

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Kings of Cool

Don Winslow

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About the Author

Don Winslow is the acclaimed *New York Times* bestselling author of fifteen novels, including *The Gentlemen's Hour*, *Savages*, *Satori*, *The Dawn Patrol*, *The Winter of Frankie Machine*, *The Power of the Dog*, *California Fire and Life* and *The Death and Life of Bobby Z*. He lives in Southern California. To learn more, follow him at twitter.com/donwinslow or visit www.donwinslow.com

Also by Don Winslow

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Satori

Savages

The Dawn Patrol

The Winter of Frankie Machine

The Power of the Dog

California Fire and Life

The Death and Life of Bobby Z

Isle of Joy

While Drowning in the Desert

A Long Walk up the Water Slide

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A Cool Breeze on the Underground

THE KINGS OF COOL

A PREQUEL TO SAVAGES

DON WINSLOW



WILLIAM HEINEMANN: LONDON

*To Shane Salerno, for everything.
Anytime, anywhere, man.*

*In the Bible, Mama, Cain slew Abel
And east of Eden, Mama, he was cast,
You're born into this life paying
For the sins of somebody else's past.*

—BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, "ADAM RAISED A CAIN"

1

Fuck me.

Laguna Beach, California 2005

2

IS WHAT O is thinking as she sits between Chon and Ben on a bench at Main Beach and picks out potential mates for them.

“*That* one?” she asks, pointing at a classic BB (Basically *Baywatch*) strolling down the boardwalk.

Chon shakes his head.

A little dismissively, O thinks. Chon is pretty choosy for a guy who spends most of his time in Afghanistan or Iraq and doesn’t see much in the way of anything outside cammies or a burqa.

Actually, she can see how the burqa thing could be pretty hot if you played it off right.

Did, you know, the harem thing.

Yeah, no.

The burqa ain’t gonna work for O. You don’t want to hide that blonde hair, you don’t want those bright eyes peeking out from behind a *niqab*.

O was made for sunshine.

California gurl.

Chon, he ain’t small but he’s thin. O thinks he looks even thinner than usual. He’s always been cut, but now it looks like he’s been carved with a scalpel. And she likes the short, almost shaved, hair.

“That one?” she asks, jutting her chin at a tourist-type brunette with really big tits and a retroussé nose.

Chon shakes his head.

Ben remains silent, sphinx-like, which is a role reversal, because Ben is usually the more verbal of the two. This isn’t a high bar to jump, as Chon doesn’t talk a lot, except when he goes off on a rant; then it’s like you pulled the plug from a fire hose.

While Ben is the more verbal, O considers now, he’s also the less promiscuous.

Ben is more Consecutive Monogamy while Chon is more Women Are To Be Served Concurrently. Although O knows for a fact that both of them—albeit Chon more than Ben—take full advantage of the Tourist Chicks who watch them play volleyball here at the beach, just a few convenient paces from the Hotel Laguna—encounters she refers to as FRSO.

Fuck—Room Service—Shower—Out.

“That pretty much sums it up,” Chon has admitted.

Although at times he skips the room service.

Never the shower.

Basic rule of survival in the Greater Cross V Crescent Sandbox Tournament:

If there’s a shower, take it.

He can’t shake off the habit at home.

Anyway, Chon admits to doing matinees at the Hotel Laguna, the Ritz, the St. Regis, and the Montage with not only tourist women but also Orange County Trophy Wives and divorcées—the difference between the two being strictly temporary.

That’s the thing about Chon—he’s totally honest. No pretensions, no evasions, no apologies. O can’t decide if that’s because he’s so ethical or because he just doesn’t give a fuck.

Now he turns to her and says, “You have one strike left. Choose carefully.”

It's a game they play—ODB—Offline Dating Baseball. Predicting each other's sexual preferences and hitting for a single, a double, a triple, or a Home Run. It's a really good game when you're high, which they are now, on some of Ben and Chon's supremo weed.

(Which is not weed at all, but a top-of-the-line hydro blend they call Saturday In The Park because if you take a hit of this stuff any day is Saturday and any place is the park.)

O is usually the Sammy Sosa of ODB, but now, with runners on first and third, she's striking out.

"Well?" Chon asks her.

"I'm waiting for a good pitch," she says, scanning the beach.

Chon's been in Iraq, he's been in Afghanistan ...

... Go exotic.

She points to a beautiful South Asian girl with shimmering black hair setting off her white beach dress.

"Her."

"Strikeout," Chon answers. "Not my type."

"What *is* your type?" O asks, frustrated.

"Tan," Chon answers, "thin—sweet face—big brown eyes, long lashes."

O turns to Ben.

"Ben, Chon wants to fuck Bambi."

3

Ben's a little distracted.

Sort of following the game, but not really, because his mind is on something that happened this morning.

This morning, like most mornings, Ben eased into his day at the Coyote Grill.

He got a table on the open deck near the fireplace and ordered his usual pot of black coffee and the crazy-good eggs machaca (for those in the benighted regions east of I-5, that's scrambled eggs with chicken and salsa, a side of black beans, fried potatoes, and either corn or flour tortillas, which might be the best thing in the history of the universe), opened his laptop, and read the Gray Lady to see what Bush and his coconspirators were doing on that particular day to render the world uninhabitable.

This is his routine.

Ben's partner, Chon, has warned him against habits.

"It's not a 'habit,'" Ben answered. "It's a 'routine.'"

A habit is a matter of compulsion, a routine a matter of choice. The fact that it's the same choice every day is irrelevant.

"Whatever," Chon answered. "Break it up."

Cross the PCH to the Heidelberg Cafe, or drive down to Dana Point Harbor, check out the yummy-mummies jogging with their strollers, make a freaking pot of coffee at *home* for chrissakes. But do not do not do not do the same thing every day at the same time.

"It's how we nail some of these AQ clowns," Chon said.

"You shoot AQ guys while they eat eggs machaca at the Coyote Grill?" Ben asked. "Who knew?"

"Funny asshole."

Yeah, it was sort of funny but not really funny because Chon *has* smudged more than a few Al Qaeda, Taliban, and their assorted affiliates precisely because they fell into the bad habit of having a habit.

He either pulled the trigger himself or did it remote control by calling in a drone strike from some *Warmaster 3* prodigy sitting in a bunker in Nevada knocking back Mountain Dew while he smoked some unsuspecting *muj* with a keystroke.

The problem with contemporary warfare is that it has become a video game. (Unless you're on the actual ground and get shot, in which case it is most definitely not.)

Whether direct from Chon or run through the gamer, it had the same effect.

Hemingway-esque.

Blood and sand.

Without the bull(shit).

All true, but nevertheless Ben isn't going to get into this whole subterfuge thing any more than he has to. He's in the dope business to increase his freedom, not to limit it.

Make his life bigger, not smaller.

"What do you want me to do," he asked Chon, "live in a bunker?"

"While I'm gone," Chon answered. "Yeah, okay."

Yeah, *not* okay.

Ben sticks to his routine.

This particular morning Kari, the waitress of Eurasian Persuasion and almost reality-defying beauty—golden skin, almond eyes, sable hair, legs longer than a Wisconsin winter—poured his coffee.

"Hey, Ben."

"Hey, Kari."

Ben is seriously trying to get with her.

So fuck you, Chon.

Kari brought the food, Ben dug into the machaca and the *Times*.

Then he felt this guy sit down across from him.

Big, sloping shoulders.

Sandy, receding hair combed straight back.

Kind of old school.

In fact, he was wearing one of those “Old Guys Rule” T-shirts, which totally miss the obvious point that if old guys really ruled, they wouldn’t have to proclaim it on a cheap T-shirt.

They’d just, you know, rule.

These are guys who can’t figure out social media technology, so Ben figures their days of rule have gone the way of the compact disc.

Anyway, this guy who looked to be in his fifties sat there staring at Ben.

Very high creepiness rating.

Ben was like, do I know you, am I supposed to know you, is this some sort of weird early-morning gay thing? Or is this guy just one of those “I’m a people person” tools who thinks it’s his human duty to strike up conversations with people sitting alone at restaurants?

Ben is not I-like-to-meet-new-people guy. He’s I’m-reading-my-freaking-newspaper-and-flirting-with-the-waitress-so-leave-me-the-fuck-alone guy.

So he said, “Bro, no offense, but I’m kind of into what I’m reading.”

Like, there are five empty tables, why don’t you sit down at one of them?

The guy said, “I’ll only take a minute of your time, son.”

“I’m not your son,” Ben said. “Unless my mother has been deceiving me all these years.”

“Shut your smartass mouth and listen,” the guy said quietly. “We didn’t mind when you were selling a little custom shit to your friends. But when it starts showing up in Albertsons, it’s a *problem*.”

“It’s a free market,” Ben answered, thinking he sounded like a Republican all of a sudden. Seeing as how Ben is

generally to the left of Trotsky, this came as an unpleasant epiphany.

"There is no such thing as a 'free market,'" Old Guys Rule said. "The market costs—there are expenses. You want to sell up in L.A., compete with our little brown and black brothers, be our guest. Orange County, San Diego, Riverside—you pay a licensing fee. Are you paying attention?"

"I'm riveted."

"Are you clowning me?"

"No."

"Because I wouldn't like that."

"And I wouldn't blame you," Ben said. "So, for the sake of discussion, what happens if I don't pay this licensing fee?"

"You don't want to find out."

"Okay, but just for the sake of discussion."

Old Guys Rule looked at him like he was wondering if this kid was fucking with him, and then said, "We put you out of business."

"Who's 'we'?" Ben asked. He saw the look on the guy's face and said, "I know—I don't want to find out. And if I do pay this fee?"

OGR held out his hands and said, "Welcome to the market."

"Got it."

"So we have an understanding."

"We do," Ben said.

OGR smiled.

Satisfied.

Until Ben added, "We have an understanding you're an asshole."

Because it's also Ben's understanding that no one controls the marijuana market.

Cocaine—yes. That would be the Mexican cartels.

Heroin—ditto.

Meth—the biker gangs, more recently the Mexicans.

Prescription pills—the pharmaceutical industry.

But the 420?

Free market.

Which is excellent, because it runs by market rules—price point, quality, distribution.

The customer is king.

So Ben pretty much dismissed this guy as some whack-job trying to jerk his chain. Still, it's a little troubling, Ben thought—how does the guy know who I am?

And who *is* this guy?

Whoever he is, he gave Ben one of those old-school stares until Ben actually had to laugh.

OGR stood up and said, “You motherfuckers think you’re the kings of cool, right? You know everything, no one can tell you anything? Well, let me tell you something—you don’t know shit.”

OGR gave Ben one more Bobby Badass look and then walked out.

The kings of cool, Ben thought.

He kind of liked it.

Now he turns his attention back to the game.

5

“I’m pretty sure that’s illegal,” Ben says, lacing his fingers behind his head and tilting his face to the sun.

“To have sex with a deer, or with a cartoon character?” Chon asks.

“Both,” Ben says. “And may I point out that Bambi is an *underage* animated ungulate? Not to mention a male?”

“Bambi is a boy?” O asks.

"Again, Bambi is a *deer*," Ben clarifies, "but, yes, he's a *boy deer*."

"Then why are so many girls in *Playboy* named Bambi?" O asks.

She likes *Playboy* and is grateful that Stepfather Number Four keeps them in his "home office" desk drawer so Paqu—

Paqu is what O calls her mother, the

Passive Aggressive Queen of the Universe—

—doesn't see them and get pissy because she is an *older* version of the centerfolds who is constantly attempting to airbrush herself via expensive cosmetics and more expensive cosmetic surgery.

O is pretty sure that the National Geographic Channel is going to do an archaeological dig on her mother in a futile quest to find a single original body part, a private joke that explains why O gave Four a pith helmet for his last birthday.

("Why, thank you, Ophelia," a puzzled Four said.

"You're welcome."

"What's it for?" Paqu asked, icily.

"To keep the sun off your vagina," O answered.)

"Girls are named Bambi," Ben says now, "because we are culturally ignorant, of even *pop* culture, and because we crave the archetype of childlike innocence combined with adult sexuality."

His parents are both psychotherapists.

Ben, oh Ben, O thinks.

Hard body, soft heart.

Long brown hair, warm brown eyes.

"But that's *me*," O tells him. "Childlike innocence combined with adult sexuality."

Short blonde hair, thin hips, no rack to speak of, tiny butt on her petite frame. And yes, big eyes—albeit blue, not brown.

"No," Ben says. "You're more adult innocence combined with childlike sexuality."

He has a point, O thinks. She does view sex mostly as play—a fun thing—not a job to be performed to prove one's love. This is why, she has opined, they're called sex "toys" instead of sex "tools."

"*Bambi* is a proto-fascist piece of work," Chon snarls. "It might as well have been shot by Leni Riefenstahl."

Chon reads books—Chon reads the *dictionary*—and also hits the Foreign Films/Classics section of Netflix. He could explain 8½ to you, except he won't.

"Speaking of gender ambiguity," O says, "I told Paqu that I'm thinking of becoming bisexual."

"What did she say?" Ben asks.

"She said, 'What?'" O answers. "Then I wussed out and said, 'I think I want a bicycle.'"

"To pedal to your girlfriend's house?" Ben asks.

"To pedal to *your* girlfriend's house," O counters.

She could play for either or both teams and would be heavily recruited because, at nineteen, she's drop-dead gorgeous.

But she doesn't know that yet.

O describes herself as "poly-sexual."

"Like Pollyanna, only *way* happier," she explains.

She would consider going LTG—

Lesbian Till Graduation—

—except she isn't in school, a fact that Paqu points out to her on a near daily basis. She tried junior college for a semester (okay, the first three weeks of a semester), but it was, well ...

junior college.

Right now she's just glad to have her guys here. As for ODB, they can have any women they want, as long as one of them is her.

Check that, she thinks—

They can have any woman they want

as long as I'm the one they love.
The pain of it is
The *pain* of it is
Chon flies out tonight
This is his last day on the beach.

6

Specifically, Laguna Beach, California.

The brightest pearl in the SoCal necklace of coastal towns that stretches down that lovely neck from Newport Beach to Mexico.

Going along the strand (pun intended)—

—Newport Beach, Corona del Mar, Laguna Beach, Capistrano Beach, San Clemente (interrupt for Camp Pendleton), Oceanside, Carlsbad, Leucadia, Encinitas, Cardiff-by-the-Sea, Solana Beach, Del Mar, Torrey Pines, La Jolla Shores, La Jolla, Pacific Beach, Mission Beach, Ocean Beach, Coronado, Silver Strand, Imperial Beach.

All beautiful, all fine, but the best one is—

Lagoona—

—which was the name officially given to the town by the State of California until someone explained that there was no actual “lagoon,” but that the name derived from “*canada de las lagunas*,” which in Spanish means “canyon of the lakes.” There are two lakes, up in the hills above said canyon, but Laguna isn’t known for its lakes, it’s known for its beaches and its beauty.

About which Ben, Chon, and O are a little blasé, because they grew up here and take it for granted.

Yeah, except Chon doesn’t right now because his leave is up and he’s about to go back to Afghanistan, aka Stanland.

Or, in the spirit of things—
Afgoonistan.

7

Chon tells Ben and O that he literally has to get packing.
He goes back to his efficiency apartment on Glenneyre
and packs a baseball bat into his '68 green Mustang—

—in honor of Steve McQueen—

—*the* King of Cool—

—and drives down to San Clemente, not far from
Richard Nixon's version of Elba and hence known in the
latter half of the 1970s as

Sans Clemency.

(Nixon, poor Nixon, the only truly tragic hero in the
American political theater; the only recent president more
Aeschylus than Rodgers and Hammerstein. First there was
Camelot, then *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, then
Richard?)

Chon drives not to the old Western White House

The real name of which was, with presumably
unintended irony,

La Casa Pacifica

"Peaceful House."

There was Nixon in Exile, prowling around the Peaceful
House chatting with paintings, while down on the actual
Pacific, Secret Service agents chased surfers away from the
nearby famous break at Upper Trestles lest they organize
an assassination attempt, which is, it should be noted,
probably the first time that the words "surfers" and
"organize" have been used in the same paragraph.

Surfers? An assassination attempt?

Surfers?

California surfers?!

("Okay, let's coordinate our watches."

Uhhhhhh ... watches?)

Anyway, Chon drives to the hospital.

8

"Who did this to you?" Chon asks.

Sam Casey, one of their best "sales partners," lies in bed with a broken jaw, a concussion, his right arm fractured in three places, and internal bleeding.

Someone beat the holy hell out of Sam.

"Brian Hennessy and three of his surfer buddies," Sam says through his wired jaw. "I was selling them a lousy QP and they ripped me off."

"You've sold to them before, right?" Chon asks.

One of Ben and Chon's cardinal rules: never sell to anyone you don't know.

Maybe only Chon would know that "cardinal rule" doesn't come from the Catholic religious official, but from the Latin "*cardo*," which means "hinge." So a cardinal rule is something that everything else hinges upon.

Everything hinges upon not selling dope to people you don't know.

And know well.

"I've sold to them a dozen times," Sam says. "Never any trouble."

"Okay, so look, the bills are covered," Chon says. Ben has set up a shell corporation through which he offers health insurance to sales partners who are fully vested. "I'll

take care of Brian. Do me a favor, though? Don't mention this to Ben?"

Because Ben doesn't believe in violence.

9

Chon does.

10

It's an age-old debate, not to be rehashed here, but basically—

Ben believes that to answer violence with violence only begets more violence, while Chon believes that to answer violence with nonviolence only begets more violence, his evidence being the entire history of humanity.

Oddly enough, they both believe in karma—what goes around comes around—except with Chon it comes around in a freaking hurry and usually with ill intent.

What Chon calls "microwave karma."

Together, Ben and Chon make up a collective pacifist.

Ben is the paci

Chon is the fist.

11

Rule of life—

Okay, more of a strong suggestion—

If you absolutely *have* to be an asshole?

Make yourself a *little* hard to find.

Go do your assholian bullshit and then lock yourself in your mother's basement and put a towel over the Xbox to block the light, but don't—

—beat someone up and then go surfing in your usual spot.

Just don't do it, asshole.

First of all, try not being a dick for a change and see how that works out, but in any case don't

park your van where you usually stick the piece of shit while you're out for one of your "sessions," bra, because

someone like Chon

or, in this case, Chon

might take a baseball bat to it.

Chon smashes out the headlights, the taillights, the windshield, and all the windows (baseball in the Steroid Era), then leans on the horn until Brian and his three buddies madly paddle in like "natives" in one of those old Tarzan movies.

Brian, who is a big freaking dude, comes out of the water first, screaming, "Dude, what the fuck?!"

Chon slides out of the car, drops the bat, and asks, "Are you Brian?"

"Yeah."

Bad answer.

Seriously.

Bad answer.

Billy Jack.

You've seen it, you know what I'm talking about, don't even try to pretend that ...

Okay, fine—

Chon's sweeping inside roundhouse kick breaks Brian's jaw and gives him a concussion before he even hits the dirt unconscious, little pound signs in his eyes like it's a cartoon.

Chon steps over Brian's prone body and drives his fist into the solar plexus of Buddy One, bending him over. Chon grabs the back of Buddy One's head and pulls it down as he drives his knee up into Buddy One's face, then throws him away and moves on to Buddy Two, who lifts his fists up beside his face, which does no good at all as Chon sweep-kicks him in the lower right leg, knocking him off his feet. The back of Buddy Two's head hits the ground hard, but not as hard as the two side-blade kicks that Chon delivers to his face, shattering his nose and rendering him, as they say, unconscious, as Buddy Three ...

Buddy Three ...

Ahhh, Buddy Three.

13

Sad Fact of Life—

Smart people sometimes get stupid, but stupid people never get smart.

Never.

Ever.

"You can come *down* the evolutionary ladder," Chon has observed to Ben and O; "you can't climb up."

(Okay, there's always that ya-yo in the mall trying to run up the down escalator, but that just proves the point.)

So—

Buddy Three, having witnessed the utter destruction of his three pals in a matter of single-digit seconds, flees to the inside of the van (where, if he were smart, he would remain) and emerges (see?) with a pistol.

And says to Chon,

"Now what are you going to do, asshole?"

The prosecution rests.

God is God.

Darwin is Darwin.

14

EXT. BEACH PARKING LOT – DAY

An UNCONSCIOUS SURFER with a PISTOL (with the safety on) jammed in his mouth lies slumped out of the sliding door of a van. TWO OTHER SURFERS lie in fetal positions on the ground.

In their wet suits, they look like baby seals in a PETA clip.

CHON roots around in the console of the van and comes up with a plastic-wrapped QUARTER POUND of dope, which he jams into his jacket pocket.

Then he steps over to a fourth surfer, BRIAN, who is on all fours, trying unsuccessfully to get to his feet.

Chon kicks him in the ribs.

Several times.

Then grabs him by the collar and drags him over to the van.

CHON

Brian, let the word go forth from this time and place:
It is not okay to steal our product. It is especially
not okay to lay hands on our people. And one other thing
—

Chon stretches Brian's right arm over the edge of the van's
bumper, then picks up the baseball bat and

CRACK!

Brian screams.

CHON

—next time I'll kill you.

15

Time to go.

O's trying to get out of the fucking house.

Very expensive house in the exclusive gated community
of Monarch Bay.

Except Paqu is, like, *on* it.

"What are you going to *do* with your life?" she asks.

"I dunno."

"Are you going back to school?"

"I dunno."

"Are you going to get a job?"

"I dunno."

Check Paqu out—

Blonde hair, perfectly coiffed.

Chiseled (not metaphorically) features.

Makeup *perrrrfect*.

A couple of gr worth of clothing on her *perrrrfectly*
toned, sculpted body that features TTDF.

Tits To Die For.

(Many male ships have been wrecked on *those* cliffs, my friend. Crashed and broken apart. Y chromosomes flailing the crazy-bad whitewater waiting for a jet ski that ain't coming.)

Now she turns her formidable tits and formidabler eyes on O. "Well, you have to do *something*."

"I dunno," O answers, wilting under the four-point gaze.

"You have thirty days," Paqu says.

"To ..."

"Get a job or go back to school," Paqu answers, cutting up strawberries and putting the pieces into a blender with two scoops of protein powder.

She's been into "power smoothies" lately.

"Oh God," O answers, "have you been to one of those tough love seminars again?"

"DVD," Paqu answers.

"Did Four put you up to this?" O asks.

She *knows* that Four put her up to it because he doesn't want an "adult child" cluttering up the house he thinks is his just because he nails Paqu in it.

I was in this house before you were, O thinks.

Come to think of it, I was in *Paqu* before you were.

"Nobody put me up to it," Paqu yells over the whirl of the blender. "I have a mind of my own, you know. And if you go back to school, you have to take it seriously."

O had a 1.7 GPA at Saddleback before she gave up the charade entirely and just stopped going.

"What if I don't?" she asks.

"Don't what?"

"Will you shut that fucking thing off?"

Paqu turns off the blender and pours her power smoothie into a glass. O knows that in a half hour she'll go to the gym to work with her personal trainer for two hours, then drink a "meal replacement shake," then go to yoga before coming home for a power nap. Then she'll spend two hours getting herself ready for when Four comes home.

And she thinks *I'm* a useless cunt, O thinks.

"You have a power-smoothie mustache," O tells her.

"If you don't get a job or go back to school," Paqu says, wiping her upper lip with the back of her index finger, "you can't live here anymore. You'll have to find your own place."

"I don't have money for my own place."

"That is not my problem," Paqu says—obviously practiced from the DVD.

But they both know that it is.

Paqu's problem, that is.

She'll forget about it, O thinks, cognizant of Paqu's Bipolar Approach To Parenting.

Paqu has wide swings between
Absent Neglectful Mother and
Smothering Controlling Mother

So, like, Paqu will take off on—

—a European vacation

Rehab

Spiritual Retreat or just

Another Affair

And totally forget about O.

Then she'll come back, feel guilty, and go in the

Complete Other Direction

Micromanaging O's life down to the tiniest details of clothing, friends, education (or lack thereof), career (see "education"), and protein-carbohydrate balance, and was *literally* up her ass during a truly unfortunate "colonic" phase.

It's Either/Or

There is no middle ground, and it has been

Ever thus.

The worst is when Paqu comes back from rehab or a spiritual retreat. Having fixed herself, she sets out to fix O.

"I'm not broken," O argued one time.

"Oh, darling," Paqu answered, "we're *all* broken."

Indeed, O thought, Paqu does spend a lot of time in the body shop. Anyhoo, after a long discussion about O's denial regarding her "brokenness" it was decided that self-realization was a river that simply couldn't be pushed and that O would have to remain in the eddy of her own delusion. Which was just fine with O, although she was pretty sure that Delusional Eddy was a guy Paqu briefly dated.

But now this thirty-day thing.

O heads for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To join the Peace Corps," O answers.

Or go see Chon.

Which is the

Exact opposite.

16

Actually it was the fact that O had no freaking idea what she was going to do with her life that led Ben and Chon into the marijuana business two years ago because it engendered a discussion of "vocation," and wordsmith Chon observed that "vocation" is merely one vowel removed from "vacation" yet could be considered an antonym.

That is—

vocation (n., from the Latin verb "to call"): an occupation to which a person is specially drawn or for which he or she is suited, trained, or qualified

vacation (n.): freedom from occupation

"But," Ben asked, "do you *want* freedom from something to which you're especially drawn? Probably not."

So, on his next deployment, Chon came home with—
A Purple Heart
A new set of nightmares and—

17

A seed.
The White Widow.
A particularly fine, THC-laden breed of cannabis.
When the seed of an idea meets the actual, physical
seed it is
Seminal.
seminal (adj.)

1. Pertaining to, containing, or consisting of semen
(uhhhh, no)
2. Botany: of or pertaining to seed (obviously)
3. Having possibilities of future development (oh, *hell*
yes)
4. Highly original and influencing the development of
future events (well, let's hope so)

Ben took this seminal seed and, actualizing the potential
for future development, developed the hell out of it in
highly original ways that would influence future events.
Ben started to breed a new plant.

18