

## **Epilogue I**

### **Requiem for a Twine**

By

Jesse Baruffi

Twine-Aid, as funded by the UN's Save the Twine Foundation and put into action by Handleman CopperCo LLC and the Sisters of Norwegian Literature, Lillehammer Chapter, was a success unforeseen by even the most hot-shot of Young Turk actuaries (who lived by their own rules and died tragically young, leaving beautiful actuarial corpses in their wake). The massive benefit concert took place on a rather large piece of Wisconsin farmland that had been purchased by a music promoter solely for the purpose of eventually serving as an outdoor festival venue. Unfortunately, after years of failed negotiations, not to mention sorcery, hallucinogens, and finally tear-soaked begging, the owner was on the verge of bankruptcy (or, even worse, actually having to farm the land!). As if by divine providence, however, a slick-suited man sporting a tall hat and copper cufflinks, flanked by a cadre of elderly, blue-eyed women with impossibly impeccable manners, arrived with several suitcases full of money, not to mention a copy of *The Complete Norwegian Reader*, autographed by Norway's Poet Laureate. The land's now previous owner skipped town before the ink on his extremely polite contract was dry, and so began a work that would come to define the lives of thousands.

Hundreds of bands were invited, and most, sympathetic to the plight of the fallen twine balls and the carnage resulting from its destruction at the hands of mad scientist Otto Von Trapezoid, came freely to offer support. It was hard to argue with their logic: since Otto's attack, twine ball creation was down nearly eighty percent, and it was thought the art might become extinct in the next decade. World hunger, fresh water scarcity, and even declining honey bee

populations were immediately forgotten and left to the not-so-tender mercies of time and entropy in the face of this far more pressing tragedy. Among the performers were such modern bands as Smooth Vice, the Zipzies, Polar Bear Death Threat, and Chimpcocalypse, all eager to offset the fact that no one made money from albums anymore with as many live performances as possible. Classic bands like Ten Stone Pound, Howdy Doo and the Jackaroos, and the Eddy Ruff Band, all well past the age it was appropriate to parade around shirtless in skintight leather pants, applied their unholy combinations of baby oil and baby powder to squeeze into their costumes, performing once more for fans who would never let them retire. There was only one cancellation: heavy metal band Bonesaw ReDethroned, known for throwing water balloons filled with infected baboon blood at their fans during shows, had broken up. The reasons were not fully clear, though the singer wrote a press release in which he referred to the lead guitarist as “sodding pillock’s cobbles.” The guitarist released a counter-statement, in which he hurled a whiskey bottle and conjectured the lead singer was a “minging uphill gardener.” Despite this setback, however, ticket sales shattered records like a music-hating lunatic with a pair of electric-powered hammers.

On the final night of the festival, Licky Handleman looked out over his creation from a large, air-conditioned booth. Millions of people, from all walks of life, joined together by nothing but their love of twine, waved their hands as one. Many looked at humanity and saw a mass of selfish, amoral animals, fumbling violently through history toward their own inevitable extinction. Not Licky (which was incidentally his catch phrase. Licky enjoyed asking rhetorical questions which he would then answer with “not Licky,” to emphasize how different and special he was). Properly motivated, people could come together for a cause, even accomplish the

impossible. No, Licky thought. People were basically good. He smiled, sighed, and took a sip from his glass of 50-year scotch.

“Welp, time to skedaddle.”

Licky stood, grabbed a pair of oversized duffle bags, and quietly made his way to the helicopter he had camouflaged with a large patch of brush. He had embezzled the twine relief funds, every penny, and now made his escape while everyone was distracted. It was surprisingly easy to do. Given everyone’s enthusiasm for the project and admiration for his own heroism, no one questioned it when he asked to personally handle the ticket sales and fund distributions. Wouldn’t most people be too scared to pull off a plan so heartless and brazen? Not Licky, he thought to himself. Oh, he’d have to hide out for a while, he knew. But with the combination of the money he’d raised, along with the leftover UN funds (which he promised the delegates he’d spend on a “bitchin’ muscle car”) and his own insurance money from the twine ball’s destruction, he could vanish comfortably for a few years, then bribe his way back, just like he had done the first time. Despite his public persona, Licky never gave a hoot about twine, or copper for that matter. He was a salesman at heart, and simply became who he needed to be in order to sell his products. And what a job he had done! At first, he was afraid the laser attack had ruined him, but he’d already made back his lost fortune at least fivefold with the concert, and after he invested that, it would probably double or triple again while he was in hiding. Yes, Licky thought as he cleared away the last of the brush on his copter, life was looking pretty good.

How Anja Gunnarson and the Sisters of Norwegian Literature managed to sneak up on him, he’d never know.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Anja asked, so politely Licky wasn’t sure it was even an accusation.

“Who, Licky?” he asked, removing his hat in the presence of ladies. “Well, the show’s just about done, so I figured I’d mosey on up in this here whirly-bird for a surprise grand finale. I do like a good showstopper.”

“Indeed.” Anja furrowed her brow. “And what do you have in those bags?”

“Um...fireworks!” Licky said at last. “Stars and stripes fireworks, yessiree ma’am!”

“That you plan to detonate from the air. In a black helicopter.”

Licky chuckled, knowing he was caught. “Aw, look, you gals did me a solid with all your help, and I ain’t ungrateful. What say I cut you in for ten percent? That’d be enough to buy every library in Norway!”

Anja’s eyes became steelier than Licky had ever seen them. “You misunderstand us. Money was never the point. Twine is all that matters.”

Licky inched toward the helicopter door. “Come on, ladies. Most folks wouldn’t cut you in for squat! Not Licky. I mean, c’mon! How much money does anyone really need for twine? Stuff’s cheap as dirt. And I ran a few dirt-selling outfits in my youth, so I should know!”

The sisters surrounded Licky. “It’s the belief that matters. The power it grants,” they said in unison as they closed around him. “We cannot let you leave.”

Licky dropped the bags, slid his hands into the air. “Now now, let’s not go doing nothing crazy here. After all, y’all don’t want to get...shot!” Quick as a greased fiber-optic cable, the salesman drew a pair of revolvers from his coat and pointed them at the surrounding women. “Ha! Thought you had the drop on me? Well, not Licky! Never assume a Texan ain’t armed!” Shifting in a circle and clearing a path, he grabbed his bags, hopped into his helicopter, and slammed the door shut behind him. The propellers shuddered to life, blowing the hair and

dresses of the quietly dispassionate ladies. Licky hooted and hollered a rebel yell, taunting the women as his vehicle rose to the heavens.

Over the noise of the helicopter, Brunhild Fosse turned to Anja. “Now?” she asked.

“Now,” Anja nodded.

In a surprise turn of events, the singer and lead guitarist of Bonesaw ReDethroned had reconciled, leading to a wild drug and alcohol-fueled bender which would have left a roomful of Roman Emperors blushing at its depravity. In a moment of heavily intoxicated generosity, the band decided they would play Twine-Aid after all, so they packed into their private jet, shaped as it was like a giant skeleton with flaming wings and a guitar in hand, and set off for Wisconsin. Despite the bassist’s remarkable ability to pilot while under the influence of magic mushrooms, opium, motor oil, South American toad mucus, and expired creamer, a mid-flight-fight broke out between the bandmates, over who had the most evil reputation. It became so intense that soon, no one was actually flying the jet, as they were too busy cracking beer bottles and food trays and boiling pots of spaghetti over each other’s heads. The drummer managed to suplex the bassist back into the cockpit just in time to see their aircraft making a beeline straight into a black, unmarked helicopter.

From below, Anja Gunnarson and the Sisters of Norwegian Literature saw the two crafts collide in a massive fireball, leaving relatively little debris, as well as the faint cry of “Not Lickyyyyyyyy!” on the wind. Two pieces in particular fell gently to the ground, however, and the sisters moved to intercept. Gathering up the miraculously unharmed duffel bags, the sisters looked to Anja. “Leave them in the field,” she said. “Others have noticed the explosion. They will come.”

Elys Sigurd turned to her leader. “Then our mission is complete? We are free to go?”

Anja nodded. "It's a pity Handleman betrayed us. I might have offered him a place at my side."

Ingrid Ludvigsen clucked her tongue. "He was just a means to an end. In that, we are no different from him."

"We play a far longer game, sisters," Anja frowned. "The spindles are in motion. They have come to love twine again, to revere and worship it. We shall return in a few scant decades and reap what we have sown. Now let us shed these cocoons and return to our realm."

Anja Gunnarson and the Sisters of Norwegian Literature were gone, replaced by blazingly luminescent beings, clothed in ornate garments of twine with high collars and long tresses. With the slightest wave of their hands, the Twine Goddess and her attendants vanished into the vastness of space, hurtling across the galaxy, to return only once the Twine Wars began anew.