



Jerry's Kids

by M. D. Carnegie

"I'm not Beethoven," Jerry Garcia once said, and he wasn't kidding. The aptly nicknamed Captain Trips was just shaking off a five-day coma, and it has come down as part of his immense legend that the remark meant something like: Losing me wouldn't have been like losing Beethoven, but boy, am I glad I'm still alive.

Well, he was grateful then, but now he's dead. The 53-year-old multi-millionaire kicked the bucket in the middle of August, in the middle of trying to kick just about everything else. He'd checked into Serenity Knolls, a \$5,000-a-month "rehabilitation facility," hoping to atone for the bodily harm he'd been committing since the wow-man-heavy sixties, when the first order of each extremely beautiful day was to transform the human consciousness into a psychegroovadelic mind-mush that would make that day still more extremely beautiful.

Even in the highly competitive category of Massively Self-Destructive International Rock Gods, Garcia was one of the darkest stars of all. Psilocybin, peyote, weed, uppers, airplane glue, coke, 'shrooms, acid, booze, mescaline, smack, the fumes off a '72 Barracuda with dual exhaust—if God truly sees every thing that we do, even He must have been mightily impressed. Factor in a diet of mostly Cheez Blurts and Yumbos and Choco-Malt Whibblers—Garcia was also diabetic—and the fact that he kept on truckin' into his fifties seems nothing short of a miracle.

At Serenity Knolls, his system surely never knew what hit it. The

ocean breeze, the spring water, the fresh-cut fruit, the *quiet*—it must have shorted out whatever was left of his inner circuitry. He had a heart attack in the middle of the night.

For many people, most of them born before or during the Second World War, the news stories about the national mourning marked the first time they'd ever heard of "this Garcia fellow." The suburban parents who packed their freshly-scrubbed daughters off for college each fall with new sweaters of every hue visible to the human retina and a tin of Mummy's special oatmeal-raisin-coconut swirlies and a nuclear stockpile of crisp twenties and fifties that Father thought ought to last until Christmas break but in fact had a half-life of just two road-trips and finally ran out the weekend of the Oktoberfest kegger at Phi Gamma Blotto—those folks had no idea about Jerry Garcia. None whatsoever.

But the kids sure knew. They might be a little sketchy on the capital of Wyoming, or who Dean Rusk was, or whether or not a huarache chucked out the window accelerates at the same rate of speed as a two-by-four. They might not have even had a definite sense what time English 2b met on Thursday mornings.

But by God they knew about Jerry, the mythic and mystic Jerry, a hyper-legend even among the hyper-legends. Lots of rock bands have maniacal admirers, but the Grateful Dead were a bona fide world religion—with Garcia as its usually very high priest.

Their acolytes became known as Deadheads. Like all strict adherents to a demanding faith, the Deadheads accumulated their own set of rituals, their own specialized and arcane body of knowledge. They knew all the words to "Sugar Magnolia" and "U.S. Blues" and "Sugaree" and "Fire on the Mountain" and "St. Stephen" and at least four- or five-dozen more. They could tell you the names of the keyboardists in the band that died of overdoses. The one that died from the bottle. The last time "Dark Star" was played in concert. And which of the thousands, or tens of thousands, of bootleg tapes have a good space jam, what they referred to more readily as "space"—that quintessential bit of Deadness in every concert, when the group would abandon all pretense of musical structure and just sort of noodle around for a very long period of time, not going anywhere but that was the point, noodle noodle noodle noodle, no point besides the communication and the good vibes and the love, noodle noodle, and everybody feeling absolutely, totally, majorly righteous.



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Talking about space is a kind of Deadhead trademark. The tone is detached yet reverent, and the vowels flattened out and held a bit longer than natural: "Duude, I caught the Boououlder shoow and they did this eeexcellent spaace, maaan. Jeerry was cruuuisin'."

Garcia detested the corporate marketing and the empty suits of the music biz, and they liked that, too—how you could just go to the concerts and tape the music for free, because the music, Jerry said, belonged to everybody. Even though the Dead were grossing more than \$70 million per annum by the end of it all, peddling software and bumper stickers and ski equipment and just about anything you could imagine corporate marketers corporately marketing, the widespread belief persisted that the Dead were against all that nasty profiteering. They had a foundation that gave away money, for Chrissakes, and anyway everyone agreed it was really all about bringing different people together—even if the everyones agreeing were as distinct as the members of the Cos Cob Junior League.

Sometimes the seeking of that togetherness became so important that they would just drop out of society altogether and follow the band around from place to place. Going "on tour," it was called. They would hitchhike, or pack themselves into vans and campers, and trail the Dead from city to city sometimes for years, supporting themselves if they could by peddling handmade bracelets, T-shirts, earrings, and whatever else they could muster up—all to be near the blissful transcendence they felt from the music and the love and the good vibes and the togetherness and the noodle noodle.

And the drugs. Dope is a part of many parts of American life, for sure—but with the Dead, drugs were almost a requirement to appreciate the experience, even if people liked to deny that this was so. Garcia claimed that he had no control over the Deadheads, and that was true in the narrowest sense. But ever since the band gained its first national notoriety—as the musical entertainment for the LSD extravaganzas held by Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters, so memorably recounted in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric*

Kool-Aid Acid Test—doing the mind-mush was part of their lore and lure, a sacrament that few thought should be scanted.

It wasn't just with the reefer that the kids kept stashed away in their oatmeal-raisin-coconut swirlie tins, either. Many a Deadhead was strung out on LSD at the shows just like their idols, some for the hundredth or more time, feeling the intensely interconnected tendrils of the universe looping around their fried-out craniums, and hoping that they'd timed the dose just right, so that when the Dead would start the space, noodle noodle noodle noodle, the acid would kick in full-bore and a 27-foot-high Yahweh would appear out of the speaker tower in a sparkling velvet robe and pull their heads right through the sub-woofers.

In recent years, though, the drugs started to turn the love-fests sour. The feds finally realized that the parking lot of a Dead concert was an ideal place to boost arrest statistics, and some unfortunate guys just trying to commune with the beyond found themselves contemplating serious time, if not infinity, from inside the pokey. In 1990 a girl, tripping her brains out behind the wheel after a show, ran head-on into a pregnant woman and killed her. And from time to time some reveler would get it in his mind that if he jumped off the cliff he was standing on, he could just kind of soar out over the beautiful blue water below, and all would be bliss. As Garcia himself said after the infamous Altamont concert at which the Hell's Angels ran amok: "Bummer."

When the Dead's keyboardists shuffled off their tie-dyed coils, the band always found a replacement and carried on. Initial statements to the press have claimed that the Dead will continue without their beloved Jerry, too, but Garcia is surely not so replaceable—especially in the hearts and souls of the band's faithful following. "Definitely bigger than Elvis," gushed a not atypical online elegy, "but maybe not bigger than Jesus."

Maybe not bigger than Jesus. Well, maybe not. But even coming close, in the scheme of things, means that you're pretty high up there—and that's where old Captain Trips pretty much liked to be. □

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It's in the Cards

by Benjamin J. Stein

Tuesday

I have a new plan. I am sitting outside a store in Hollywood called Meltdown, between two different Thai restaurants. Meltdown sells collectible and super violent comics. All right. That's not my problem. However, it also sells (choke, gasp) decks of cards, "booster" decks, individual super valuable cards, and other things connected with a vile, horrible game called "Magic."

Tommy is interested in "Magic." No, not interested. Obsessed. Crazy. Insane. He has a huge box filled with them. He has many photo albums filled with Magic cards. He carries them everywhere. He stares at them. He holds them up and puts them in front of me and asks, "Daddy, do you think this is a good card?"

The card is something like "The She-Vampire of the Bog of Metamucil." It has various symbols on it. And I am supposed to know what those little symbols mean. Something about "mana." Something about "tapping." Something about how many blows you can absorb and how many you can dish out. Then there are some cards that can throw your opponent's card back into his hand.

"Daddy, do you think this is a good card?"

"Yes, I think it's a good card."

"No, it's not a good card. It has no mana and it can only take three and give out two. You can just tear it up and throw it away."

"All right."

"Do you think this is a good card?" He shows me something like "Ghouls of Balboa Island."

"No, I don't think that's a good card. It looks, well, icky."

"It happens to be a very good card. Look at that." He shows me some tiny symbols and they mean less than nothing to me. "This card has five mana and can take five and give out five."

"All right. How come you can memorize the rules of this incredibly complicated game and can't consistently do simple addition and can't remember to close the refrigerator? How come you know this incredibly complicated game that even your mother and father don't know and can't tell us when your dog makes a mess in the kitchen?"

At that, he looks at me and holds up another card. "Daddy, do you think this is a good card?"

Anyway, here's my idea that's coming to me while I am waiting in my car for Tommy to do his insanely long choosing process with the patient proprietor of the store, Gaston. Wlady and I will invent a card game called Clinton. It will have cards for Bill and Hillary and Vince and Webb and Bernie and Janet and Gennifer and several assorted movie stars. Then, each player will have certain abilities and powers. Like the Hillary card can commit income-tax fraud and securities fraud, and she can have the media say she's the victim, not the criminal. She can also obstruct justice a half-dozen times and still have *Time* magazine say that no one has found anything wrong in Whitewater.

The Janet card will be able to commit stunning mistakes in trying to "save" children from a maniac cultist and let the kids die of fire—and she gets the press to say she, Janet, is the victim. The Al Gore character is my favorite. He gets to write a book while he's a civil servant, make a million dollars from it, and have

no qualms at all about helping to accuse the Newt character of ethical gaffes for writing a book and not taking an advance.

The best characters are the media cards. They can fold backwards and forwards so they can do every kind of perverse act that the Clinton card and the Hillary card might want them to do.

"Clinton—A Game of Magic and Illusion." How do you like it?

Saturday

The moment of truth. I have decided that I need a boat of my own. To zoom around Lake Pend'Oreille and up the Pend'Oreille River. Not just the *Sea Puppy*. But a big, fancy boat of my own. But for me, a big boat is a 20-foot Thompson. I found one I like at one of the two boat shops in Sandpoint, The Alpine Shop. It's a 1993 that was never sold. I have been bargaining over it for a few months now. I decided not to try to get the best possible deal. I want Bob, the owner of the Alpine Shop, to be really happy with me. I want him to be happy enough so that he will go anywhere on the lake, at any time, to rescue me.

"Bob," I said, as I looked lingeringly at the boat and its gorgeous turquoise trim, like a 1957 Plymouth Fury or maybe a 1955 Chevy Bel-Air, "am I an idiot to buy this boat? Wouldn't I be smarter to buy stock for my retirement?"

"Ben," he said, "you have to have some enjoyment before you retire."

Trust me, an idiot, to ask a boat store owner if I should buy a boat or buy stock. Still, he gave a good answer. This is the problem. A man has to plan for his retirement and save for it, and he also has to live in the moment. He wants to

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