherously betrayed the peace-loving peoples of

the Soviet Union, and Pavel was called to do his duty in the Great Patriotic War. He endured the Siege of Stalingrad, where he amazed his trenchmates with his ability to sleep through the most harrowing barrage. Captured, interned in a prisoner-of-war camp in Poland, he was apt to turn to the other prisoners and say, "You think this is bad...?"

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A rutted dirt path ran from the collective farm to the nearest village, Meilinkigrad. The road had been unnamed until 1918, when the Bolsheviks dubbed it the Praise And Honor To The Glorious Heroes Who Stormed The Winter Palace In Petrograd On November 7, 1917 Expressway.

It was down this path that Marina led young Kyril one fine day in the 1940's. Her intention was to enrol him in school. That she dared do this was testament to her incredible determination as a mother.

He began his schooling without incident. Soon he was steeped in the glories of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. He began a grand dialectic that was to last all his life.

Kyril joined Komsomol, the Communist Youth League. He dreamed of erecting, single-handed, hydroelectric earthworks to harness the mighty rivers of Siberia: the Lena, the Ob, the Jenisej. He would boost Soviet industry, defeat the Fascists, triple the grain harvest, tilt the Earth's axis to warm the frigid north, loft powerful fortresses of Soviet Solidarity into orbit, to the moon itself.

He would fulfill his Five-Year Plan!

He would do all this and more, just as soon as his mother said he was ready.

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The Great Patriotic War ended without his help. Benevolent Soviet Hegemony was extended to millions of formerly enslaved peoples in Eastern Europe. The Western powers treacherously betrayed the long-suffering Soviet people at Berlin and threatened genocide to all who would not travel the Decadent Capitalist Road.

Somewhere in these terrible times, Pavel made his way home and sought refuge in the arms of his family.

"Stalin is executing returning prisoners of war," he told them.

"Yes, we know," said Kyril.

"He says we were traitors to be captured in the first place," Pavel went on, draining his first glass of vodka in five years.

"Yes, we heard," said Marina.

"I'll just hide out here for a while," Pavel said. "This should all blow over in three or four years."

"You're safe with us," said Kyril.

"Thank you for bringing this to our attention, Kyril Pavelevitch," said the Commissar, twenty minutes later. "We'll have him rounded up."

"It was my duty, Comrade Commissar," said Kyril.

"Good-bye, Pavelushka," shouted Marina as the boxcar pulled away.

“Good-bye, Father,” shouted Kyril. “Enjoy your reeducation!”

“Good-bye, Pavel Ivanovitch,” shouted the Commissar. “I hear Siberia isn’t really all that bad.” . “Dress warm,” Marina shouted.

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Kyril’s teachers reported to the Commissar that they had never found a more apt pupil. The Commissar took an interest, and Kyril received special attention usually reserved for the sons of Party members.

It was rumored around Meilinkigrad that the Commissar was actually Trotsky himself. The wild shock of hair, the glasses, the intense expression, the rigid inflexibility when it came to Marx and Engels—all these contributed to a growing legend that included dark stories of a stooge taking the great Bolshevnik’s place, dying in his stead in Mexico. The Commissar did nothing to dispel these rumors, knowing that while they increased the people’s fear and respect, they were too wild to be believed by those above him. This was fortunate, as he in fact *was* Trotsky.

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In the wider world, the heroic People’s Army under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung defeated the running dog Capitalist Readers of the

Kuomintang and forced their degenerate lickspittle tool-of-fascism General, Chaing Kai-shek, into permanent exile in the Chinese province of Taiwan, from where he would soon be forced into the sea. Kyril eagerly devoured the little red book of the Thoughts of Chairman Mao. He liked it so much that an hour later he wanted to read more.

There were two important events in Kyril’s life during this time. The first was his beloved Marina’s descent into insanity.

“Come here, Kyrilushka,” she said one day. Taking him to the basement, she opened a trap door and removed a short-wave radio. “Listen to this,” she said, as she tuned to the pirate signal of Radio Free Europe.

“I’m not saying they’re right,” Marina said, “and I’m not saying Comrade General Secretary Stalin is wrong. But hear- for yourself, my darling. I and your father, God rest his soul, used to listen every week.”

“Religion is the opiate of the masses,” Kyril said.

“Of course, of course, that just popped out,” Marina said, glancing around nervously.

“And then I heard the most amazing string of lies,” Kyril said to the Commissar, twenty minutes later.

“It does sound serious,” said the Commissar judiciously. “Perhaps I should send for a doctor.”

“Would you, sir? Thank you so much.”

“Good-bye, my darling,” Marina called from the open boxcar door as she was taken away for the doctor’s prescribed rest cure.

“Good-bye, Mother,” Kyril shouted, manfully fighting back tears.

“Good-bye, Leon,” Marina shouted. “Take care of my boy.”

“Who is Leon?” shouted the Commissar, looking around nervously.

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The other thing that happened to Kyril was named Lara Langarova.

She came from Moscow, though she would not talk much about that. Nearly two meters tall, with sixteen-inch biceps and a size eighteen neck, she was the Olympic ideal of the New Soviet Woman. Kyril had never seen anything so lovely. Her thighs were like great tractor springs, her breasts the mighty Urals. Her hands moved with oiled grace, as though mounted on ball bearings. In her voice was the song of a thousand balalaikas, and the Red Army Chorus. She could clean-and-jerk two hundred kilograms. She could bend a large spanner in half. To Kyril, she was the Motherland Incarnate.

And her loins, her loins were the vast, fertile wheat fields of the Ukraine. One day those loins would yield up young Socialists like an inexorable factory.

(There were two young Socialists on the assembly line already, but Kyril did not know that.)

Lara Langarova was equally smitten.

“Hubba hubba,” she said to her girlfriend Olga the first day she spied him. “What an incredible example of Socialist Realism.”

“I’ll say,” said Olga. “That’s Kyril Kentarovsky. It is said he can piss through armor plate.” Lara naturally thought Olga was kidding, but had no trouble imagining equally unlikely and much more obscene feats the dashing peasant boy might perform.

Kyril began bringing her bushels of potatoes and turnips. He sat behind her in classes, and across from her in the library, and their hearts whirred like Diesel turbines, and swooped like MiGs in a dogfight.

Then one day she invited him to the room she shared with her Uncle Vanya and six cousins—all of whom were gone marketing in Sverdlovsk. She was wearing unusual blue trousers.

“Levi jeans,” she told him proudly. Then she wound up a victrola and put on a record. She began to gyrate most alarmingly.

“I have not heard this music before,” Kyril said.

“It’s Louis Armstrong.” She showed him a stack of similar records. “I have all the cool be-bop, Jackson. Coleman Hawkins, Thelonious, the Bird, Lawrence Welk. Beat me, daddy-o, eight to the bar!”

“Where did you obtain all this?” Kyril asked, sternly.

“The black market, natch. But it’s cool. Don’t be cubical, get hep! You can score anything in Moscow. You want some sweet reefer?”

“And then she smoked a funny cigarette,” Kyril said to the Commissar, twenty minutes later. Well... maybe twenty-five. “And those maddening jungle rhythms... I was almost undone.”

“Degenerate music,” the Commissar intoned. “It sounds as if the young lady has fallen under the grip of Western influences. I will handle it.”

“Good-bye, Kyril darling,” Lara shouted as the boxcar rumbled away. “Be sure to write every day.”

“Good-bye, Larushka,” shouted Kyril. “Name one of the babies after me.”

“Good-bye, Commissar,” Lara shouted. “It’s all for the good of Mother Russia, and I bear you no ill will.”

The Commissar merely muttered, then sought out a comfortable patch of straw beside Kyril as the guard rolled the boxcar door closed, shutting them in. Their long journey had begun. Kyril merely clanked his chains together philosophically, trying his best not to accidentally damage them.

“Cheer up, Commissar,” Kyril said brightly. “How bad can Siberia be?”

“How was I to know she was the daughter of the President of the Politburo?” the Commissar whined. “How was I to know she was here to be cured of a slight case of pregnancy?”

“The State has spoken,” Kyril said simply. “And we must obey. Twenty years isn’t so bad.”

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In truth, it wasn’t so bad for Kyril. He could have done twenty years standing on his head, Siberia agreed with him.

The Commissar was not so lucky, having no superpowers.

They were taken to the Let’s All Shout *Khorosho!* To Celebrate The Fifth Party Congress Gulag And Orphanage. Kyril and the Commissar were bunked side by side in a building with Boris Pasternak, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Lavrenti Beria, Raskolnikov, and Cyd Charisse. Also present in the camp were Josef Stalin, V.I. Lenin, three Ivan the Terribles, seven Napoleons, Adlai Stevenson, Jesus Christ, and eight Mae Wests, several dozen Judy Garlands, and uncounted Marilyn Monroes. Kyril suspected that many of them were imposters, and some might be insane.

One certain case of insanity was an ancient, toothless man in the bunk next to Kyril. The old man was convinced that rocks had sexes. Every night he put two stones in a shoebox under his bunk, and each morning he checked it for offspring.

“Today is my birthday!” the old man announced, shortly after Kyril’s arrival.

“Yes, Father, I know,” said Kyril.

“I’m fifty-five!”

“No, father, only forty-one.”

“Fantastic!” exclaimed Pavel. “I feel younger already! And only one more year of my sentence to serve!”

“No, Father. Fourteen.”

To cheer him up, Kyril put a handful of gravel in the shoebox that night. All the next day Pavel showed off the newborn rocklings.

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“I can’t take much more of this, Kyril Pavelevitch,” the Commissar whined one day.

“What’s wrong, sir?” asked Kyril.

“Well, for one thing, I’m going to have a rectum the size of an SS-20 missile silo,” said the Commissar.

At first Kyril thought the Commissar was speaking of an intestinal disorder, a common complaint at the Let's All Shout Etc. Gulag. But no, it was something infinitely worse. Kyril was shocked, flabbergasted to learn such degeneracy could exist in the Soviet Union. For the first time in his life he forgot himself. With the Commissar in tow he marched into the gulag Commandant's office. Two guards promptly riddled him with automatic weapon fire.

Annoyed, Kyril took one of the firearms away and twisted it into the shape of a sickle. Brandishing it at the Commandant, he shouted heroically.

"My friend Comrade Trotsky informs me he is the unwilling sweetheart of half the sexual perverts in the barracks. This is not true Socialism!" His stalwart Soviet upper lip curled in a sneer of disgust. "Each night they have their will with him, whispering endearments such as 'snuggle-bunny' and 'angel-buns.'" I have heard these things with my own ears. And I tell you, this *does not further the international class struggle!*"

The Commandant, already white as albino snow, fainted dead away. This took some of the wind out of Kyril's sails. He glanced at the other guard, whose eyes were large saucers.

"Give me that weapon," Kyril said petulantly. The guard was only too happy to surrender it.

"When he wakes up," Kyril muttered, "tell him there will be no more degeneracy in this camp. This will be a decent Soviet gulag, or he'll have to deal with me."

"His balls will become the next two Sputniks," said the Commissar.

Kyril nodded; then, to drive home his point, he ate the guard's Kalashnikov.

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"You are quite strong, Kyril Pavelevitch," the Commissar ventured as they waded back through the snow to their barracks.

"I am not of this Earth," Kyril confessed. "My mother says I fell from some great Soviet in the sky."

Kyril then proceeded to demonstrate some of his abilities to the Commissar, running the 100 meters in .00005 seconds, throwing a timber wolf over the horizon, and jumping over the nearest mountain.

"I'd bet on you in the next Olympics," the Commissar conceded.

"That has been my dream for a long time, sir," Kyril confided. "To humiliate the Western powers with my superhuman feats..." He sighed dreamily, but the Commissar was shaking his head.

"Resist the temptation, Kyril Pavelevitch," he said. "Comrade Lenin himself warns of the cult of personality. To reveal such superiority to the proletariat would sow the seeds of elitism. It would be counterrevolutionary."

"Lenin also said, from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," Kyril pointed out.

"Ah... no, Marx said that," said the Commissar, smiling, not at all sure who really said it but pleased at the intellectual struggle. "But he was not thinking of such as you. Someday, when the State has withered away, when the New Soviet Man has swept the planet clear of decadent revanchist thought... then, Kyril, a man like you, a man who has, if I may say so, leapfrogged over the arduous path of historical inevitability, could take his place without danger to the New Order. Until then, you must do your Socialist duty in other ways."

“And what ways are those, Comrade Trotsky?” Kyril asked, humbled by the vast worldview of this Bolshevik founding father.

“Don’t call me that,” the Commissar said absently. “The seeds you sow, Comrade Kentarovsky...”—and the great Communist paused for dramatic effect—“shall be *the seeds of the Soviet Super man!*”

They both gazed fanatically at the vast Russian sky, eyes gleaming, jaws clenched, biceps bulging, looking just like a poster announcing Chairman Mao’s Great Leap Forward, except for the fact that neither was Chinese and the Commissar was so scrawny, stooped, and rat-like.

They held that pose as long as anyone reasonably could; then Kyril spoiled it by furrowing his brow and announcing, “I don’t understand.”

“Your other powers,” the Commissar hinted. “I mean, surely a man who... that is, he ought to be a regular stallion, if you get my drift, er, urn, what I’m saying is, *hoo-boy!* You know what I mean?” The Commissar nudged Kyril relentlessly, dry-humped the air, rolled his eyes, and blushed dark as a bowl of borscht, being a virgin himself.

“I don’t know,” Kyril said dejectedly. “I might have found out, but I felt it was my duty to denounce Lara first... and you know what happened then.” Kyril was lying. Perhaps his reticence stemmed from Lara’s comment when he was through: “That’s it?” It doesn’t always pay to be faster than a speeding bullet.

“Never mind,” said the Commissar. “Why, I’ll bet you could cover a hundred Soviet women in a day. No, two hundred! *Three hundred!*”

“I will try,” said Kyril, stoically facing his duty.

“I see vast breeding farms,” hissed the Commissar. “Creches, collectives, whole apartment blocks filled with satisfied comrades incubating your brood! I see bright-eyed children by the millions, transforming the Motherland in a single generation into the Socialist paradise on Earth!”

“Yes, yes,” Kyril breathed. “And I can begin in only eighteen years!”

“I must see what Comrade Lysenko has to say about this,” shouted the Commissar, and whirled and ran toward the camp library.

He got six steps, and stopped in his tracks. He turned slowly.

“What did you say, Kyril Pavelevitch?”

“Just as soon as we’ve served our sentences, the glorious work can begin!”

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Threats were useless. The Commissar tried to reason Kyril out of his adamant position, and soon saw that the youngster’s devotion to proper Marxist thought was as invulnerable as his damnable skull.

“We could make an exception just this once,” the Commissar wheedled, beginning the argument he was to have every day for the next eighteen years. “Over the wire, and skedaddle to Moscow. Bullets can’t hurt you...”

“I was sentenced by a properly convened Soviet tribunal, all in accordance with our Constitution,” Kyril pointed out virtuously.

“Yes, but it was pure *influence* that got you there. Special privileges for the Politburo. Is this the proper path for the Party?”

“It is true, there seem to be disturbing deviations in Moscow,” Kyril admitted, frowning his brow. “But to escape would be to put my *self* above the will of the State.”

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This argument consumed ten minutes of each working day. The other nineteen hours and fifty minutes were spent at many other vigorous occupations, interrupted only by the daily meal.

Kyril’s favorite job was in the uranium mines. It made him proud to be digging out the raw material from which the purely defensive nuclear weapons guarding his homeland were wrought. His heart sang as he trundled his wheelbarrow full of ore out of the blackness of the stygian pit. He only wished the inmates were provided picks and shovels so they could dig that much faster. At night, they all bathed in a warm glow of accomplishment Kyril swore he could almost *see*.

It was with regret that Kyril had to avoid two other occupations of the gulagites: military testing and medical research. That a projectile bounced off his mighty chest was no measure of the weapon’s worth on the battlefield. And as hypodermic needles were blunted by his impenetrable skin, the new experimental viruses and bacteria had to be field-tested in other veins.

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Two days before their scheduled release, Comrade Trotsky incautiously stopped to relieve himself against a tree, and froze solid. It was a common mishap in Siberia.

Kyril flew north, to Komsomolec Island, and there established his mighty Fortress of Solidarity. He brought the Commissar’s corpse with him and installed it in a glass icebox, where he is still preserved, like Lenin, only standing, with his chin on his chest, looking in some alarm at his cold-shriveled member held in his scrawny fingers. Lenin gets a lot more visitors.

This done, Kyril sped to Meilinkigrad in hopes of finding his true love.

Lara was still there. Shortly after denouncing Kyril and the Commissar, her father had been caught up in a purge. Lara had stayed in the village, married, produced litter after litter of healthy young Socialists.

And she had changed a bit. She didn’t recognize Kyril when she answered the door, and he barely recognized her. She had a moustache many a lad would envy. Her nose would have resembled a beet in size and shape and color, but for the road map of burst, purplish veins. Through her laddered stockings, Kyril could see varicosities the size of pythons.

“That’ll be three *kopeks* for trench, five for around-the-world,” she said. One brown tooth and three steel ones flashed in a smile, and she wiggled her four hundred pounds seismically. “How about it, you cossack? Are you man enough?”

“Sorry, wrong number,” Kyril stammered.

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As he flew away from Lara Langarova’s door, a vast weight seemed to lift from Kyril’s heart. His last link with the past was cut. His father had died years ago, attempting sexual congress with a large boulder. His mother had vanished into the vast benevolence of the Soviet Asylum network. Comrade Trotsky was safe in the Fortress. It was time to put Meilinkigrad behind him.

It was time to go to Moscow.

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He found housing in a nice little two-room flat in the How 'Bout Them Bolsheviks. "Revolutionary Modular People's Housing Block #34923. He shared it with seven other people, only two of whom were KGB informants. It was a 15th-floor walk-up—or it was until the scheduled arrival of elevators in four years—and would be warm and cozy and dry as soon as the roof was installed.

He found an opening for a mild-mannered reporter with *Pravda*, and got the job. He intended to use this as a cover, a secret identity.

Kyril had given this matter much thought, both at the gulag and later in the Fortress of Solidarity. To display superhuman powers as Kyril Kentarovsky would indeed be to court a cult of personality. But what if he assumed another identity, a sort of Spirit of Socialism, a near-mythical character with powers far beyond those of mortal men?

He decided to give it a try, and thus Bolshoiman was born.

To aid this deception, he needed a uniform. With the remnants of his indestructible Xenonian diapers and swaddling blankets he fashioned a good, sensible Soviet suit with baggy pants and wide lapels. But he felt a white suit looked too western, so he dyed the ensemble the red of the glorious flag of the U.S.S.R. When he tried it on he found it had shrunk *to* embarrassing tightness. The legs and sleeves were six sizes too short, and he couldn't button the coat. So he added Red Army combat boots and a T-shirt with a capital "#," for Bolshoiman. Surveying the effect in the mirror, he decided it was just as well, as the shrinkage covered up the sins of his needlecraft.

"It's you, it's you," his roommate Ivan assured him.

"I don't know," said his roommate Yuri. "Maybe a cape...?"

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Kyril started out at *Pravda* in the classified ads department, Personals section. It stirred his heart to see how many Muscovites were interested in continuing their education. ("45-yr-old generous Party member seeks stern third-world instructress for lessons in leather and domestic service.") There was also a keen interest in art and history. ("Ukrainian cross-dresser wants to meet husky workers to discuss Greek culture. Include frank photo for quick reply.")

Fascinating as it was, Kyril chafed at being chained to the telephone all day. He longed to be out on the streets, fighting counterrevolutionary elements. He began spending his lunch breaks watching the TASS teletype machines. All night long he haunted the bars, listening to rumors, checking out leads, looking for the story that would break him into the big time.

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The city room of *Pravda* was where most of the mild-mannered reporters spent the working day. Most of them were so mild-mannered that they spent the day asleep, waking up only long enough to put their names at the top of stories as they were delivered from the various ministries around Moscow. Some slept atop their desks, some brought in cots, but the majority preferred to lean back in their swivel chairs, mouths open. On a slow news day the snoring could be deafening, and *every* day was a slow news day at *Pravda*.

Only the editor stayed awake all day long. This was because he had not been able to sleep properly for

over twenty years.

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Comrade Philby took Kyril under his wing. In a few vodka-soaked months he taught his eager young pupil everything he knew about the newspaper business—knowledge gleaned from endless screenings of *His Girl Friday*, *Deadline USA*, *Each Dawn I Die*, and *Nancy Drew, Reporter*. Unfortunately, none of it had anything to do with the prudent management of information and propaganda under a benevolent Socialist regime.

Philby also taught him to speak Etonian-accented English. They met daily at The Happy Hungarian, 2 Dzerzhinsky Square—right across the street from KGB headquarters—during happy hour (7 A.M. to midnight), where Hiram the Happy Hungarian poured only three different drinks: 80 proof vodka, 100 proof vodka, and 150 proof vodka.

One day Kyril swam to the surface of an alcoholic haze to hear Comrade Philby's voice coming from beneath the table.

"One day they'll get me, Kyril Pavelevitch," he intoned gloomily. "MI-6 will never forgive me for aiding the struggle of oppressed peoples around the world by giving England's secrets to the Motherland."

Philby was not under the table because he was drunk (though he *was* drunk). It was his habitual seat at The Happy Hungarian. He felt safer there.

"That's -why I drink here, even though they water the vodka."

Philby admitted, gloomily. "I feel safer the closer I am to the KGB. They've kept me alive this long. But MI-6 will have its revenge."

The five KGB agents at the next table had long ago stopped taking notes on Comrade Philby's story; they'd heard it all before. The two KGB agents who were actually MI-6 deep-cover moles wished heartily that they *could* kill the garrulous old traitor so they could steal some *important* secrets, such as the one about the alien superbeing the Russians were alleged to have in hiding somewhere.

Kyril glanced at his watch and noticed it had been five years since his arrival in Moscow. Most of that time had been spent at the Hungarian's. The rest was accounted for by standing in various queues, and dancing the hully-gully with Ludmilla Langarova, Lara's younger sister, who had been his lover for some time now.

It was time to get to work.

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He knew where to find Ludmilla. Through the revolving doors of the G.U.M. department store—largest in the world, he thought, proudly—up to the third floor, and there she was near the end of a queue for nylon spandex panty hose from Yugoslavia.

"Ludmilla," he announced, "I must start fighting for Truth, Justice, and the Socialist Way."

"Of course, Kyril dear," she said. "My darling, would you hold my place in line for just a few minutes? I heard a rumor that a shipment of Polish eye shadow has just arrived down at the cosmetics counter."

Three hours later, Kyril arrived home with six pairs of reinforced-crotch panty hose. He trudged up the stairs and kissed his mother on the cheek, pausing only to wipe the drool from her chin.

“Hi, Mom, I’m home,” he said. “Hello, Yuri. Hi there, Ivan. Yo, Vladimir, Sonya, Piotr, Sasha, Nikita, Alesandra, Yuri Junior, Alexei Ilyich, Alexei Andreivitch, Alexei Ivanovitch...”

Kyryl had found his mother while doing a story about the great strides made by Soviet medicine in the field of political rehabilitation. When the doctors realized he was her son, they agreed she was cured, and sent her home with him. And she *was* cured. Twenty years of electroshock and drug therapy had showed Marina the error of her ways.

There had been a few minor side effects, among them partial paralysis, loss of the power of speech, and hair that stood permanently on end.

“It was a small price to pay,” she had written in her electroencephalograph hand, shortly after her release. “I repent of the crimes of my youth.” At this point her eyes always leaked grateful tears. (These were two of the three sentences she knew how to write.)

“Mother,” Kyryl announced, “I will now go forth and make the world safe for Marxist-Leninist Socialism.”

“Dress warm,” Marina wrote.

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So Kyryl marched down the stairs, his Bolshoiman costume in a shoebox under his arm.

No sooner had he turned the corner onto Kalinin Prospekt than he spied a crime in progress. There were three parasitic youths lounging around a noisy Western ghetto blaster, chewing on toothpicks, combing their greasy ducktails, sneering at the hearty bustle of workers hurrying along the sidewalk.

“Why are you not at work?” Kyryl asked them mildly.

“Work is for suckers,” drawled one of the parasites insolently. “Take a walk, you old bolshy.”

Kyryl hurried around another corner and ducked into a convenient phone booth, evicting the Uzbek family who had made it their home. He went unobserved as he struggled into his costume except for the three KGB cameras concealed in the booth, along with one each from MI-6, *Mossad*—the terrorist arm of the outlaw Jewish state— and the American CIA. The CIA camera was far superior to the other five, and cost a hundred times as much. It would have delivered high-resolution pictures and stereo sound to its operators in Langley, Virginia, except that it had stopped working three years before.

He left the booth, leaped into the air, and swooped down on the parasites, who looked appropriately surprised.

“Your lives of crime are at an end, social leeches,” he announced. “From now on your kind will have to deal with Bolshoiman!” He grabbed one by the scruff of the neck and, warning the other two not to leave the scene, leaped into the sky again.

When Kyryl reached a thousand feet and began zooming toward the local police station, the parasite looked down and threw up all over him.

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He reported to work the next day to find the city room of *Pravda* filled with activity. Everyone was working on stories about the exploits of Bolshoiman.

Comrade Philby showed him a sample front page. The headline read: IS IT A MIG-25? IS IT A TUPOLEV-144? NO, IT'S BOLSHOIMAN!

"What do you think?" Philby asked gloomily.

Before Kyril could answer, a reporter slapped him on the back.

"Nice going, Bolshoiman," said the reporter.

Kyril jumped, then looked around, acting innocent.

"Where?" he asked. "Is Bolshoiman here?"

"Oh... that's right," said the reporter, and winked broadly. "He has a secret identity, doesn't he?" Wink, wink. "Well, *whoever* he is, that Bolshoiman is really something, huh?" Wink, wink, wink.

"Comrades!" shouted another reporter, slamming down a telephone. "The Comrade General Secretary himself has requested that Bolshoiman join him at once in the Kremlin!"

Every person in the room fell silent and looked at Kyril.

"I'll see if I can find him," Kyril said grumpily, and stalked from the room.

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But it was not Comrade Brezhnev, it was Yuri Andropov, head of the KGB, who greeted Bolshoiman. Andropov stood and held out his hand—then recoiled as Bolshoiman shook it. Kyril felt his ears go red.

"I apologize for the smell, Comrade Andropov," he said. "But I apprehended over a hundred parasites, hooligans, Jews, and black marketeers yesterday, and at least half of them got air sick. On me."

Andropov waved it away, and showed Kyril to a seat a comfortable distance from his desk.

"The General Secretary will be arriving in... ah, here he is now."

Leonid Brezhnev was brought in, strapped to a hand truck, followed by a battalion of doctors who immediately began hooking him up to kidney dialysis, an I.V. drip, a heart-lung device, and a cluster of other machines.

"The General Secretary is a bit indisposed," said Andropov.

"Ummm," said Bolshoiman.

A washtub of black beluga caviar was placed convenient to Brezhnev's right hand. He scooped up enough caviar to feed a Park Avenue household for a year, slapped it onto a slab of black Russian bread.

"I've existed for ten years on a diet of caviar and vodka," Brezhnev announced, and ate half the open-faced sandwich.

"That's wonderful, Leonid Ilyich," said Andropov, and turned to Kyril. "All Russia rejoices in your glorious exploits," he said.

Kyril blushed heroically.

"Comrade Brezhnev wanted me to award you this medal," said Andropov. He held up a red ribbon with

a gold star hanging beneath it, came around his desk and pinned it to Bolshoiman's chest. "You are now a Hero of the Soviet Union."

"I wipe my ass with sable pelts," Brezhnev announced.

"Marvelous, Leonid Ilyich," Andropov said absently. He frowned. "It's too bad the ribbon is the same color as your uniform. But the solid-gold star stands out nicely." Andropov needn't have worried. In a few days the solid-gold star left a large green stain, setting off the red ribbon.

"Every sable pelt produced in Siberia," Brezhnev announced. "I wipe my ass with, it."

"How droll, Leonid Ilyich," said Andropov. "And here, Bolshoiman, is your membership in the Russian Communist Party, voted in at a special session of the Politburo only last night."

Kyril's chest swelled with pride as Andropov handed him the papers.

"No sable is exported," Brezhnev announced, "without me first wiping my ass on it."

"Is that so?" said Andropov. "And one more thing, Bolshoiman. This is my own personal contribution. I thought a cape and a hat might go well with your... er... rather effective costume. So I procured these, made of... erm, ah... of the finest Russian sable."

Kyril thought his invulnerable heart would burst as he wrapped the cape around his shoulders, and jammed the hat onto his head.

"What a joke on the decadent capitalist warmongers, eh?" Brezhnev chuckled.

"Indeed, Leonid Ilyich," said Andropov, resuming his seat. He folded his hands and regarded Kyril paternally.

"And now, Bolshoiman," he said. "Tell me what you plan to do to further the aims of worldwide Communism?"

"Well, sir," Kyril said, stammering a bit in the presence of the two great men, "I've been thinking about this *a lot*." He leaned forward confidentially. "I've begun to suspect there is a great deal of injustice right here in the Motherland. I've heard rumors that certain Party officials have set up special stores where only they can shop, stocked with hard-to-obtain Western goods. I believe that some of these men have established private *dachas* in the woods, or by the shore. It seems certain those with the proper political connections do not have to wait as long to buy a car or other consumer goods. With my own eyes I have seen Party members go to the head of the queue for buying toilet paper." He folded his arms and leaned back resolutely. "Sir, I would like to root out this evil perversion of the classless society and see that the perpetrators get their proper punishment."

Andropov regarded Bolshoiman for a moment in silence. Then he slapped his palm on his desk.

"Wonderful, Bolshoiman!" he crowed. "I applaud your egalitarian spirit." Then he leaned forward. "But I must tell you, we in the KGB are aware of this scandal. I expect to announce arrests within the month. If you blundered into this situation, you might unwittingly undo years of investigation."

"Oh," said Kyril, his heart sinking.

"But I have other work for you," said Andropov. He rounded his desk again, and held out more papers. "Here is your secret membership in the KGB. It entitles you to lie, cheat, steal, sabotage, and murder in the cause of Communism. Here is an American passport and other identity papers establishing you as a

U.S. citizen, naturalized ten years ago. And here is your exit visa from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”

Andropov took a deep breath, then put his arm around Bolshoi-man’s shoulders. He whispered intensely.

“You shall go to the United States. You will confound the capitalists with your strengths. *You will work to undermine their decadent system from within!*”

“How diabolical!” Kyril breathed.

“Thank you,” said Andropov, and extended his hand. Kyril took it, and they both assumed the pose popularized by the Socialist Realism school of art.

“Good luck, Bolshoiman,” said Andropov.

“Thank you, Comrade Andropov,” said Kyril.

“I piss in Stolichnaya bottles labeled ‘For Export,’” “ announced Brezhnev.

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Kyril and Ludmilla flew to New York aboard *Aeroflot*—the world’s largest airline. As soon as their bogus tourist visas were approved, they threw them away and assumed their KGB-established cover identities.

On the way in from the airport, Ludmilla leaped from the moving taxi, vanished into Bloomingdale’s, and was never seen again. Once a month her MasterCard statement arrived at 1 Dzerzhinsky Square. Andropov always broke into a cold sweat when he opened it, then paid, significantly reducing the American foreign trade deficit.

Kyril got an apartment in Greenwich Village and took a job in the classified ads department of the *Village Voice*, where he was amazed to discover an American fascination with Greek, English, and French cultures fully as deep as any he had seen in Moscow.

Like many a great revolutionary before him, Kyril decided to begin his campaign for the hearts and minds of the enslaved American people on the streets. He dressed in his Bolshoiman costume and boarded the A Train. No one in the subway gave him a second glance.

He got off at 125th Street, where he quickly spotted a group of young, third-world, unemployed workers. He approached them.

“Crack, man.”“ one of them asked him.

“Hey, man, who’s your tailor, Bozo the Clown.”“

“Arise, oppressed workers of America!” Kyril shouted. “I, Bolshoiman, will lead you out of bondage.”

“Yo‘ *mama*, one of the workers commented.

“You have nothing to lose but your chains,” Kyril promised him.

Judging the debate had gone far enough, one of the oppressed workers attempted to stab Kyril in the back, but the blade broke off. Another swung his fist at Kyril’s chin, breaking every bone in his hand. A third produced a .357 Magnum and emptied it into Kyril’s face. This had no effect, except on two

bystanders hit by ricocheting bullets. Kyril reached out, took the firearm, ate it, and lifted the surprised worker by his hair.

“I must deliver you to the proper authorities,” he said mournfully. “Perhaps you will rethink your politics while languishing in the hell of the American prison system.” He took a small white paper bag from his pocket and gave it to the oppressed worker.

“What’s this for?” asked the worker.

“You’ll find out,” Bolshoiman said glumly, and leaped into the air.

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“What do you mean, ”lock him up“?” yelled the apoplectic desk sergeant. ”I can’t even scold him. Did you read him his rights? Do you have probable cause? Was there a lawyer present when the alleged assault allegedly occurred? Do you realize he’s eleven years old?“

“What about this?” Bolshoiman said, reaching into the youth’s pocket and producing several dozen packets of a controlled substance.

“That? I found that just laying on the street, man. I was gonna turn it in, but along comes bullshitman here and brutalizes me.”

“See?” said the desk sergeant. “He found it.”

“And this?” said Bolshoiman, reaching into another pocket and finding seven Rolex watches and fifteen diamond rings.

“Them? Them fell off *a* truck, man.”

“See? They fell off a truck. Did you have a warrant for those searches? Do you realize he hasn’t seen a psychiatrist yet? You realize just walking down 125th in that outfit is provocation, and entrapment? Here, kid, take this stuff and get outta here. *You*,” he said to Bolshoiman, “you I oughta lock up. You’re *crazy*. Now get outta here.”

Bolshoiman went home and pondered these events long into the night.

At nine A.M. there was a knock on his door. He answered it to find five process servers standing in a line. Each of them handed him a subpoena.

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Kyril spent most of the next year in court.

Both of the ricochet victims sued him for negligence in improperly deflecting the bullets. One of them died before the trial, so what with loss of projected lifetime income, pain and suffering to the wife, three children, mother and father, four grandparents, and punitive damages, Kyril had to pay seventeen million dollars. He got off easier with the survivor, whose lawyer could only manage to find nine hundred thousand dollars in damages and was so ashamed he gave up the practice of law.

The youth who cut himself on the broken knife blade sued for doctor and hospital bills of \$4398.03 and fifteen thousand dollars in pain and suffering. The fellow with the broken fist contended that he had lost his means of livelihood—mugging, purse-snatching, and leg-breaking—and won a judgement of a million five.

“Sorry about that,” said Kyril’s court-appointed public defender after the fourth verdict against him. “But this next case is frivolous. No jury in the world is going to convict you for stealing that kid’s gun and destroying it.”

“But it’s a criminal charge,” Kyril worried.

“Trust me,” said the public defender.

“But just what does a sentence of six months to life mean?” Kyril asked, through the wire mesh screen of the visitors’ room at the Tombs, two weeks later.

“Three, four weeks, tops,” said the public defender. “I gotta run. Keep your nose clean, and don’t drop the soap.”

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Back in his cell that night, one of his three cellmates crept close in the darkness and whispered in Kyril’s ear.

“I represent ABC television,” said the man. “I bribed the guard to get in here. ABC will pay ten thousand dollars for exclusive rights to your story. We plan a two-hour movie of the week.”

“Twenty thousand, and a four-hour two-parter,” whispered the cellmate from CBS. “Plus a guarantee to air during a sweeps week, Thursday of Friday.”

“They’re robbing you,” whispered the cellmate from NBC. “I’m prepared to offer thirty-five thousand, and *The Cosby Show* as a lead-in for the first episode of what we envision as a six-part miniseries.”

“We’re gonna call it *Bolshoiman: The Risks of Involvement*” whispered the man from ABC.

“We’re gonna call it *Bolshoiman: The Peril of Getting Involved*,” whispered the man from CBS.

“We’re gonna call it *Bolshoiman: Is Involvement Worth It?*” whispered the man from NBC.

“Why don’t you just *all* do it?” Kyril sighed, and rolled over and went to sleep to the sound of whispered bidding.

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Kyril was paroled after serving two months. He walked home to find a little man in a tweed suit sitting in his living room.

“Good morning,” said the little man briskly. “I’ll get right to the point.” He opened his briefcase and produced a sheaf of papers, which he fanned out on Kyril’s coffee table.

“I have here your 1040 forms for the last ten years. In none of these years do you list an income exceeding seventeen thousand dollars. Yet it has come to my attention that you recently paid out judgements in the amount of \$19,419,398.03, and you paid in cash. May I ask where you got this money?”

Kyril had charged it all to his KGB-backed American Express Gold Card, but began to wonder if perhaps he should have squeezed lumps of coal into diamonds instead.

“By the way,” said the little man, with a brisk smile. “Did I mention I’m from the Internal Revenue Service?”

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Kyril was sentenced to fifteen years for tax evasion, and remanded to the new Jails 'R' Us privately operated minimum-security rehabilitation facility outside Orlando, Florida. He was issued a loud Hawaiian shirt, a pair of Bermuda shorts, sandals and sunglasses and a ball and chain, and the bellhop showed him to his two-room efficiency cell/suite. It was furnished by the same people who do Holiday Inns. There was a small color television, a K-Mart bottom-of-the-line "stack" stereo with miserable speakers with practically no bass response, and no telephone. He had to share the Jacuzzi with nine other inmates. When Kyril arrived the inmates were on strike, demanding compact disc players and a better grade of suntan oil.

He settled easily into prison life once more. He spent his time reading the *Daily Worker*, plotting the overthrow of the U.S. government by force and violence, and wondering if he should escape.

Sometimes he had the weird feeling that prison was his destiny.

While he thought about these things he freebassed a lot of coke and gained over fifty pounds on the prison diet. He tried to sweat it off in the daily aerobics class, but then Sunday would roll around again.

"That damn brunch is my downfall," he often lamented to the ex-cabinet officers, federal judges, and Congressmen. "I swear I'm just gonna have a bite, and the next thing I know all the cheesecake is gone."

When he tipped the scales at an alarming three hundred and fifty pounds, he decided he had to make a break for it. He punched a hole in the floor of his cell and began tunneling like a tubby, supersonic mole.

After a few miles he lifted a manhole cover and poked his head into the Florida sunshine again. He was in the Fantasyland section of Walt Disney World. He took a slow look around, then zoomed back through the tunnel to the safety of his cell.

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No matter how he tried to avoid it, Kyril's first parole hearing came up after only two years. He was told not to do it again, and set free.

He carried out of the prison gates only his Bolshoiman costume, two hundred pounds of blubber he hadn't come in with, and a monkey on his back bigger than Mighty Joe Young. He was met at the gate by seventeen gorgeous women offering to marry him. The networks had taken his advice and all aired his story. The part of Bolshoiman had been played by Tom Selleck on ABC, while CBS opted for Arnold Schwarzenegger, and NBC, in a lighter vein, went with Chevy Chase.

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He rented a small apartment in Miami. It was okay, except for the vampire bats poking their heads through the walls, the giant slugs in the bathtub, and the billions of invisible ants that crawled over his body day and night. While going cold turkey, Bolshoiman wasted down to a hollow-eyed ninety-eight pounds. His costume hung on him like a deflated zeppelin.

He decided America would kill him if he stayed any longer, so he swam to Cuba, where he was imprisoned for eight years. He never was clear about the charge, but it seemed to have something to do with his costume.

China had about as much use for him as Russia. He only did three years there.

Bolshoiman now lives in the People's Stalinist Republic of Albania, where he is reasonably happy. He

resides in Cell #5, The Enver Hoxha *Glasnost*-Free Repentance Academy, 45 Revolution Square, Tirana, where he is serving 850 years to life.

He is currently at work on his manifesto.