

Transformations

Part I

Chapter 1

Marcus Modal started June 2nd, 2003 in a new spirit, for he had decided over the weekend to start meditating daily on the coming Monday. (...Which was June 2nd.) Marc had been experimenting with different styles of meditation for a couple of months. Once he had tried Metta Bhavana meditation for a couple of weeks, he decided it was effective enough to do it every day before work.

After waking up to his beeping alarm at 6:30 AM, he set it for 6:35, and returned to laying on his back. Staring up at the ceiling, he realized it was the important first day of a new era; so he got up, shut off his alarm, and jumped in the shower.

Ten minutes in the shower, ten minutes shaving, and ten minutes getting dressed put him squarely at 7:00 am.

Do I eat first, or meditate first?

<Fleeting thought: *Fasting*>

Meditate first. I'm not too hungry anyway...

With that, Marc sat down to meditate. He crossed his legs, and rested his palms on top of one another, left over right. He straightened his back, and let his neck relax a little bit, ending with him staring at the ground a few feet in front of him. He closed his eyes.

May I be filled with loving-kindness.

May I be well.

May I be peaceful, and at ease.

May I be happy.

Marc took a long, refreshing breath between repetitions, flexing this and that muscle to make sure he was in the perfect position. He repeated this verse, in tune with his breath, a dozen more times before he was confident that it felt sincere. At that point, he moved on to his closest friends and family.

May Mom be filled with loving-kindness.....

May Dad be filled with loving-kindness.....

May Samantha be filled with loving-kindness.....

After reciting the verse for his loved ones, all his (neutral) co-workers, and then those acquaintances he didn't care for very much, he stopped talking in his head, and just kept his breath slow.

<Fleeting thought: *Om Mani Padme Hum*>

Om Mani Padme Hum

Om Mani Padme Hum

Om Mani Padme Hum

...Marc chanted the mantra of Chenresig unsure of its reliability, but yearning to believe in the existence of him; the great Bodhisattva of Compassion, "hearer of the world sound", Avalokiteshvara. After 49 times, considered by some to be a perfect number (7 x 7, seven being a perfect number), he felt something open deep in an area of his mind that he wasn't sure was even part of his mind.

<Fleeting thought: *The darkness has no shape.*>

Marc continued chanting. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, a soft, white glow began to pour onto the horizon of his mind's eye. At first, it was dismissable as an over-active imagination, maybe even a hallucination, but within a minute, he was confident in its reality. He was a cautious man, so he hadn't put the psychiatrist out of his mind completely, but for the moment he decided to believe it.

He stopped chanting and focused on the source of the light. It wasn't the same as seeing with his eyes. Time seemed to not exist. While what he saw changed from moment to moment, each moment seemed somehow eternal, as if the previous moment had never existed. A blue and white being...

A buddha!

...grew from the size of a grain of sand to, well, a reasonably visible size in Marcus's mind. The buddha was light blue in color, with a soft white glow emanating from every corner of his body. He was meditating in a full lotus position (the one most casual Zen-lovers can't do), with his eyes closed. After his (apparent) size stopped changing, Marc felt an astonishingly loud silence for a few moments, and then the unnamed Buddha smiled and slowly opened his eyes. Marcus was in utter shock at what he was seeing. He had only been meditating a few weeks, why on Earth would any divine being choose to manifest to him?

In what amounted to 2.36 seconds, Marcus's view of the situation flip-flopped about forty times; *I'm hallucinating. | No, it's real. | I'm hallucinating.* At 2.37 seconds, he believed it was real, and allowed himself to relax. He marvelled at the reality of it, like in the dreams he had where he knew he was dreaming, yet somehow didn't wake up. He could *focus* on the being, examine its feet, its face; it had *texture*. At the perfect moment, when Marc was perfectly focused, the being opened its mouth to speak.

"Hello, Marcus, my name is Rata. Your questions are many, but in time, they will all be answered. For now, I must speak with you of a matter of most importance.

"I'm sure you've heard of the Nashville Monster. He's been killing teenage women in Nashville, Tennessee for a few days now. So far, three grossly disfigured bodies have been found. What nobody knows is that this Monster is in fact Charles Dom, a black belt Karate Master that teaches children and expert students alike.

"The forces of evil are stronger than they have ever been, and far stronger than any spiritual leaders on Earth are willing to believe. Beelzebub, whom you might know as the Devil, has attained a new mastery in altering reality. Dom is possessed by a powerful demon that Beelzebub himself unleashed.

"I am an expert in dealing with situations like this. I have now stepped into your Universe, at the request of Chenresig, and you are my black pawn response to Beelzebub's opening move. Trust me when I tell you that not every piece in this chess match is human; not even are they all 'mortal' in the sense that you are.

"Why am I telling you all this? Unfortunately, the answer must wait for tonight. Please go about your day with your usual compassionate attitude, which I pray I have not disturbed. I'll talk to you again soon."

Before Marcus had a chance to respond to the overwhelming speech he had just received, he looked around the darkness that his mind became when his eyes were closed. Everything seemed normal again. Breath in, breath out. No images, no sounds, no hallucinations... nothing.

<Fleeting thought: *Might be late for work...*>

Marc opened his eyes and looked at the clock.

7:15 AM

Shaking his head in disbelief, as it seemed more like an hour. Marc made his way to the kitchen, resolved to chant *Om Mani Padme Hum* through the rest of his morning activities. He chanted aloud, now, which he often found more effective than reciting words inside his mind. Marc fed the cats, ate his Wheaties (literally), collected his keys, wallet, cell phone and backpack, and jumped in his (much loved) Saturn Ion.

After stopping at Starbuck's for a Venti Vanilla Latte, five minutes from home, Marc sat down in the driver's seat of his car, and tried to mentally prepare himself for the day.

Same as always, just keep it real. You know what compassion is, and you love embodying it, so just keep it up. If that was a hallucination, you should remain unaffected; if it wasn't, compassion is more important today than ever. Om Mani Padme Hum.

Marc popped in 311's first album, "Music" -- from "before they sold out", as he often thought. He pumped up the volume enough to drown out traffic, and pushed his Ion for all the acceleration it could muster at each light as he drove the ten miles to work in Anaheim. Marc lived in Costa Mesa, CA.

Chapter 2

Marcus loved his job. He loved programming. When he was 16, back in '94, he started learning Perl, and eventually Java. At the time, he had no great project to focus on, and no fresh ideas to run with, but he loved compiling his fun little programs and seeing them run. He got his Bachelor's in Computer Science from UC Irvine in 2000, and quickly landed a job as Senior Programmer (inferior only to the Project Manager) at Twister.Find, a Pay-Per-Click search engine based in Anaheim. While filling the position with a relative youngster was a gamble for the young company, they felt he'd proven a level of responsibility with his 3.9 GPA. Not to mention his remarkable portfolio, consisting of contract Web Programming work, much of it for the University's CS department.

As was his signature, Marc pulled into work at 8:57, and was walking up the stairs as 8:59 passed on by. The clock read exactly 9:00 AM as Marcus sat down at his desk, and Roger Davis, Project Manager, couldn't hold back a smirk. Luckily, nobody saw it.

Marcus was working on one of those projects he'd learned to live with working at Twister. His task was to write a spider -- a program designed to traverse web pages on the Internet and save them to disk -- that would search their competitor's sites, and store what contact information they had listed for each site. This info Twister would pass on to its Sales staff, who would proceed to try and pull the customers over to Twister, who was renowned for their excellent service at affordable prices.

It was no-holds-barred moves like this that kept Twister on top of its industry.

Marcus read through the few e-mails he had in his @twister.find inbox, finished his latte, and got up to throw it out. On the way to the closest garbage can, he walked by a conference room with the door open.

"You see, the beauty of being listed on Twister dot Find is that you only pay for actual visitors to your site. You see, let's say you pay twenty five dollars up front. That money's credit in your account. Then you bid on whatever keywords you think are applicable to your business -- which our staff can, of course, help you with if you want -- and your site is immediately listed in our search results. The higher your bid, the higher up in your listings you're shown. Every time somebody clicks on the link to your site from ours, the bid price is deducted from your account."

Marcus had heard the pitch a million times, with a million different wordings, but he still loved hearing it. He'd been working for Twister for three years, but he still marvelled at the beauty of the Pay-Per-Click model.

Man, I sure am young... Marcus thought with a smile.

Marcus had the Perl-based spider written by Noon, leaving the afternoon to adapt it to parse the pages it downloaded for the contact information the company wanted. He had Chinese food for lunch, as he did every Monday, and was back on the job by 12:45 PM. As Marc killed the rest of his lunch hour surfing the web, the 150 PTO (Personal Time Off) hours he'd recently attained rolled around in his head.

That was the max you could have at Twister, which meant you were missing out on well-earned PTO if you didn't use it up.

By the end of the day, Twister.Find had hundreds of names and e-mail addresses and dozens of phone numbers to work with. The COO had a nice password-protected web interface from which he could grab info from their competitors. The sales staff had a seemingly endless supply of contacts. In short, Twister.Find was stronger than ever in its spot at the top of the Pay-Per-Click Search Engine sector.

Chapter 3

Marc passed the evening with an unusually potent air of calmness. He had decided that weekend that he would commit to meditating in the morning Monday through Saturday. That night, he decided to meditate a bit extra, considering the unusual event he'd experienced just that morning.

This time, Marc just kept a steady breath while chanting *Om Mani Padme Hum* in his head. After a full half hour of this, Marcus opened his eyes, surprised at the exactitude of the time that had passed. He shrugged, quickly dismissing his next thought, which was that Rata was manipulating his new pawn. The very idea reeked of mental illness in his semi-unsettled mindset.

At least the chanting helped a bit.

At 11:00, after watching reruns of Seinfeld and Samurai Jack, Marc brushed his teeth, set his alarm, and laid down to bed. Part of him had hoped to see Rata again when he'd meditated earlier; it was even part of his inspiration to chant *Om Mani Padme Hum*, as that's what preceded Rata's earlier appearance. *Oh well*, he thought, as he closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and cleared his mind of all thoughts.

Marcus usually fell asleep rather quickly, a virtue of his rather focused mind. Tonight would be no different, in that regard. It would be different, though.

Marcus looked around a dark forest in the dead of night, a gentle breeze blowing through his hair. He quickly realized he was dreaming. As was the usual routine, in a way, Marcus tried to rip some trees out of the ground and throw them around with his mind. This was one of those things that usually worked once he realized he was dreaming. This time it didn't.

As Marc made one final attempt to uproot a nearby tree, lightning graced the sky above, exactly in beat with his mental efforts. Simultaneous booming thunder told him the lightning was close; until he remembered he was dreaming, that is.

On a distant horizon, which felt like East, Marc saw a white ball coming from, seemingly, miles away. It reminded him exactly of the one he'd seen while he was meditating the previous morning. Marc quickly made his way through the forest in that direction. A few minutes of walking, and he found himself in a large clearing, with a 10-foot tall, 3-D, absolutely vivid Rata floating in the air, meditating, glowing. Marc approached Rata with an air of wonder, completely free of fear. He may have been new to the world of Zen, but he was very intelligent, even wise for his age. Marcus wasn't afraid because he knew he was dreaming, despite the strong evidence that this was something altogether different than a normal dream.

Marc stopped walking about 30 feet away from Rata, and locked eyes with him. He stood there, calmly breathing (even in a dream), with his back straight and legs slightly apart.

"You see, Marcus, you're special. It may sound like the same tired cliché you've heard from teachers all your life, but, for you at least, it's actually true. The world needs you, and it's my sworn duty to help every living being. Others will tell

you differently, but what makes me special in the realm of Bodhisattvas is that I believe in Good and Evil."

Marcus scratched his head. This seemed a bit too real.

"Dom must be dealt with, and most every other Bodhisattva is tiring himself out trying to find a way to lead Dom to Enlightenment. Chenresig, one of my dear friends, is among them, but he was so wise as to also asked me to intervene. Which brings us to the purpose of our meeting."

Rata extended his arm towards Marcus, a finger pointing at his head. The arm grew rapidly in length as the hand grew slowly in size. As the Bodhisattva's finger penetrated the surface of Marc's head, Marc felt an unbelievable surge of light flow through his dream-body. The surge lasted about ten seconds, and when it was over, Marc's dream-senses returned. It was day-time. He felt light -- weight-wise light -- and somewhere, deep down, he was sure it was because part of the light had stayed.

In a way, he was right. But he'd later conclude he wasn't.

"It is a new day for you, Marcus Malcolm Modal. Your life will never be the same. I've granted you an exceptional amount of physical ability. Everything from enhanced strength, to 'stone skin', to, might I say 'cat-like', reflexes is now a resource at your disposal. Feel free to explore this dream-world for a while. It stretches on for miles.

"You may not believe it now, but this world models the physical rules of Earth exactly. You'll believe it when you wake up. Please don't be afraid because you can't wake up right now... you'll soon accept that I am capable of certain, quote-un-quote, miracles.

"Sleep well, Marcus, and keep this to yourself. I'll be watching over you, and we'll talk again soon."

Marc ran towards the trees on the other side of the clearing, about 200 yards away. He covered 50 yards in 5 seconds, another 50 in 3, 50 more in 2, and 50 more in just under 1 second. He leapt into the forest at a speed of 50 meters per second (over 100 mph), dodging branches and trees by as little as a centimeter. He was breathing heavily, but not sweating. He didn't feel short of breath.

Not yet, at least.

As he slowed to 15 m/s, he attempted to leap to a branch 25 meters above the ground. His mind raced with excitement and disbelief as he landed, graceful as a canary, on the branch.

Marc spent what felt like hours bounding about this world he knew was just one room in a glorious, supernatural universe. Somewhere, surrounded by the darkness of the void of infinity, Rata looked on, smiling. Rata could feel Chenresig smiling, too.

Chapter 4

When Marc awoke on the morning of Tuesday, June 3rd, he felt energized like an R/C car battery that had been peaked a dozen times. He felt, well...

I feel like I could run a marathon with a bus over my head!

<Pause>

Wait, maybe I can... ?

With that realization, Marc turned off his alarm and hopped out of bed with a spring in his step. For a few moments, he contemplated whether or not he should believe what Rata told him last night.

Could've been a dream, but... it sure didn't seem like any dream I've ever had before.

Marc remembered what Rata said about keeping this to himself, so he decided he'd just go about his day in his normal fashion until some fantastic vision told him to do otherwise.

After his 60 minute shower/shave/get dressed/meditate routine, Marc fed the cat, and poured some Wheaties into a bowl.

"...might I say, 'cat-like', reflexes..."

I hate to do this, but...

Marc walked over to his cat, and pushed it over. He knew Aurora had a quick temper... she always had. Aurora got up and stared at Marcus in that defensive way only a cat can: 3 legs on the ground, 1 in the air, head pulled back, eyes squinting. Marc moved his hand quickly towards his now furious cat, who swung at it with full force.

Time seemed to go by faster and slower for a moment, as Marc dodged his cat's blow with ease.

Hmm.

Marc laughed to himself as he shook his head, and ate his Wheaties. He picked up a latte and drove to work. Five minutes passed as he read his e-mail, then Roger came over and sat in the "comfy chair" across from Marc's desk.

"Any way you can spoof IPs for that spider?"

"Yeah, I think so, but it would mean rewriting it in C++. Would probably take a couple days."

"Well, get to it. We've got definitely got enough contact info to last a week, and I don't want any of our competitors realizing what's up, 'kay?"

"Sure thing, Roger."

Marc forgot all about his "dream" as he spent the day working on a new version of his GrabLinks spider. As 6:00 PM approached, Marc started wrapping up his work for the day, and realized the new spider was about 75% done. That triggered him remembering his encounter with Rata, and several emotions flowed through his being all at once.

Well, we're about to find out if that's the truth.

Marc walked briskly out to his car. After Marc unlocked the door, he looked around the parking lot, and saw noone.

"Om Mani Padme Hum," he said aloud.

Marc jumped into the air with what felt like a little effort, and landed two seconds later. His vertical leap, he noticed, had been about 5 meters. (Marc had taken several Physics courses at UCI, so he often thought in meters.)

I can't fucking believe this.

Marc's heart raced as he cranked 311 and drove to Samantha's apartment. Samantha was Marc's girlfriend, a soon-to-be senior at UC Irvine. She was a Psychology major, and she met Marc in a World Civilizations class he was taking as a senior, when she was a freshman. Samantha was a rather beautiful red-head that weighed in at 95 pounds, approximately 5'4". She was the first girl Marc ever really fell in love with, and she knew it. She'd been meditating since Marc started, and they meditated together sometimes; but, while Marc looked forward to the possibility of attaining Enlightenment, Sam mostly did it because her boyfriend was doing it.

Marc parked on the street and walked up to her door, a bit nervous because he actually, for once, had a secret to keep from her.

I'll tell her before I lose her, that's for sure.

After their greeting kiss had come to its gradual close, Marc and Sam sat down on the couch.

"So, what's up?" she opened with.

"You know, the usual top secret evil projects at work, Wheaties and meditating at home, and my girlfriend's got PMS."

"She does, huh?" she said with a genuine smile.

"Yeah, she's a total bitch this time of the month."

This remark brought on a few (harder than expected) punches from Samantha, followed by a passionate, long-lasting kiss. When it was over, they stared at each other, smiling, until Sam broke the silence.

"What's wrong?"

How the FUCK does she know something's wrong? I'm smiling!

"Ah, it's nothing, I'm just a little bummed about some of our business tactics at work. The corporate world can be pretty hard-core sometimes, Sam."

"I'm sure it can be, honey," Sam replied, fiddling with the buttons on Marc's shirt. "You sure that's all that's the matter?"

"Yeah, I think so," Marcus said.

"You think so?"

Marc nodded.

"I think you better tell me what's up, or it's your ass," Sam said in her feminine-yet-frightening, girl-power way.

Marc took a deep breath, and closed his eyes for a moment.

Well, here goes nothing.

"The truth is, Samantha, I've had some fucked up visions and a really fucked up dream in the last couple of days. I really think I'm in contact with a deity." Marc said the words, but almost didn't believe he was saying it.

"A deity..." Sam replied in disbelief, head tilted forward, looking up at him. Sam stared at him, but Marc knew she was thinking about what might've happened to his mind.

"Yes, a deity. His name is Rata, and... he said he needs me for something, I don't know why... 'cause I'm 'special', he says. He gave me superhuman strength and reflexes and shit..."

Sam smiled at him.

What the fuck?

"Didn't I tell you not to tell anyone?" Sam asked.

A chill ran over Marcus. The same kind of chill that he always felt in those dreams he could never quite remember.

"What... the..." Marc said as he quickly rose out of his seat. Sam's eyes stayed locked on him the whole time, her body language looking perfectly natural.

"I told you not to tell anyone," Samantha said, looking down and fiddling with her jeans, "and I really wish you hadn't. Did you really need to know I was this powerful?"

"What the **fuck**, dude? Are you fucking **possessing** my fucking **girlfriend?!?! And you expect me to help you?"** Marc's voice was reaching a critical pitch, the pitch where your voice almost starts cracking. Or does.

"I'm not possessing anyone, Marc. Remember, in *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, how Seung Sahn always stresses that it's all in your mind? Remember? 'You're dreaming', he says. Well, it's the truth."

Sam stood up (as Marc backed off a few more steps), put her hands on her hips, and tilted her head, making fiery eye contact with Marcus.

"I don't believe you," Marc said quietly.

"You've had enough of this, then?" Sam asked.

"Yes!" screamed Mark.

"OK," Sam said, as she raised her right hand in the air like a conductor. As she swooped her hand around a few times, the room started changing shape. Marc felt himself, not walking to, but transforming into the position he was in on the couch a few moments before. Reality's lines blurred, and he saw Samantha rewinding through all of the actions that he knew Rata had actually been doing. As this shift in reality neared its end, it slowed down, with Sam staring at him intently.

Marc felt a rubber-band-like snap in reality.

"I think you better tell me what's up, or it's your ass," Sam said.

Marc blinked once, felt his jaw position, and closed his mouth. The right move hit him like a splash in the face... Marc smiled, and kissed Sam on the forehead.

"Baby, you know I'd tell you if I didn't think you'd *dissect* it all to hell and back!" Marc surprised even himself with the naturalism he'd just portrayed.

Samantha blushed, looked down for a moment, and looked back up. She reached forward and touched his cheek.

"I'm sorry, baby, I just love you so much, I want to help if something's bothering you," she said.

"Well, please trust me when I say that whatever's on my mind is my problem to deal with, OK?"

"OK, baby," sighed Sam as her hand slowly fell from his cheek.

"Hungry, baby?" Marc asked.

"Yeah. *Feels like an Arby's night*," Sam said, doing her best impersonation of David Putty. Marc laughed and got up to grab his keys off the table.

The rest of their evening together went smoothly, and, as expected, Sam asked if she could spend the night at Marc's.

"Well, I don't know, baby... why would you want to do that?" he asked in jest.

Sam responded with a well-placed elbow to the ribs, which Marcus noticed didn't hurt at all. Quickly, Marc remembered Rata's short display of complete omnipotence earlier, and a great fear fell over his heart. Marc started fearing Rata's immense power, especially considering what he and Sam were doing at that moment.

I never would!

Marc almost heard himself think it.

Om Mani Padme Hum, Marc thought.

A moment later, Marc felt an incredible, golden energy fill his stomach, and he wondered if Buddhas felt like that all the time.

Yep. Have a good night, Chen's a lot better at looking over this kinda stuff.

Marc felt absolutely ecstatic as he and Sam walked up to his apartment. It was around 10:30 PM. He was greatly enjoying the golden feeling in his stomach, he was excited at the prospect of being "like Superman", and he was a little afraid of Rata. Whenever he was afraid, though, his focus shifted to the supernatural energy in his stomach, and he remembered Chenresig was looking over him.

Marc and Samantha fucked long into the night, and around 3:30 AM, they kissed for a few more minutes and then went to sleep.

Marc dreamt of having a conversation with a rabbit. It was one of those dreams where you're about a quarter conscious; one where you'd never realize you were dreaming, because your will is practically nonexistent. It was pretty vivid, though.

"I still think the Dodgers could win the World Series this year," said the pink rabbit.

"No fucking way! Are you crazy?"

"I'm not crazy, Marc, I'm just a pink rabbit."

Marc woke up and sat up all in one motion, breathing a bit more heavily than normal. He tried to detect the presence of any supernatural Buddhas, and he could *feel* Chenresig's presence getting closer. Chenresig appeared to him, right there in his room.

"Look, I trust Rata, but I know he can be pretty frightening. Don't tell him, but I look over him, too. Remember that, OK?"

Somehow, that made Marc feel a whole lot better, and he laid back down on his back. Samantha rolled over right at that moment, lacing her leg through Marc's and putting her hand on his chest.

And don't ever think that was me, Marc.

Marc closed his eyes, breathed a sigh of relief, and drifted quickly back into dreamland. He slept deeply and soundly for the rest of the night.