

THE
ASSISTANT
(to the)
HUMORIST

an absurdly real sci-fi self-help novella

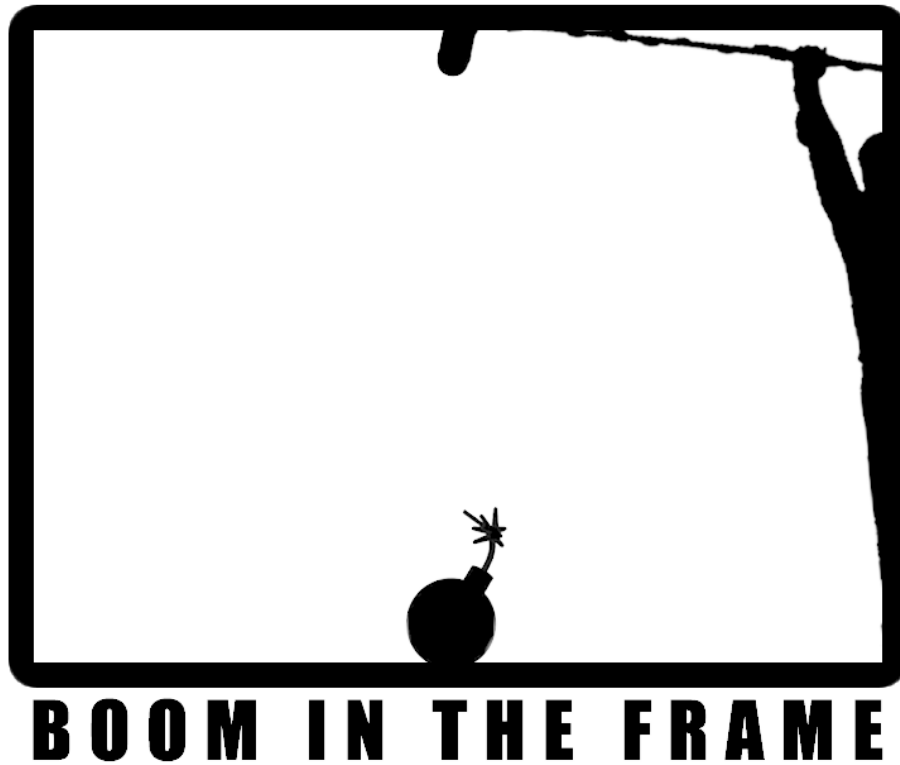
by J.R.R. Trailer

In a world, overrun by technological unemployment...one man stands alone against the undying robots, inspiring an entire generation to find meaning beyond the confines of a traditional occupation.

This novella contains adult themes and language.

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As I sat there, eating my chicken sandwich in the 'dining room', I wondered how many brain cells I was knocking out with each bite. Bite after bite, the cheap bun dissolving away immediately to a sugary mush. And these people sitting around me, had I become one of them? Finally given in to the cult of sugar-fat-salt, destined to let my health slip away as my diet crashes into the side of a mountain?

I was just eating here because my electro-bus stop is right there, across the street! Now, that's something even Tommy C would do - in a pinch! You get the job done, and you move on! I bite into another stringy piece of near flavorless chicken meat, and the stringy part gets wedged between two molars. Great, some weird guy sitting across the room insists on watching me pick the stringy meat out from between my teeth.

'Dining room'? Yeah, right. That placard hanging on the wall doesn't know the half of it. Hung upon these now squalid walls during a much better era - an era where anyone could come up with some cool idea for a website that does something, or maybe a website that sells something or another, and then go on to make their millions. Ah, those were good days. "Retire at twenty-seven," Tommy C always says, "or you're nothing."

After I attend Tommy C's live seminar at the metroplex tonight, I too will become one of those proud men, leaving my mark upon history forever, and making my millions in the process, then retiring to my mountain-side villa and pool-side jacuzzi. One day you'll see me out there, zipping around in my electric supercar, and you'll wonder, "how did he do it?"

As I stand up from my 'dining room' booth, my pant leg sticks to some liquid spilled on the seat, possibly days before, and was now long forgotten, left out to dry in this sunny Los Angeles weather we've been having lately. I contemplate a quick restroom detour to swab off the sticky soda crust from my pants, but decide against it, remembering that any attempt of a cleanup in a restroom like this would just result in a net loss of overall cleanliness. After a few steps back into the hot, crowded sidewalk, I see my electro-bus approaching from further up the street.

This is it. Next stop: the metroplex. And it was a straight shot from here, too. You see - you can get to just about anywhere you need to be using the electro-bus transit system, but the trick is, getting to where you need to go, while also not having someone cough directly into your face, repeatedly, at point blank range. On my lap, I hold my backpack close to me, resting my hand inside the bag, gripping firmly my copy of "Ten Guaranteed Steps To Finding YOUR Angle!", by Tommy Come-lately.

I stare blankly at the passing shops and crowds outside the window. They mean nothing to me. This is the day I will see him in person. Will he even look at me in the crowd? Will he sign my book afterwards? Could I even get close enough to ask? Worst case scenario: I learn how to unfetter the knowledge found in his book, granting me the power to summon, at will, my own destiny. Autograph or no, it's going to be a pretty good night for me.

I tell you, a man really has to outsmart the system these days! If you don't have an angle, then you're just like everyone else: living off the teat, just surviving and nothing more. Similar to what I'm doing now, actually, by living on my stipend alone, after my most recent position was, once again, made redundant over the natural course of time - all thanks to advances in software development, internet applications, renewable energies, and manufacturing automation. These days, it turns out that you can do so much more, with so much less - and yes, that includes us humans as well, in case you weren't paying attention.

It is now undeniably harder to find a career that really makes you feel important. And by important, I mean that you earn so much more money than practically everyone else. Sure, you can get any job in the public sector or do community volunteer work - and I've got nothing against those folks who do - but let's be honest here, those are thankless jobs. "Woohoo! Look at me, everyone, I fixed a broken power converter in the metropolitan power grid last week, and this week I'm rushing into a burning building to save a litter of kittens!" That's awesome! But, who really cares? Nobody even notices you're doing a great job until something breaks, and then it's nothing but sweat and tears. What about our entrepreneurs? They make millions on the power of their thoughts and ideas alone! And, most entrepreneurs go down in history as a small advancement in human civilization - or at the very least, a historical footnote in some book about human civilization.

Step number one: never trust a person's résumé. Building a successful business means hiring people you can trust, especially when you need to transfer your business over to them after you pull your golden parachute at twenty-seven years old, and retire to your mountain-side villa, lounging by the pool, and sipping on a top-shelf frozen blended margarita. How do you know this applicant can even tie his own damned shoes? Have the candidate whiteboard a mathematical function which describes the process of tying one's own shoes. I mean, really - dig deep here! See if the applicant really knows their stuff - past experience on some damned piece of paper be damned! When in doubt, just hire the people your friends say are desperate for a job, as those people are very gullible, and will generally work very hard for you and your money making machine - especially if they want to look good in front of their peers. And, one day, if it all goes south, well...you know exactly where to find them, too.

I awake from my pool-side daydream at my mountain-side villa, just as the automated electro-bus slows to a stop outside of the metroplex. The lines leading up to the metroplex entrance are long, but I have already reserved my expensive front row seat on the Tommy C phone app. In fact, I had invested almost all of my remaining stipend on this ticket, so it's nothing but fast food sandwiches from here on in. Or, at least until I can shape up and find my angle.

After funneling into one of the shorter entrance lines, I eventually scan my phone at the door kiosk and push through the turnstile, joining another crowd in the lobby. Twenty minutes later, I am finally able to push through the crowd and

find my front row seat. I would bet good money - if I had any leftover after buying this front row seat - that Tommy C has just sold out the entire metroplex arena.

Ok, so, apparently 'front row seat' now means 'a seat within the front three rows', but my ticket remains a solid investment, regardless. Besides, what's the extra two rows when you're already sitting this close to Tommy C? The extra distance was so negligible that I almost didn't even bother mentioning it here. After what seems like an eternity, the lights finally dim. A hush falls over the crowd, and after a few moments, he appears on stage wearing a suit that screams confidence. The crowd goes wild and my heart begins racing.

The man on stage is Tommy Come-lately, in the flesh. Also known as Tommy C, amongst friends, and he was a sight to behold. Tommy doesn't like to dwell on his personal hygiene or physical appearance, as magnificent as they are, because that's not what makes a winner. No - winning comes from within! Unless, of course, you are born into a wealthy family which has already won everything - that's literally the only exception! Actually, step nine is directly related to this - but I don't have time to think about the book right now because Tommy C has just grabbed the mic after waiting almost three tantalizing minutes for the uproarious applause to subside! He speaks with a smooth timbre, of which I have only heard in my dreams, and on other recorded interviews featuring Tommy C.

"Welcome!" Tommy smiles, scanning the audience, waiting once again for the applause to subside.

"Ladies and gentlemen..." Tommy begins pacing the stage slowly.

"That restaurant at the end of your street isn't 'cash only' because they like the look and feel of all that money-" The audience laughs gently, as do I, transfixed on the bright white spotlight bouncing from Tommy's face. It felt like I was right there next to him, reading from his book's preface aloud. After a moment, Tommy cracks a smile and continues to scan the room.

"Though, all that money certainly does feel good to the touch-" The audience laughs again, louder now, as do I, slowly realizing that I am actually standing in the same room as Tommy C, which is just unbelievable.

"It doesn't matter if you're late to this party! I was late! We're all late, now! But I am here to tell you that you can turn your situation around tomorrow! No damn robot is gonna take our jobs!"

The audience cheers even louder as the clapping swells to a deafening thunder.

"So what if most jobs are automated these days?" Tommy pauses, again, waiting for the applause to subside.

"We're the people making the next generation of people jealous because we made something that those people use every damn day! And there's not a robot in the world doing that job!"

The audience roars into another standing ovation and sustained cheer, while Tommy paces up and down the stage, once again waiting for the uproarious applause to subside. Someone in the audience throws their bra onto the stage - presumably a woman - but everyone is jumping and cheering and I can't see

anything in all the commotion. Another bra comes flying onto the stage, as several topless women climb up onto the stage, rushing towards Tommy C. The metroplex security team is already rushing out stage-side to meet the rushing topless women head-on. After a moment of struggle, one of the topless women manages to squeeze past the guards on stage, and then tackles Tommy C with her legs wrapped firmly around his waist. I try to push my way closer to the stage, but there are two hundred other people behind me with the same idea, already trying to squeeze past me. In the ensuing chaos, I take a random elbow to the jaw and instantly black out.

* * *

I am jostled awake by a metroplex security guard, him crouching over me, inspecting my face and body for injuries. He looks over his shoulder, and motions his arm in my direction.

"Hey Phil, this one's waking up! How you feeling, sir? You alright?" he shouts down at me.

I slowly sit up and look around, noticing the metroplex is nearly empty now, except for a few other rough and tumbled attendees, slowly shuffling their way to the exits.

"Wait, where's Tommy C?" I ask, desperately hoping this is just intermission.

"Yeah, you just missed it - we had to stop the show early. Massive love riot."

He shrugged, picking up his broom.

"Well, what about my refund? Surely-"

"Tommy C doesn't give refunds, you should know that!" he chuckled, before sweeping a few more empty cans to the end of the row.

"I didn't say I wanted a refund from him, I meant a refund from you!" I explain, but he looks back at me very confused.

"I didn't knock you out, sir, it was clearly somebody in the aud-"

"I know that!" I implore, "You know what I mean! You couldn't keep the venue under control - so you're ultimately responsible-" I reason, but he turns away from me, uninterested, and returns to his sweeping.

"Hey! I spent damn near my whole stipend on this ticket!"

"Sir, you can file a trouble ticket online with the metroplex." He mutters, and begins sweeping the next row of seats. I don't bother following after him because, deep down, I know he is right. A trouble ticket is my only hope for a refund. Which means: I just blew my chance with Tommy. All because of my stupid jaw! I should have seen the flailing elbow coming at my face and adjusted accordingly!

I have barely stumbled past the metroplex entrance before I am planning my next trip to see Tommy C live, and in concert. I become sexually aroused, somehow, at the thought of owning a signed copy of his book - available now at most retail outlets - "Ten Guaranteed Steps To Finding YOUR Angle!", by Tommy C. I'm not sure if I mentioned his book yet, but that's the title, and that's where you

can find it. Technically, you can get the e-book version for cheaper, but an e-book could never be autographed by Tommy, and not to mention, I can't exactly hold and caress a generic plastic e-reader tablet - that would be ridiculous!

My next stipend comes in four days, so I resolve to go home and drink alone, rather than spending cash I don't have on overpriced drinks I don't need. The electro-bus ride home is a boring blur of who-cares-what. I peer out of the bus window, but see only my reflection in the darkened glass, staring back at me with disappointment. In that moment, I reflect upon my failure tonight at the metroplex.

I focus on each passing pedestrian for only a fraction of a second, silently judging them as they pass. They wouldn't even be here right now if they had their own mountain-side villa. Note to self: check Tommy C's phone app tonight for new show dates and related announcements.

My apartment is decidedly not up to snuff. It's the main reason I don't go out looking for a nice, long-term relationship right now. I would probably be fighting off girls left and right, you know, if I was actually trying. But - that stuff comes later in life, after you get the mountain-side villa and electric supercar. I am already scrounging around in the liquor cabinet, lazily pouring a potent medicine into a highball glass. After a few moments, my medicine is ready for oral consumption. The mad doctor admires his creation in the glass, then prepares a dosage, and swallows it.