

GILGAMESH CONTRITE, A CYBER MYSTERY

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About the Author

D. Ezra Sidran has been designing, writing and programming computer games for over 15 years. He has twice received the *Software Publishers Association's* "Codie" Award (the industry's equivalent of the Oscar) and has been named "Developer of the Year" by *Computer Entertainer Magazine*. His programs have received "Educational Game of the Year" and "Wargame of the Year" awards. Twice he has authored the best-selling computer game in the world. Worldwide sales of his computer games are in excess of US\$28 million.

A Technical Note About IP Addresses

It is now possible, with voice recognition software, to tell a phone to “call Mom” and the phone will parse your speech, retrieve Mom’s phone number from memory and dial the number.

Every web site on the Internet has a unique IP (Internet Protocol) address, which is roughly the equivalent of a phone number. When a user types in ‘AOL.com’ in the address line in Netscape™ or Internet Explorer™ the user really is asking to be connected to the IP address 152.163.159.232. This IP address is the ‘number’ of AOL.com.

“WWW.AOL.com” is called the URL (Uniform Resource Locator). The URL is the equivalent of asking for “Mom’s telephone number” and 152.163.159.232 is the actual, unique, number for AOL.

All the IP addresses in this story are specious.

They are the equivalent of the ubiquitous phone number (555) 555-1212 in other works of fiction.

Dedication

This book is for
Dr. Barret Baumer who
saved the life of the real Sam
and for Kelly who saved me.

“Fame haunts the man who visits Hell
who lives to tell my entire tale identically,
so like a sage, a trickster or saint,
Gilgamesh was a hero who knew secrets
And saw forbidden places,
Who could even speak of the time before the
Flood because he lived long, learned much,
And spoke his life to those who first
Cut into clay his bird-like words.”

- The Epic of Gilgamesh

- Tablet I, Column I, Lines 1-9.

Prologue

“Open up the special box that’s hidden in the wall
and read aloud the story of Gilgamesh’s life.
Learn what sorrow taught him; learn of those
he overcome by wit or force or fear...”

- The Epic of Gilgamesh
- Tablet I, Column I, Lines 20-23

0.0 Enigma? Christ, Let Go!

The man with the woman’s breasts typed what would be his last words:

And so, once again, we see that surprisingly complex structures arise out of simple equations.

Allan Mathison Turing
June 6, 1954
Hollymeade Cottage,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire
England

Alan Turing, the man who cracked the unbreakable German Enigma code, the man who invented software before there were computers, the man who wrote the definitive treatise on Artificial Intelligence, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”, the man who had saved the world from the Nazis in 1939, cranked the last page from the ancient machine. On the table before him lay 37 pages of typescript manuscript. His work was done.

It was ten years, to the day, that Turing’s greatest triumph had allowed for a successful landing at Normandy. If it had not been for Alan Turing they would probably still be speaking German in Southampton today.

Alan Turing had unraveled the secret of humanity. Whatever he had thought were the reasons that his Maker had put him on this Earth, on this

rock circling a class M sun, far out on a distant arm of a pissant galaxy, those days were over now.

Alan Turing had lost his security clearance.

He had been arrested and brought to trial on March 31, 1952 in the case of *Regina v. Turing and Murray* on the charge of sodomy.

The local newspaper, *The Alderley Edge and Wilmslow Advertiser*, reported the case in the proper, succinct and British manner:

“UNIVERSITY READER PUT ON PROBATION

TO HAVE ORGANO-THERAPIC TREATMENT.

AT CHESHIRE QUARTER SESSIONS AT KNUTSFORD ON MONDAY, ALAN MATHISON TURING (30) F.R.S., O.B.E., SINGLE, UNIVERSITY READER, OF ADLINGTON ROAD, WILMSLOW, DESCRIBED AS “ONE OF THE MOST PROFOUND AND ORIGINAL MATHEMATICAL MINDS OF HIS GENERATION,”

MR. DAVID SAID THAT AFTER TURING MADE A STATEMENT HE ASKED A POLICE OFFICER: “WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN ABOUT ALL THIS? ISN’T THERE A ROYAL COMMISSION SITTING TO LEGALIZE IT?”

PARTICULARLY HONEST

MAXWELL H. A. NEWMAN A PROFESSOR OF PURE MATHEMATICS AT MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY CALLED AS A WITNESS FOR TURING SAID “TURING WAS PARTICULARLY HONEST AND TRUTHFUL.”

Turing made no denial. He made no demurral; he made no defense. Instead he told the Court that he saw no wrong with his actions. He was given a choice: prison or injections of estrogen to neutralize his ‘unnatural’ impulses; he opted for the injections.

The injections weren’t so bad. He became even more feminine. He grew breasts. Turing had struggled with his sexuality since the day he had been born. All his life he had blurred the line between male and female. Now he had transcended these mundane concepts.

But he had lost his security clearance. He was no longer allowed access to ACE (the Automatic Computing Engine) the digital computer at Manchester University. His computer, he built it and now – because he was a security risk – he could no longer use the very machine that he designed; that he had built with his own long delicate fingers.

It didn’t matter. Alan Turing had already left his own computer behind. His mind was many generations beyond what could be constructed. Alan Turing already belonged to the ages.

He had only one last thing to do: to write it *all* down on 37 pages of fools-cap fed through the antiquated Remington Royal typewriter. Back at

Bletchley Park – where he had broken the back of Enigma during the bleak winter of '39 – Timothy, the tabby cat, would play with the papers that Turing cranked from the machine. Turing had liked the way that Timothy had put all his great work into a feline context: all of mankind's labors existed only to be a cat's plaything. Tens of thousands of lives, Allied and Axis, hung on Turing's output and Timothy liked jumping on the keys and attacking the sheets of decrypted top-secret messages.

But now Timothy the tabby cat, Bletchley Park, Cambridge, A.C.E., Christopher Morcom – his one true love – they were all gone.

The next morning the sun shone through Alan Turing's bedroom window. He woke up refreshed. His work was done.

He went to his chemistry bench and prepared a beaker of cyanide. He steeped a golden, delicious apple in the poison. He made sure that his last work was laid out on the table before him and then he ate the apple and then he died.

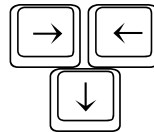
The charwoman appeared the next day at Hollymeade Cottage and discovered Turing's cold corpse. She rang the police straight away and then went into the kitchen and put the kettle on; there would probably be a good number of people for tea shortly. Then she thought that she should probably tidy up a bit and went back into Turing's laboratory and picked up the papers.

Forty-five years later Turing's lost work would be rediscovered in the stacks of the University of Manchester library by an American graduate student.

The world would never be the same again.

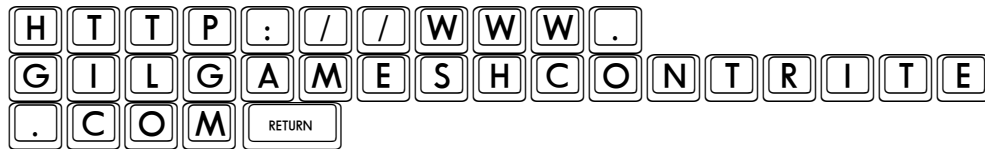
“No graceful robe any longer graces her naked self
and her kind breasts, once warm with milk,
have turned into bowls of cold stone.”

- The Epic of Gilgamesh
- Tablet XII, Column I, Lines 39-41.





1.0 Erotic Things Glean



Present day California.





Waiting to connect to server...

Caleb Mach poked his head over the top of his cubicle divider; one of a dozen techno-veal furtively glancing around to see if their latest theft of corporate time had been observed.

Caleb was sly. He simultaneously pressed   with the thumb and third finger of his left hand and brought a meaningless spreadsheet up to the front window.

But Caleb was in the desperate heat of the techno-veal. He pressed   again to check on the progress of the pulsating thermometer bar: only 43% loaded. He switched back to the spreadsheet and licked his lips; a nervous, sexual, lick that just grazed the fuzz on his lip that he fancied a mustache. He poked his head up again above the machine-gray cubicle divider; no supervisor in sight. Back down.

  93% loaded. Caleb decided to sweat it out. 95%, 97% – what shitty algorithm doesn't hit every percentage along the way? – 99% and then it hung on a 100% for an eternity before the screen built.

And then, in a top-down flood of animated .GIF images *her* page is drawn before his lustful eyes. Another click of the mouse and he is granted access to the Holy of Holies: before him another window opened showing Heather's live webcam.

Heather was lying on the four-poster bed with the green satin sheets that he knew so well. The webcam seemed to be hovering from somewhere about 10 feet above her pierced navel and looking almost straight down. Her red pubic hair lit up the bottom third of the screen.

There was no sound and the image refreshed only once every 5 seconds but he could tell this was going to be a good session. Urgently he rammed the mouse down to the lower left-hand corner of the screen and launched ScreenCapDeLuxe (ver. 5.4) from the Start menu. He wanted to savor every moment of this later at his leisure.

Heather was not your ordinary amateur, horny, overweight, exhibitionist, housewife-out-to-make-a-buck web slut. Heather transcended all of that.

First, her body was flawless porcelain.

Second, no expense was spared to maintain her. Her deep auburn hair fell in luxuriant curls about her breasts. Her nails – hands and feet – were always exquisitely manicured. A large blue gem (most certainly sapphire) in a platinum mounting encircled the third phalanx on her right foot. Her breasts were of such perfection that you knew that they could only be the work of the finest surgeons in the world.

Third, at all times, she wore a *cloisonné* mask that must have been crafted by some twisted old master possessed by a lust of satanic depths because her face was locked in an otherworldly orgasmic grin.

In the 320 x 240-pixel window before him Heather snaked the middle finger of her right hand down between her thighs.

Caleb licked his lips again and, like a prairie dog, furtively thrust his head up above his cubicle's walls for one last look around. Retreating back into his hole, Caleb snuck his head back down and riveted his eyes to those 76,800 multicolored pixels that were representing what goddess Heather was about to do next (or had actually already done about 1.8 seconds ago somewhere *out there* on the Web).

It was then that he finally recognized the birthmark on the inside of her left thigh; she had probably worn body makeup before. The birthmark was not unsightly – it was erotic in its own way – it was actually something that could identify her.

You never forget the inside thighs of your first lover.

That wasn't Heather on his screen. That was Bethany Jean Rosemont.

He knew that birthmark as only two sweating teens under a pale yellow light could know each other. That was Bethany Jean underneath the saline implants, the piercings and the Spa treatments.

And then he saw her die right before his eyes.



1 . 1

Caleb's first thought was to randomly press keys and throw the mouse about as if this was some twitchy first-person-shooter. This wasn't a game.

Bethany Jean was bleeding furiously from a knife embedded just above her pierced gem-studded navel by an off-screen unseen hand.

And then, frame by frame, Bethany Jean's head jerked into the window and – if nothing else this would make you know it was real – her cloisonné mask fell off – and there was no mistaking that this was Bethany Jean Rosemont now – and the mask fell towards the bottom of the screen and her perfectly manicured hands reached for the knife in her belly but then she vomited out a stream of dark red blood that had come straight from her lungs and then she fell on her right side – as the image slowly rebuilt – and then the live webcam feed suddenly went black.

Caleb jumped straight up from his chair.

He opened his mouth to scream for help but as his eyes broke over the horizon of the cubicle farm the reptilian part of his brain told his mouth to shut tight and so he just bobbed up like a cork on the gray cubicle sea.

Caleb fell backwards, out of his cubicle, and into a tributary of taupe carpet that flowed, eventually, into a central pool where a single, dying, dragon-plant kept guard over six cheap wire chairs. He crashed first into Kelly's cubicle and then rebounded across the aisle into Ed's personal space taking down a divider wall before he stumbled past the limp dragon-plant and into the Men's room where he threw up before making it to his favorite stall in the back.

He threw up again on his way to the sink. He didn't even look at himself in the mirror when he splashed cold water over his face.

He burst out of the Men's Room and headed straight for the elevator bays where he pushed the ↓ button with a new urgency.

Caleb remembered nothing of the elevator's descent. He did not see the disapproving stares of the other occupants in the lift nor the reproachful looks from the huddled smokers outside. Numb inside and out he stumbled towards his blue Pontiac Sunbird in the company lot.



1.2

The back seat of Caleb's car was overfilled with fast-food wrappers, empty Marlboro™ boxes, parking tickets and unopened mail (most of which these days were dunning notices stamped with **FINAL NOTICE** on the envelopes). Caleb turned the engine over and put the car in drive. Already his brain was running on autopilot as he pulled out of the company parking lot and headed to the onramp of the 880.

Caleb hated this drive more than anything on this earth.

Every morning and every night for the last two years he had to ride the 880 and confront the failures of his life.

That gray five-story poured-concrete office building on the right, the one with the three-story atrium with the now dying evergreen, the one with the NOW LEASING banner stretched from what was once his corner office on the top floor to the opposite corner office where his Chief Technical Officer had held court, screamed, "LOSER" to him. That building seemed to hang on the horizon for an hour. Caleb gunned the little blue Sunbird up to 95 Mph and still that damn building was in view.

That was once Caleb's office; that was once Caleb's empire.

Caleb had once been Number One with a bullet. Caleb Mach had written the best-selling computer game of the year. He crashed into the charts at Number One with a bullet (still going up in sales). Caleb Mach once had the world by the tail.

Caleb Mach once had 85 people working for him and every one of them had full dental, full medical, Keogh plans and stock options.

All ashes now.

Outside the sun was falling into the Pacific Ocean. It was what the cinematographers called 'the magic hour'. The earth was bathed in a golden glow. Caleb had not been outside at this time for many years. The earth looked warm and inviting. The world looked kind, not as Caleb knew it.

What was once Caleb's home appeared as a dark seven-gabled silhouette on the western horizon.

Somebody else was living there now.

The bank took it. No, the IRS took it. Even now it was hard to keep straight who did what to him.

Even as Caleb raced down the 880, he could not escape the indignity of the truth: the IRS took his house with their official seals and rolls of yellow tape – they destroyed his business – because he had paid 100% of the health insurance for all his employees; and maybe for some down-on-their-luck friends who were not, technically, employees. He had "expensed" the health insurance premiums out instead of declaring them as "taxable income" and withholding the alphabet soup of FICA, FUTA and SUTA payments from everybody's paychecks. Then his publishers went Chapter 11 owing him a ton of unpaid back royalties. The cash-flow pipeline was dry as dust the day the IRS agent appeared in his office. That day was a living nightmare that he still couldn't wake up from.

It had been early fall (not that there were real seasons out here), late in the morning. Caleb and a half dozen friends had been in his corner office just talking, laughing. Caleb was putting on a brave front; he knew how bad the financial picture was.

"Caleb, you'll pull another rabbit out of your ass, you always do," Jimbo, an old high school buddy had said, laughing, showing his big white teeth. Caleb was glad to see that Jimbo was taking advantage of the free dental care. Man, his teeth had been a mess.

And then, right on cue, the IRS agent pushed her way in past his flustered secretary and everything went to shit very quickly. The short woman in a red power suit picked up the Waterford crystal decanter that was on the conference table in Caleb's office. "This will look great on my mantle," she announced.

"I'm sure it would," Caleb answered, "but who, exactly, are you and why are you helping yourself to my property?"

By way of introduction she flipped out her badge and Treasury ID.

He paid the back taxes out of his own pocket but the fines that the IRS levied on him personally for "signing false returns" crushed him like a boulder on his chest.

They took everything.

They were a plague of locusts.

They were the Czar's taxmen that his grandfather from the old country had warned him about. Caleb could still remember the old man telling him, "They took *everything*. They even took the *chickens!*" Somehow the chickens were the final indignity.

"Grandfather, they took my business. Grandfather they took my house! I just wanted to do the right thing," Caleb wanted to tell his now long-dead grandfather. "They took everything. The taxmen were the plague of locusts you warned me about, Grandfather."

Caleb barely crawled out of the wreckage of his business. It was two years ago that the IRS agent in the red power suit appeared in his office. Two years of working in a cubicle slamming out meaningless code for lousy overpriced business applications. Caleb still had the Waterford crystal decanter, though, and Sonny, his orange tabby cat. The IRS and the creditors got everything else.

Up ahead the highway divided into two graceful arcing curves. The left road went home to Caleb's pitiful apartment. A large green California DOT sign announced that the other ramp led to Fairclough Avenue and the San Jacinto Police station.

The steel blue Pontiac Sunbird roared down the highway somehow knowing where to take Caleb Mach.