

Post-Modem

The Interwebs Explained

by

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Any idea what those numbers mean? It looks like some sort of countdown, but to what? Ooh, I know what it is. Masonic Code. Specifically from the Electric Masons.¹

¹ See Page 8

Foreword

By the Author, Jason C. Klamm, B.A.

As a long-time Internet Veteran and historian, Internet's past and development are of particular interest to me. This book, however, is by no means to be taken as *the* authority on the history of Internet, but rather as *a*, or *some* history of it. It is important to remember that there are conflicting accounts of historical events going all the way back to the days of The Bible, so it should perhaps not be surprising that, in an era defined by "information," it is nearly impossible for us to gauge which of that information related to internet history is true, and which of it is false. This is an historical human problem, one that I am not prepared or willing to tackle or repair all on my own.

That said, I have gone to certain lengths to keep my research as sanitary as possible. My research model is based on a belief I have long held – that the only way one can research the Internet is ON the Internet itself. After all, how else did historians ever research books? By looking in other books, of course.

In addition to this book's lack of original research, I am taking advantage of what is generally known as the "Observer Effect," whereby, in science, the act of observing certain objects and effects actually affects the data gleaned from said object or effect. Internet is much the same way, equally fragile and fickle, so that by recording information about it, I am actually changing Internet in the process, especially in cases where community-edited sources allow me to do so.

If you learn nothing else from this book, at least take from it that any one person can affect history if they are willing to take the time to change the perceptions of those around them. Whether that change of mind results from strongly-worded, logical discourse, or simply the amendment of that same discourse as stored on some sort of digital

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repository, doesn't matter. What matters is that Internet allows us to make these changes – thusly, it empowers us.

Naturally, that power can be all too tempting. In writing this book, I haven't given in to the temptation to simply make up facts. Where facts were sparse or non-existent and necessitated expansion based on analogous stories, histories were aggregated from the most likely candidates for truth, thereby creating a “patchwork of honesty” not unlike Internet itself, which many historians have likely analogized as a quilt at some point.

Each and every perspective is taken into account, provided those perspectives find a considerable platform or voice on this, our most precious of informative media. When it was found necessary to truncate or entirely eradicate certain pieces of information from this book (believe me, it wasn't easy, but it was necessary!), my own process mimicked that of Internet's Anarchist Democracy, whereby votes are only cast, and discussion only had, in order to disrupt the flow of information and to prevent Internet from becoming *too* informative. It is not, and has never been, my intention to make this history *excessively* edifying; whenever possible, my research stops just short of inquisitive to avoid reflecting any personal or professional bias.

Let us not forget, however, that Internet is exciting! It is unlike any other resource at our disposal, since it is all of them! It is my goal as an author and historian to bring you the experience of the internet, as presented through the eyes of its progenitor, the printed word. This book should reflect the exact experience of hearing Kirk Douglas telling you about how proud he is of Michael's work in 2003's *The In-Laws*.

Sincerely,

Jason C. Klamm, B.A.

theauthor AT postmodembook DOT com



A Man shoots Internet into a Receptor Pod (1942)

Chapter 8

File Sharing: Pirates of the 01_Carribbean_Queen-Billy_Ocean.mp3

In 1999, as the number of households with high-speed internet began to steadily increase, so did the average WebUser's choices for web-based content. One enterprising young man soon found a way to revolutionize the way users could gather that content together and share it.

The story goes that young Shawn Fanning, a recent college drop-out, stayed up for 60 hours straight to code a file-sharing application designed to allow users to share with potentially unlimited fellow users the music files (MP3s) that they had "ripped" from their compact discs. This program was called "Napster," and was an overnight sensation, allowing college students to share the latest hits – all for free. Internet users traded their favorite tunes like so many baseball cards changed hands in the 50s, ushering in a new era of media availability and accessibility.

And so has the original e-Robin-Hood story been perpetuated, even after the company's legal problems eventually forced them to settle with numerous music publishers. Even as Lars Ulrich, drummer for heavy metal band Metallica had a public feud with Napster for "stealing music," and continuing on until they were purchased by electronic big box company Best Buy, the legend continued to build. This story, contend insiders, couldn't be further from the truth.

In February of 1997, Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich confessed to be in a "deep funk, man," to a music reporter in Moline, Illinois during their "Poor Touring Me U.S.A. Tour," though he didn't expound on the reason for his alleged depression. The true reason, sources close to the artist say, is Metallica's then-recent drop in record sales. The band's 1996 release *Load*, had moved a respectable 64,383 units in Finland, but

The Land of A Thousand Lakes was not so receptive to their 1997 follow-up, *ReLoad*, perhaps, it is surmised, due to the language barrier.

Not one to be defeated, Ulrich began researching how he might best improve Metallica's sales in Finland, a personal proving ground for the rock quartet. He soon came upon an article in *Wi-Fi* magazine entitled, "Music Piracy: Falling into Mickey Dolenz's Locker," in which the author, Samil Hortrum, sounded a warning few would heed, about the potential misuse of this exciting audio compression technology called "MPEG Audio Layer 3" that compressed the typical digital audio file to a fraction of its original size. Undaunted by what he deemed "scaremongering," and potentially the motivation of "only a few bad apples" and "Sneaky Peters," Ulrich then devised a plan, in his ever-present Moleskine notebook, at the top of which he scrawled, in good, thick felt-tipped pen, "Something-Ster."

Newly revitalized, creatively, Ulrich is reported to have started taking night classes in computer programming with the intent of "creating a new method of distribution that the [record companies] haven't thought of." After purchasing the requisite textbooks in Chicago, he began his night classes promptly, if surreptitiously, if only to avoid a "good-natured ribbing" by the boys in the band. The tour quickly packed up, though, and Metallica and company moved to the next city on the list. This forced Ulrich to sign up for new night classes, often having to purchase brand-new textbooks as he hoped, beyond hope, that he would be the same amount of classes in to the course in the new city that he was at the last school.

Eventually, as the tour ended in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T5A 0A1, Ulrich celebrated with a class of jubilant computer programmers as they all graduated with completion certificates in Computer Programming, the first step to an Associates degree. Clearly unhappy with not having an actual degree in his hands, Ulrich then locked himself in his car for the next week, his laptop plugged into an electrical outlet in the back alley of a local Italian restaurant, and began to code his yet-to-be-named program. Drinking little more than the rainwater that collected on a sizable dent in his car's roof, and eating only the leftovers

the nearby Italian restaurant had to offer, Ulrich found himself with a completed program just minutes before his self-imposed one-week deadline officially terminated.

Before he could launch his groundbreaking program, however, Ulrich had to start searching for a representative. No one, so he confessed to Sal Molinari, owner of the Italian restaurant which he has asked not be named, would ever believe that a God of Rock would be capable of such thought, introspection and intellectual skill. As much as he'd like credit for the program, it wasn't possible, at least not in this world. He then swallowed his pride and girded his willpower and began to call college campuses known for their computer programming curricula, in order to find that lucky someone upon who would be dumped thousands upon thousands of accolades, and a lifetime worth of good will.

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY, BOSTON, 1998

The campus of Northeastern is known for its jubilant celebrations of freedom and a strong work ethic. Burgeoning computer programmer Shawn Fanning was no exception to either of these, though it was the latter that stood out to Lars Ulrich. After nearly a year of searching, Ulrich had whittled his list of college students down to a short-list of just four programmers. What was to be the penultimate e-mail to all four youths (BCC'd, of course), announcing a coming final challenge, was mistakenly sent half-complete, with all of the recipients CC'd, instead. Having left the window open before completing the e-mail, Ulrich reportedly visited a number of websites and typed down some lyrics to a rock opera entitled *Godpiece* that he had been working on for some time. When the computer began running slowly due to the massive amount of windows open at once, Ulrich promptly Ctrl+F4'd through the windows, hitting the "Right Arrow" and "Enter" key at every prompt, thereby sending the incomplete pre-challenge e-mail.

It might have been luck that Northeastern's Shawn Fanning was at his computer at the very moment his computer downloaded the e-mail. Upon receipt, Fanning quickly clicked on the message labeled "No

Subject,” clearly bewildered by the enigmatic half-message that ended in, “Willy Wonka was a b***h compared to me,” and responded with a matter-of-fact, “I think this message is incomplete. – Sean.” Three reboots later, when Ulrich opened his e-mail client again, he discovered Fanning’s message – the lone response – beginning a quick reply:

“Sorry, dude, real weird – thought I closed that win-“

And Ulrich stopped, coming to what he believed was a distinct realization – Fanning, it seemed, had found a way through Ulrich’s security protocols, allowing him to send Ulrich’s e-mail out unfinished. “That little [expletive]... He hacked me.” A smile then reportedly grew on Ulrich’s normally reserved face as he shook his head in amazement. “Holy [expletive], he hacked the system!” Ulrich reportedly exclaimed, jumping up from the coffee shop table at which he had been working, pointing both forefingers determinedly at his screen, addressing the room with furtive glances to random coffee drinkers. “I found my guy!” Ulrich finished, still pointing with such severity that the force nearly broke one of the leather wristbands that adorned his toned drummer’s forearms.

After sitting down to contemplate this moment, inadvertently clicking “send” with one of his oversized wristbands, Ulrich promptly called up his road manager to have Fanning flown out “immediately.” When Fanning arrived at Ulrich’s Los Angeles manse the next day, he was quickly greeted with hugs by the enthused rock-and-roller, along with an impromptu high-five session that reportedly lasted nearly ten minutes. After the pleasantries were complete, Ulrich, as usual, got down to brass tacks. Fanning’s response to Ulrich’s initial offer of complete ownership of the “Ster” name was one of incredulity – to have such a present thrown right into one’s lap was simply unheard of, especially during these years, when the net was slowly building to a glorious peak. Ulrich assured Fanning that, if he was ready and willing to take over and adapt the code when needed, Ster would be his. Ulrich

gave him the night to think about it, leaving him with one thought: “Shawn – you could be the man who saves Metallica.”

A clearly fatigued Fanning came back to the table two days later with a list of caveats, number one on the list being that he be allowed to rename the service. As a symbol of good faith, Ulrich took out his moleskine notebook and felt pen, handing it to Fanning, who promptly added “nap” to the service’s existing moniker. When asked, “Why Napster?” Fanning mentioned something about his kinky hair, to which Ulrich then slapped his hands on Fanning’s shoulders, telling the room of roadies and investors, “This is the guy! Look at him!” and proceeded to clap his own hands together in impish delight, running over to his stereo to un-pause a recently-recorded live version of “Devil’s Dance,” and breaking into a counter-top drum solo. “Why don’t the Fins get this?” he then asked Fanning as he reached for the contract across the kitchen table.

The weeks that followed tested Fanning’s limitations as a programmer, as the process began on the road with Ulrich and Metallica. Though most of his training sessions with Ulrich are said to have consisted primarily of “tweaking” Fanning’s image to be more of a “bad-ass,” and watching the entirety of the first two seasons of *Perfect Strangers* off of the original master tapes (which Ulrich had recently purchased from Miller-Boyett Productions), Fanning still found time to tweak the program to his liking, including code that expanded search options beyond “metal,” “heavy metal,” “death metal” and “Metallicaesque.” In late May of 1999, after Ulrich and Fanning had loaded the entirety of Ulrich’s massive music collection onto Fanning’s hard drive as MP3 files, Ulrich sent Fanning and his hard drive back to Northeastern, wishing his new friend a sincere, “Let’s kick Finland’s ass!” followed up by a plaintive, “Naw, I’m just kidding. I really love those guys.”

The launch came in June of 1999, and with Fanning’s skills as a social networker, he quickly spread the word about his service and how he could help people share the music of their favorite musicians. In an early e-mail, he casually lets a few friends know (with Ulrich BCC’d)

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that, “I just put together this thing called Napster. I just shared Eagle Eye Cherry’s “Save Tonight” with a bud in California. Check it out.” Ulrich, after reading his introductory e-mail to a rather large group of friends, fired off a response, being careful not to “reply-all,” asking Fanning why he hadn’t, instead, mentioned Metallica’s latest single, “Die Die Die My Darling.” “And why don’t I see any Finnish domain extensions in there? I need to see at least six .FIs in the next e-mail.”

By August, Fanning had pulled in thousands of users, and were still growing, with little effort on their parts. Though the two were constantly working on improving the code, word-of-mouth was causing the kind of growth even Ulrich hadn’t dreamed of. Still, one thing was missing for the former professional tennis player.



A screen capture of the *Napster* website, circa 1999.

As he checked Napster’s stats one night in July of 1999, Ulrich scanned through the list of shared songs and their downloads, shocked to find that, among thousands of shared Metallica songs, both

contemporary and classic music – even classical – was being shared at an unprecedented rate. He then fired off an e-mail to Shaun Fanning, his adrenaline pumping, asking him, “Why didn’t you tell me what we had here? We have irrevocable proof that Metallica fans don’t JUST love metal. I’m blown away, and not a little frustrated that you didn’t catch this.”

By September, though he was clearly frustrated at the “attitudes” of Fanning & Parker, who regularly ignored his e-mails, which at this point included Excel spreadsheets containing the names of thousands of Fins who Ulrich had pinpointed as potential Metallica fans, Ulrich hired California venture capitalist Eileen Richardson – through Fanning, to avoid any public suspicion – to be the CEO of Napster, Inc. The numbers didn’t lie – people were using the Napster service.

The company kept growing, making “MP3” – not to mention “Napster” – a household name, at least among the world’s fast-growing population of tech-savvy youth. Though Napster’s peak came much later, December of 1999 was a considerable turning point. While Metallica’s songs were, indeed, among the first thousands of songs downloaded by Napster users, the increasing popularity of generally expanding one’s own personal digital music catalogue created cross-over into literally every possible genre of music. Though this exposure was more than welcomed by countless independent bands, as well as certain mainstream artists, the music publishing industry – which tracks royalties owed artists, producers and rights holders of any music generally published – enough was enough, at least for the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

Claiming that Napster services “enable and encourage Napster users to download millions of pirated songs as well as make available their own music library for others to copy,” the RIAA filed suit against the service that began as a mere twinkle in Ulrich’s eye. The legal pressure was enough to make Ulrich take a break after a concert to e-mail Fanning – who insisted in his auto-reply e-mail signature at his infrequently accessed, Ulrich-enforced metalfan@napster.com address, that his recently-purchased cellular phone was “always on” – asking him

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“what’s the plan, Stan?” and following it up with his recently-developed emoticon resembling a hand making devil’s horns. Though Fanning replied to the first few e-mails with hasty platitudes (“sounds good! Let’s do this, man!” seemingly the most common), his patience for Ulrich’s need for constant non-phone-based contact quickly grew thin, to the point where his metalfan address was soon set to forward to CEO Richardson’s e-mail, bouncing back to Ulrich with her standard autoreply ending in, “Metallica 4eva, Eileen.”

“He was hurt,” says a member of Metallica who wishes to go unnamed, “and Shawn was just burying the dagger deeper by insisting that he was for sharing music in general. Not one public mention of Metallica. That pushed Lars to the brink.” Some would argue he was pushed past the brink, however, as Ulrich began firing a series of e-mails to Fanning’s regular e-mail address, CC’ing Richardson, accusing the former of being a “no-goodnick” and a “bounder,” to which Richardson frequently replied, “being sued by RIAA. call to talk. rock lives. – ER.” Fanning, it should be noted, treated Richardson’s responses as the final word on the subject, hoping to avoid further contact with Ulrich as he prepared for his first major legal battle. The rapid-fire instant messages between the two indicate the confusion that was clearly gripping the company’s west coast headquarters:

“FANNING: umm Lars wants me to call him – wut?

RICHARDSON: u shud probly call.

F: he has my #

R: right, but call him. shows good faithh

F: #?

R: ?

F: what’s his number?

R: lemme check rolodex, LOL

F: kk”

Ulrich, who reportedly waited at his landline after sending the e-mail and closing the latest version of his internet provider’s dial-up software,

got the call he was waiting for on April 13, 1999. Fanning was predominantly quiet as Ulrich laid out the basics of his feelings on the subject of the RIAA suit and Fanning's apparent disregard for Ulrich's concerns. The unnamed Metallica member continues, "Lars was straight with him, man. He's just 'hey,' you know, 'you're not respecting me. You should respect me.' Fanning was pretty scared, dude, so he didn't say anything. Lars took it hard. He wanted to rap – some back-and-forth, like when he brought the kid on. So he says, 'I'm taking you guys to court.' Filed suit at noon, like right after. It was cold, sure, but you cross Lars, and it's like crossing two wires. Things set fire, you know?"

The lawsuit made fast headlines, in papers and magazines across the country. Ulrich quickly became Napster's biggest detractor, demanding, through Metallica's lawsuit, monetary compensation and the removal of any Metallica-infringing users from the Napster service, signaling Ulrich's complete disenchantment with his "baby," and an end to his love of "all things digital," according to recent interviews with an anonymous former Napster employee believed to be Richardson. This was also the end of Ulrich's typical interview style – up to this point a free-wheeling, highly impromptu improvisation of Ulrich's musings on life – and the beginning of what Ulrich has since referred to as "Darth Lars," a no-nonsense, talking-point-heavy, even dower Ulrich, which began to worry the members of the band. To Ulrich's own perspective on the change, another unnamed member of the quartet responded, "I've never seen Star Wars. I keep meaning to."

Meanwhile, Fanning stayed out of the spotlight, wishing instead to concentrate on the ongoing lawsuits and a new web service he intended to be a "lawsuit-proof" version of Napster, which would only allow users to share files in the public domain. The litigation, however, precluded any "me-time" Fanning had set aside specifically for designing new file-sharing services. Faced with sound byte after sound byte of Ulrich-originating derision against the services he had inherited, Fanning was eventually faced with the inevitability of Napster's impending bankruptcy filing, even as the service prospered and copycat services began to pick up the slack for the increasingly-limited Napster.

Though Ulrich cut off ties with Fanning and Richardson outside of his public displays of frustration, Fanning's e-mails, recently published in the memoir *I, Fanning: Confessions of a Game Changer*, and edited so as to avoid revealing the identity of Napster's true originator (known in the book as only "Cousin Larry"), reveal that his last attempts to reach out to Ulrich were not only heartfelt, but filled with the sort of regret that, in hindsight, might ultimately have saved Napster from oblivion, at least as a file-sharing service:

"officially bankrupt. should've seen this coming. just installed a car-based MP3 player in the RX-7. put on [Metallica Hit Song] Master of Puppets first thing. just thought I'd let you know that. – SF."

Ulrich never responded.

It was Ulrich's disappointment in humanity, it has been said, that ultimately led to his often public outbursts against the Frankenstein he, himself, had created with all the world's best intentions. Still, the earliest signed drafts of the non-disclosure agreement signed by both Ulrich and Fanning in 1998 prevent either party from revealing the true origins of the controversial, world-changing service until Fanning reaches the age of 38 – November 22, 2018 – the point at which, both parties agreed, the service would have reached "epic levels," and should subsequently be passed on to whomever the prospective team deemed a true "heart-and-soul rocker," and therefore echoed the true spirit of the service which the contract still referred to as "Ster."

Recommended Reading:

German, H. (2003), *Flapster: A History of the File-Sharing Scuffle*

Klieg, M. (2007), *Fanning the Flames: The Napster Story*

Chapter 9

Punning With Scissors: The Downside of Uploading

Regardless of one's position on the issue of file-sharing, there are a few cases that stand out for both sides of the arguments for and against the controversial practice. While mainstream artists both derided and endorsed the practice, the latter for its sheer ability to spread the word about talented music acts, some of them faced genuine obstacles in having to embrace not just the attitudes and habits of a new generation of music listeners, but an entire new era of technology and communication. One such artist was a man thought by most of his fans to be immune from "techno-fatigue" – "Weird Al" Yankovich.

When Napster was at its absolute peak in 1999 and 2000, "Weird Al" was in the middle of his *Running with Scissors* tour, premiering such hits as "The Saga Begins," which combined the plot of the recently released first Star Wars prequel with Don McLean's latest hit "American Pie," using the two tools of his trade with much skill and to great personal reward. On stage, Yankovich was a ball of energy and spunk, performing "quick-changes" between his hits and performing rare and unreleased parodies to the delight of his audience. Psychologically, however, Weird Al was another story.

Long an icon of nerds and nerd culture alike, Yankovich was faced daily with the pressure of his core audience's high expectations. Not only did they expect the same high energy and clever puns that had come to be Al's trademark since the early days of "Another One Rides the Bus," and "I Love Rocky Road," but they expected his "nerd capital" to constantly self-replenish. While on the road, it was assumed, Weird Al was spending equal time rehearsing, performing, and updating himself on popular culture. All of this – music, quick-changes, autograph-sessions – right on the cusp of the dot-com bubble's bursting. In an as-yet-unreleased autobiography entitled *Untitled Weird Al*

Autobiography, Al reportedly confesses that his research time, his “Absorption Period,” is actually the time between touring and new album releases, as the tour bus is not a place for research, but rather a place for inspiration.

Needless to say, the unexpected rise in popularity of file sharing and the various associated programs thereof sent audiences looking to Al for guidance as to how they could best be ironically self-derisive regarding their use of such services, avoiding the stares and jests that inevitably came with expressing one’s knowledge of the current tech-world while in mixed company. In private, Al was counting down the days to the end of the *Running with Scissors* tour, hoping desperately to avoid another autograph session replete with questions about his “web site,” and how he preferred to “connect” to the “information highway.” It was becoming too much for the comedian-cum-pop-star, and, though he wouldn’t admit it at the time, he was about to reach a breaking point.

Through the years, Al’s personal loyalty to fans had been a trademark. This loyalty was easily at its peak when a fan introduced him to the concept of vegetarianism. Al, ever-hoping to be on the cutting edge of natural human and social evolution, quickly followed the book to the T, which supposedly led to his famously unsuccessful pitch to do an album filled with Rogers and Hammerstein parodies formatted to exclusively concern legumes. Constantly paranoid that another fan would try and capitalize on Al’s famous open-mindedness by handing him yet another life-changing book, autograph sessions decreased in length, almost exponentially, to the point where Al reportedly asked an audience in Delhi, New York in late 2000 to “please sign your own autographs tonight,” adding, “if anyone asks about it, I’ll back you up – I’ll say the signature’s mine. Good night, Delhi.” The cheer that followed was the first of his entire career in which Al reportedly felt absolutely no comfort.



”Weird Al” concert, Delhi, NY (2000).

Al’s behavior became increasingly erratic during this period, when he would take his free-time between shows studying other music acts – including parodists – avoiding the other members of the band during their group lunches. For the first time, Al was talking about “branching out” and keeping “up-to-date,” and “maybe joining up with the Prodigy,” and the band became worried that Al was feeling stale, despite performing and writing as fresh as ever. “Also,” reports Al biographer Portle Griegson, “they weren’t sure if he meant the band *The Prodigy* or the internet service *Prodigy*. It might have been that very confusion that scared them the most for Al’s future.”

Shortly after, the *Scissors* tour ended, with the band parting ways, as usual. Said one unidentified roadie, recently, however, “something was different about [Al] at the end, this time. He just had this dead look in

his eyes. I mean, he had been spending a lot of time in his private recording booth on the bus, so I thought it was that, at first – just the long hours of a perfectionist. But he was carrying around an empty notebook.” The notebook was notorious, given to Al by a fan after a concert mid-way through the tour. Continues the roadie, “It said ‘I love You Al,’ on the cover, but the kid had drawn all kinds of drug-and-sex-related imagery on it. It wasn’t Al’s style, at all, but he couldn’t refuse the kid – he was a fan. I think the kid was schizophrenic, but Al didn’t care. He didn’t judge.” This would be the last time any of Yankevich’s friends and collaborators would see the normally social comedian for several months.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to know exactly what happened to “Weird Al” during these periods of bleakness, during which contact with the outside world was limited only to phone calls with close band members, and even then was reportedly peppered with so much obscenity as to make Al’s voice virtually unrecognizable to even his closest of friends. Mutterings of “new projects” and refusals for help in producing, or even recording, the tracks for these same projects were quickly becoming the standard, leading to massive confusion amongst the band members, who reportedly even contacted celebrity psychologist Dr. Drew Pinsky, who promptly recommended an intervention, suggesting that Weird Al was likely “hopped up on smack,” given the anecdotal evidence he had first heard only seconds before.

Less than a week later, Yankovik’s first band-member, drummer Steve “Bermuda” Schwartz, showed up on the comedian’s doorstep, requesting a one-on-one meeting with the reclusive artist. After three hours of pleading through the tiny speakeasy-like door panel on Al’s front door, Schwartz realized that his efforts had been in vain, and planned to head back to the rest of the group, from each of whom he would solicit a third of the deposit for Dr. Pinsky’s services. At that moment, reports a friend of the band, Schwartz got a call. “[lead guitarist] Jim West calls him up and says he has something really important to show him. Bermuda doesn’t care, but he has to head over there anyway, so he hops in the vintage Edsel Al bought him after their

first tour and drives down to Venice Beach.” It was there, in the Venice, California home of lead guitarist West that Schwartz discovered what, at this point, the rest of the band and Dr. Pinsky had all learned only an hour before.

There, Schwartz sat down in front of West’s personal computer, asked by West to click on his Napster downloads directory. He scrolled down through the list of directories, passing acts like Def Leppard, Ratt and Twisted Sister, knowing exactly what to look for, clicking on the “Weird Al” directory. There, alongside classics such as “Stop Draggin’ My Car Around,” “I’ll Be Mellow When I’m Dead” and “Fat,” he discovered a list, twenty seven strong, of mp3 files reportedly by one “Weird Al” Yankovic(sic). The songs varied in content and style, ranging from titles like “Star Wars Cantina” (a parody of Barry Manilow’s “Copa Cabana”) and “Windows 95 Sucks” to more mature themes, such as “As*hole Sun,” “Guava Tequila” (a Mexican-themed version of Hava Nagila), “What if God S***ed Cannabis,” “Schneider’s Vest” (a parody of No Doubt’s “Spiderwebs” from the perspective of a character in the sitcom *One Day At A Time*), “Frozen Lime” (another tequila-related parody, this time of “Closing Time” by Semisonic) and “Arby’s Girl” (a parody of Aqua’s “Barbie Girl”).

Schwartz, naturally shocked, selected all the visible tracks and prepared to right-click, when West stopped him, directing him instead to scroll just a little further down, where Schwartz found the most surprising revelation of the afternoon. A track entitled “I F**ged Your m**s s****l s*****y c**d,” caused Schwartz to leave the room for a moment while West sat quietly, waiting to see if Schwartz was up to sample the out-of-character tracks of their friend of almost twenty years.

Instead, West, in an attempt to de-select the tracks, accidentally hit the “Enter” key, thereby loading all tracks but the last, most egregious example of Yamkevik’s change in standards, into his Windows Media Player software. As the tune to Manilow’s “Cabana” began to echo through the stuccoed halls of West’s Venice Beach home, Schwartz was brought to tears. “While they were working on *Running with Scissors*, the band had turned down Al’s request to parody ‘Copa,’ not wanting to

upset the Manilow Corporation,” recalls long-time friend of the band and radio DJ “Hoppin’ Mad” Marty Bunnifski, “and now all Bermuda could think, of course, was: ‘What if?’”

Schwartz and West immediately put in a call to Al’s home number, despite protests from an ever-present Dr. Drew Pinsky that they simply drive up to his house as a group and confront him with a skyward-raised MP3 player in the style of John Cusack from the popular 1989 film *Say Anything*. The phone rang Yonkoveck’s rider-dictated 4 rings, after which a “nearly unrecognizable” Weird Al answered, sounding “distant” and “lost.” Schwartz then requested a casual meeting between the three band members wherein they could discuss Al’s “side project,” so Schwartz termed it. Al was reticent, but acquiesced when it was guaranteed that Dr. Pinsky would not be present.

Later that evening, over a meal of vegan chik’n and be’ef, the band went down the list of songs, wondering just exactly what Al’s plan was with this highly unusual detour from his typically family-friendly fare. Al first denied the tracks had anything to do with him, citing that each song “sounded nothing like [him],” in fact, sounding “as though from extremely disparate sources with varying levels of dedication, skill and talent, and no comedic talent or timing whatsoever.”

The band, though, knew the sad truth – Weird Al, his dedication to perfection ever-present, even in his darkest of moments (a trait which caused Rolling Stone to crown him “The Howard Hughes of the Parody Music Scene,” in a rare issue from 1983), had produced a good fifty-plus tracks in the styles of fifty different “artists,” hoping to draw every varietal of parody music fan to the music of the “real Al.” His hope, knew the band, was to pull in the audience he wasn’t reaching by sinking to the depths of the internet’s least-loved comedians in order to gradually introduce these would-be fans to his invariably superior style without having to receive traceable income for them.

When confronted with the majority of the paragraph above, Al attempted to confess, clandestinely closing the lid of his laptop as he did so. Schwartz, not one to give up on a friend, then asked Al what he was hiding by closing his laptop. When Al’s response of “nothin’,” drew his

suspicion, as opposed to his customary comic response of a laugh-inducing “I just wanted a better look at your deep, blue eyes,” Schwartz threw a look to West, who attempted to wrest the laptop from beneath Al’s tightly-clamped arms. Schwartz then looked at Al and shook his head, letting Al know, “We’re here for you. Not against you.”

Though the scene was briefly interrupted by the distant clapping and whooping of a bespectacled, blond-haired collegiate type hiding in the bushes outside Al’s kitchen window, whom West quickly ran off with a pair of novelty oversized scissors Al had kept from the band’s latest album cover photo-shoot, Al quickly gave in, collapsing in a heap on his countertop. The band consoled him with hugs and an A capella rendition of “I Lost on Jeopardy,” much to the benefit of Al’s demeanor. When Al recovered, Schwartz opened the laptop, finding exactly what he hoped he wouldn’t see. “I won’t even repeat the titles of the thirty-or-so songs Bermuda found on his computer,” continues Bunnifski, “at least nowhere I’d have to see them in print or hear them played back to me.”

Though Yangkovick’s plan was for gradual release of every track through the use of Napster and up-and-comer Limewire, West and Schwartz quickly asked his permission to take the laptop with them, to relieve the temptation they could see was eating their dear friend alive. Schwartz then sent West on his way with the computer, offering Al his services as a live-in housekeeper until Al was back on his creative feet again. Embarrassed, Al spent the next several hours in a backyard sensory-deprivation chamber while Schwartz banged, in vain, on the square room’s steel exterior walls, under the misapprehension that Al, in his desperation to relive his prolific youth, had convinced himself he’d purchased, or built from scratch, a working time machine. When Al exited the chamber at around 1 AM, Schwartz, hoping to ease him back into reality, kindly welcomed him “back to the future,” to which Al responded with his trademark cackle and a hearty slap on Schwartz’s back. The long-time friends then settled in for a long night of *Perfect Strangers* reruns, hot cocoa, and Twinkies.

Post-Modem: The Interwebs Explained

Though far from easy, Al's recovery from his ordeal served his career well. The daily visits from his regular band inspired him to write again – creatively – and within weeks, Al had all but forgotten what he would later privately confirm as his career's darkest period. The songs – parodies and originals – were flowing like water, in accordance with the release of other non-parody pop songs. Al and the band were back on their feet.

The harm to his name had been done, however, and Al knew he had to face it and do some damage control. It was nothing he couldn't handle, but he had to do it deftly, and quick. The Weird Al official website, <http://www.weirdal.com/>, quickly published a rebuttal to the influx of requests about this mass of new songs that were being attributed to their king of satire. Their explanation?

“Unfortunately, there are a lot of song parodies floating around the Internet being attributed to Al which are in fact done by somebody else. "Star Wars Cantina," "Windows 95 Sucks," "Living La Vida Yoda," "Combo No. 5," "What If God Smoked Cannabis," "He Got The Wrong Foot Amputated" (the list goes on and on... some of the titles are unprintable in a family-friendly web site) - these songs are NOT by Al. If you want to verify whether or not a song is actually by Al, check the Catalog page.”

It worked, perhaps due to his loyal fanbase, or Al's own conviction to the story he had cooked up with the band. Whatever the reason, the innocence of those whose ears were deflowered in regards to comedic music with the likes of “Nature Trail to Hell” and “Mr. Frump in the Iron Lung” had been preserved, and with it, Al's career. And with Al's career, his own creative spirit. Dr. Drew Pinsky remained unaffected.

Weird Al Yankovix was one of the lucky ones. From 1999 to 2002, over seventeen established artists went through the exact same experience that Al went through during and after *Running With Scissors*. Of those unlucky artists, only two – Weird Al and Tone Loc – survived

essentially unscathed. Both artists attempted to keep up with the Electronic Joneses, equally realizing – eventually, though considerably separately – that web piracy should be embraced, rather than condemned. Weird Al eventually did so with his comic hit “Don’t Download This Song,” off of his *Straight Outta Lynwood* album, which proved an ironic hit. Ironic because, of course, Al only released it after realizing its potential irony to his audience, who immediately assumed it was ironic, which of course it wasn’t, furthering the irony even further. Tone Loc’s similarly-themed “Two’s Company, MP3’s Allowed,” unfortunately never found its audience.

Internotables: Bermuda Schwartz on Music

John “Bermuda” Schwartz has been the drummer for “Weird Al” Yankovitch’s band since 1980. He is an equally-skilled imitator and original music talent, and he also designed Al’s original website. He addressed the following questions before reconsidering his decision to participate in this book.

Jason Klamm: Tell us about the first time you ever logged onto the interwebs.

Bermuda Schwartz: I first got online in 1993, kind of at the behest of Al. He knew that there was a lot of potential for reaching out to his fans... well, really, it was all about selling more records... but he didn't want to do it himself. He figured the fans would feel more comfortable if it was a band member who reached out to them in a casual way. I was the only one who owned a computer, so I got tapped. He paid my \$9.95/mo for a Prodigy account, and I was in business. The fans bought it hook, line & modem! We then cooked up a web site with my personal photos and stuff, and eased into the whole weirdal.com thing. We still tell fans that I'm in charge, but Al's label took over the site years ago and deliberately keeps it looking hokey so the fans will believe it's still us running it. A great master plan.

You won't blow our cover, will you?

JK: Do you remember the first time you used e-mail? Can you tell us a little about it?

BS: I do, and what a disaster that was! I remember thinking it was a great way to stay in touch with friends and family without racking up my

phone bill or sending those snails in the mail. Don't get me started on the letter I got from PETA! But in accordance with Al's plan to reach out to fans, he had me start chatting on the bulletin boards and answering fan emails, all very innocent of course, in the beginning anyway. Eventually it took over my life, and Al thought I was getting too power-hungry, a loose cannon, and he stopped paying for my internet access. But it was too late for me, I had the taste. Sort of like when you first smoke crack. And believe me, crack isn't \$9.95 a month!

JK: What was it like being one of the world's first Viral Cassette Tape sensations with "Another One Rides the Bus?"

BS: Ah, cassettes... before MP3s, before CDs, before vinyl! Let me tell you, copying and mailing tapes to thousands of people around the world wasn't fun. Or cheap! In the first place, I had just met Al. Within a few days of playing Bus on the [Dr.] *Demento* show, he showed up at my door with a tape reel of the song, and asked how quickly and how many cassette copies I could make. We spent the next month, 24/7, cranking out tapes and mailing them, some were cleverly targeted to record executives, others were randomly addressed. I think one went to Santa Claus, care of the North Pole. We never left my apartment, and ordered pizzas for lunch and dinner, and then had leftover pizza for breakfast. Mostly pepperoni and sausage, I think. I recall that a short time later, Al decided to stop eating meat and cheese. I doubt we'll ever learn why he chose that path.

JK: How has your career suffered due to cassette tape piracy?

BS: Suffered? Au contraire, piracy has SAVED my career! Ha ha, did I say au contraire? That's too funny. Umm, oh yeah, piracy SAVED my career! How? Once I saw how successful the distribution of cassettes could be with the whole Bus promotion, I realized that there was probably a buck to be made somehow. I secretly began making my own tape copies of our albums, and selling them directly to the fans, sometimes before the album even came out! That whole internet thing

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with reaching out to the fans really paid off! If you ever wondered why some of Al's albums only went gold instead of platinum, it's because I was selling the other 500,000 copies! My career's actually been great.. you won't tell Al, will you? I know he'd want a cut.



bermudaschwartz.com