



Paul DiLella

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

Copyright © 2007, Paul DiLella

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

MINDCON is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and all of the countries covered by the Universal Copyright Convention and countries with which the United States has bilateral copyright relations including Canada, Mexico, Australia, and all nations of the United Kingdom.

Copying or reproducing all or any part of this book in any manner is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or videotaping without written permission from the publisher.

A royalty is due for every performance of this play whether admission is charged or not. A "performance" is any presentation in which an audience of any size is admitted.

The name of the author must appear on all programs, printing, and advertising for the play. The program must also contain the following notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Big Dog Publishing Company, Sarasota, FL."

All rights including professional, amateur, radio broadcasting, television, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved by Big Dog Publishing Company, www.BigDogPlays.com, to whom all inquiries should be addressed.

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

P.O. Box 1400

TALLEHAST, FL 34270

To Jerry L. Crawford—

*Without your mentoring,
MINDCON would not exist.
May the Muse be with you.*

MINDCON

SATIRE. Unique, fresh, relevant...this play will amuse audiences with its wicked wit! As part of a routine employment background check, Jeremy shows up at the MINDCON laboratory, where he inadvertently ends up as a subject in a mysterious behavioral experiment. While waiting to be experimented upon, Jeremy meets Irene, a test subject who has been accidentally transformed from a frowsy chain-smoking ballerina into a “hyphenated person.” But before the scientists can “recondition” Irene, Jeremy sets out to free her, and in doing so, discovers that MINDCON functions more like a mad circus than a research facility. Not only do its scientists conduct inhuman experiments, but the chief financial officer “cooks” the books, the do-nothing CEO spends his days on the golf course, and everyone else just looks the other way and mindlessly follows orders. This clever play pokes fun at the dark side of corporate America, politics, and the media.

Production Time: Approximately 90 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(3 M, 2 F, 13 flexible, extras)
(Flexible cast. Doubling possible.)

JEREMY MARSHALL: 23, easygoing, searching for a job as a pizza deliveryman; wears black slacks, a black T-shirt, and a battered fedora.

DR. LIVY (LIVINIA) PROCTOR: 20s, daughter of Dr. Dr. Proctor; her posture reveals her military background and no-nonsense demeanor; wears a starched white lab coat, riding boots, a red scarf around her neck, and a military dress hat.

DR. DR. SID PROCTOR: Corporate lackey, wears a top hat and a lab coat with tails.

IRENE COVEY: Subject of laboratory experiments and former ballerina; her face is clown white with red lips; wears a beret, a red blouse, black skirt, and ankle socks with no shoes.

EUGENE DIBBS: Do-nothing CEO of MINDCON and golf addict; wears a mismatched golf outfit.

WRECKING BALL: Formerly Chief Financial Officer of MINDCON; nicknamed "The Chef" for his/her ability to cook the books; flexible.

OFFICE LACKEY 1, 2: Mindlessly follow Dibbs around; flexible.

REPORTERS 1, 2: Flexible.

LAB ASSISTANTS 1, 2: Flexible.

GUARDS 1, 2: Flexible.

TECHNICIAN: Flexible.

ADVISOR: Flexible.

POLICEMAN: Flexible.

INTERCOM: Voice only.

EXTRAS: To give a sense of the enormity of the MINDCON enterprise, the more Lab Techs, Scientists, Security Guards, Police, Office Lackies, etc. the better, as it makes for a more chaotic effect.

NOTE: All characters wear a hat even if unspecified above.

SETTING

Near future. A laboratory at the MINDCON complex, a research facility at an undisclosed location north of Las Vegas, NV. The MINDCON complex is comprised of a vast array of camouflaged domed buildings.

SET

Inside the large MINDCON laboratory. A giant screen, like a bloodshot eye, bulges out of the ceiling. Translucent cubicles ring the perimeter. There is a glass-encased control booth centered in the back wall. Multi-colored warning lights hang from the ceiling. A table fills the center. Next to the table is a portable research station with various scientific equipment on it. The lab is full of electronic harnesses, headgear, electrode patches, computers, monitors, and hand-held peripherals. On the wall a sign with the corporate motto reads, "A mind is a terrible thing to conceal." (NOTE: The lab can be represented as a two-story building connected with stairs and ramps. This can be used to create an elaborate Keystone Cops-type chase as Irene tries to elude capture.)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I: Large laboratory in the MINDCON complex.

ACT II: MINDCON laboratory, a few minutes later.

PROPS

Sign that reads, "A mind is a terrible thing to conceal"	Cart
Desk	Walkie-talkie
Drawing	Whistle
Drawing paper	Alarm button
Crayons	Red handkerchief
Table	Banana
Technical-looking equipment	Scuffed, red ballet slippers
Computer monitors	Speakerphone
Patients' folders	Podium
Skateboard	Microphone
Business card	Prescription bottle
Clipboard	Pills
Papers	Bottled water
Flower	Cans of silly string
Vase	Pies
Pen	Handkerchief
Headset that resembles a bicycle helmet	Kazoo
Electrode patches	Computer disks
Hypodermic needle	Papers
Chart	Employee personal belongings, misc.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Calliope/circus music	Sound of a weather forecast
Bell	Smoke puffs
Flashing emergency lights	Soft classical music
“William Tell Overture” or another suitable song	Faint, slow music
Cell phone ring	Red light flashing
Zap	Low hum
Sounds of objects being tossed around	Alarms
Screams	Piercing scream
Sounds of a scuffle	Dramatic movement from “Swan Lake” or other suitable music
Multi-colored flashing lights	Blood-curdling laugh
Wailing siren	

*"Two things are infinite:
the universe and human stupidity,
and I'm not sure of the universe."*

– Albert Einstein

*"I can calculate the motions of heavenly bodies,
but not the madness of people."*

– Isaac Newton

*"There are several species of impositions
that have been practised in science,
which are but little known, except to the initiated,
and which it may be perhaps be possible to render
quite intelligible to ordinary understandings.
These may be classified under the heads of
hoaxing, forging, trimming, and cooking."*

– Charles Babbage

Reflections on the Decline of Science in England (1830)

ACT I

(Darkness. MINDCON laboratory. The sounds of a calliope – circus music can be heard. This may be a lab, but this enterprise is more like a three-ring circus. Lights up. In the translucent cubicles, we see shadows of subjects willing to test their mettle for money. Various personnel – Technicians, Scientists, Psychologists – monitor equipment and record results. Lights dim on the back of the lab. One by one, lab personnel drift away. Off to the side, Irene Covey sits at a desk working feverishly on a drawing. Irene's face is clown-white with red lips. She wears a beret, a red blouse, black skirt, and ankle socks with no shoes. At the table sits Livy Proctor, who is reading patients' folders. Livy's posture exhibits a military background and a no-nonsense demeanor. She wears a starched white lab coat, riding boots, a red scarf around her neck, and a military dress hat, a souvenir from her service days. As Jeremy Marshall walks down the aisle to the stage, a bell sounds. Irene jumps up, jubilantly, and rushes to Jeremy, who has just entered the lab. Jeremy wears black slacks, a black T-shirt, and a battered fedora. He carries a skateboard. Irene holds up her hand for him to halt. Jeremy stops.)

IRENE: Comma. Halt. Comma-your-comma-name. Comma-comma-business.

JEREMY: What? I didn't quite get that.

IRENE: Comma-comma-your name. Your-business-comma-comma.

JEREMY: Lady, speak English, will ya?

IRENE: Comma! *Comma!* Irene. Comma-your-name-and-comma-please.

JEREMY: Lady, comma what?

(Hearing the commotion, Livy gets up from the table to intervoene. Her white lab coat struts its starched stiffness. Her riding boots gleam in the light.)

IRENE: Comma-Livy. Comma-person-comma-name-comma-business. Comma-comma!

LIVY: It's okay, Irene. I'll take it from here. (*Irene returns to her desk and continues to design a business card.*) I'm sorry for the confusion. That was Irene. I hope she didn't startle you. She's new and she's trying to make a good impression.

JEREMY: Couldn't you find someone who can speak English?

LIVY: She does the best she can under the circumstances.

JEREMY: What's her problem, other than her speaking? Why is she bent over like that?

LIVY: Irene is a hybrid—part person, part punctuation. She's a living comma. Once she was a volunteer like you. She came here hoping to advance medical science. Unfortunately, there were a few setbacks.

JEREMY: Look, lady, I'm no volunteer, and medical science can advance without me. I just came here for my test.

LIVY: You're our new test subject? You're here for the Sabbath Study?

JEREMY: I dunno. Back at the interview, they gave me this card. Said I had to come here and take a test if I wanted the job.

LIVY: Let me see it. (*Jeremy takes a card out of his pocket and hands it to her. The card is bent and stained.*) Employment Referral Services gave you this card?

JEREMY: (*Sheepishly.*) Yes.

LIVY: It's bent! It's sweat-stained and covered with, with—

JEREMY: Chocolate. It melted. Sorry.

LIVY: How am I supposed to tell which kind of card it is? Yellow is for behavioral studies. Orange is for background checks. I can't tell.

JEREMY: I think it was orange.

LIVY: Orange? Not yellow. I could use a yellow. Need another volunteer for the Sabbath Study.

JEREMY: Orange. I'm sure it was orange. Orange.

LIVY: No matter. I have an extra. Come with me.

(Jeremy follows Livy to the table CS, and they sit down. A Lab Assistant shoves a clipboard in Livy's face for her signature. Livy scribbles her name, unfazed by this common interruption. The Lab Assistant hands Livy the folder and exits.)

JEREMY: Sure is a busy place. What is it you all do?

LIVY: Why don't you let me ask the questions, shall we? My name is Livinia Proctor. Dr. Livinia Proctor. Someday I hope to have a double doctorate like my father. I am Deputy Assistant Director for Psychological Research, Western Division, MINDCON. And you—

JEREMY: MINDCOM?

LIVY: MINDCON. As in "Mysteries Involving Normal Dimensions of Consciousness." Hence, MINDCON.

JEREMY: This have something to do with psychic predictions?

LIVY: I assure you, there is no guesswork in what we do. We screen applicants for employers and conduct innovative behavioral experiments on volunteers.

JEREMY: *(Indicating Irene.)* What job did she apply for?

LIVY: Irene volunteered for the Sabbatic Study—groundbreaking research for high pay. I'm going to get my second doctorate with that. Maybe I can piggyback that into a third doctorate, or even wiggle my way to the Nobel Prize. That will outdo Daddy. I will be the first in our family to be addressed as "Dr. Dr. Dr."

JEREMY: Does that mean you'll be called "Dr. Dr. Dr. Proctor-Proctor-Proctor"?

LIVY: Is that an attempt at humor?

JEREMY: Not if it will cost me the job. I only want to deliver pizzas.

LIVY: Since your job classification is entry level, I'll only deduct ten points. *(Pause.)* Are you sure you don't want to volunteer for the Sabbatic Study? *(Jeremy looks at Irene and shudders.)* Then we're ready to proceed. First things first. You are—?

JEREMY: Jeremy Marshall.

LIVY: According to your file, you are applying for the position of "Mobile Epicurean Services Technician, Italian Division."

JEREMY: That's messed up. It's pizza delivery.

LIVY: We know that. But this is how the government classifies it.

JEREMY: Whatever. Just don't ask me to remember it.

LIVY: Whatever. Now, listen carefully to what I am about to read to you. *(Reads.)* "Welcome to MINDCON Research Services. One of our functions is to expand the frontiers of medical knowledge, and to this end, we seek individuals such as yourself, who are willing to pioneer new techniques in mind-mapping, electrical, chemical, and micro-neural regeneration, as well as consciousness expansion. Without your participation, this program could not continue. Before we proceed with the synapse/dendrite flush, please read the following declaration out loud and then sign it."

(Livy pushes papers across the table to Jeremy.)

JEREMY: *(Reads.)* "I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that I am of sound mind and body when I agree wholeheartedly and without reservation to participate in any and all mind exploration experiments under the auspices of the personnel of MINDCON. I realize that these experiments are not approved by any governmental agency and that they are unproven and possibly dangerous. I agree to absolve MINDCON, the CEO and employees of said organization, from any liability resulting from personal injury, be it temporary or permanent, whether it be from incompetence or negligence, or from a failed experiment. Furthermore, my immediate family, heirs, and relatives will absolve MINDCON and its agents of any liability and will refrain from any litigation. In case of accidental injury, MINDCON will utilize its resources to provide the undersigned with immediate and complete medical services and to re-train said individual for an alternate career. In case of accidental death, the remains of the deceased

will be sent C-O-D to the designee of my choice." *(Throws contract on the table.)* Hey, I'm not signing that. All I want is a job.

LIVY: I assure you it's standard procedure.

JEREMY: Are you sure?

LIVY: Positive.

JEREMY: Do you lose many job applicants?

LIVY: I'd tell you, but that's classified.

JEREMY: All this for a stinkin' pizza job.

LIVY: Sign here, and you're on your way to smelling the pizza.

JEREMY: With my luck, I'll be smellin' roses.

LIVY: Irene.

(Irene plucks a flower from the vase on her desk and saddles up to Jeremy, who is a bit awestruck at this creature. She dabs the rose underneath his nose and lays it on the papers. She inches the papers closer to him and hands him a pen from the table.)

JEREMY: Sure is cute for a comma. *(Sighs.)* Darn. I really need this job.

(Jeremy signs the papers. Livy collects the papers.)

LIVY: Thanks, Irene. *(Irene twirls around and returns to her desk.)* See, Mr. Marshall, you can have your rose and Ragu, too. *(A smirk. Icy again.)* Now, phase two. *(She pushes a button on the table. Out of the control booth, wearing a top hat and a lab coat with tails, rushes Sid Proctor. He's excited.)* I want you to meet somebody. *(Sid stands like a vulture next to Livy.)* Jeremy Marshall, this is Dr. Proctor.

SID: *(Extends hand.)* Howdy. I am the chief research specialist at this facility. I will be overseeing your experiments today. I have two doctorates, but you don't have to call me "Doctor-Doctor Proctor." And no, in case you were wondering, I'm not a proctologist. I can't wait to try out the adrenal cortex nerve stimulator.

JEREMY: Will this affect my ability to deliver pizzas on time?

SID: I don't know. We could make it part of the experiment.

(Suddenly, there is a horrible scream from one of the cubicles. A Volunteer is having a bad reaction to his experiment. He yanks the headset from his head, tears off the electrode patches, and runs into the main lab. Clearly, the poor "specimen" is in pain. Emergency lights flash. The "William Tell Overture" blares, trying to drown out the pathetic cries so that other volunteer "guinea pigs" don't bolt. Security Guards 1, 2 rush in and subdue the enraged Volunteer, forcing him to the ground. Sid pulls a hypodermic from his lab coat pocket and administers a sedative. Guards 1, 2 drag the Volunteer's limp body offstage. Sid returns to the table.)

JEREMY: What was that all about?

LIVY: What?

JEREMY: That...that...*that!*

SID: Oh, that. Nothing.

JEREMY: You call a major meltdown, nothing?

(Livy grabs a chart from a nearby cart.)

LIVY: Let's see. Cubicle E-7. Volunteer number VXL025KM0368Y199T. Medulla Oblongata. One milligram of radioactive isotope PV-3 in a .001 saline solution.

SID: Darn. That's the third time this week. Only Tuesday.

LIVY: Say, wasn't that Roger Sheffield? The CFO?

SID: Yes, "The Chef" himself. Dibbs thought he cooked the books one too many times, and it was time for Roger to move on to another corporate "kitchen." Dibbs gave him a choice. Before he got to "or," Roger said he'd take his chances as a volunteer rather than go to jail. Too bad. Nice guy. Lousy guinea pig.

LIVY: I heard we may downsize—close the facility.

SID: Goodness, no. *(Aside.)* I never should have left Jersey.

JEREMY: What's going to happen to him?

SID: Won't know for awhile.

LIVY: Sometimes these things work themselves out.

JEREMY: Sure. What work do you think a cataleptic klutz can do?

SID: Sometimes, it's for the best. Some of our clientele...well, let's just say they lack certain qualities to acclimate themselves in society, to assimilate, to fit in—

LIVY: Look at Irene.

SID: Irene's a perfect example. When she came to us, she was a mess. Frowsy, undisciplined, late, chain-smoker. A ballerina who looked she was clog dancing.

LIVY: Now she's presentable and punctual—

JEREMY: What do you expect? She's a comma.

IRENE: Comma, beautiful, comma.

SID: Her life is better for it. Trust me. She knows her place.

(Irene sets her papers aside and steps on a chair so that she can climb on top of the desk. She sits in a half-lotus position to meditate.)

LIVY: Are we ready?

SID: Let's get on with it.

JEREMY: Hold on. I'm not so sure.

LIVY: Mr. Marshall, it's going to be okay. It's not always like this. It's not always "Sid's Circus." Now come over here, sit down, and we'll get you outfitted.

(Sid's cell phone rings. He answers it.)

SID: *(Into phone.)* Sid. What's up? *(Pause.)* Thanks. I owe you one. *(Puts phone away.)* CEO Alert. Putter-head on his way.

LIVY: You mean he's not playing golf? Must be serious...

SID: Yep.

LIVY: Oh, crap.

(A Technician brings an assortment of electrodes and a headset that resembles a bicycle helmet. As the Technician hooks Jeremy up to the

gear, Eugene Dibbs, wearing a mismatched golf outfit and carrying a golf club, strides in, accompanied by Office Lackies. As Eugene takes Sid aside, the lights fade on Livy and Jeremy. Spot on Sid and Eugene. Office Lackies, bearing charts and position papers, take notes.)

SID: *(To Eugene.)* What a surprise, sir.

EUGENE: No surprise. You had radar out.

SID: An informed employee is a prepared employee.

EUGENE: Can it.

SID: Yes, sir.

EUGENE: I hear we had another failure. What's that, third this week?

SID: Ah, no...second, I think.

EUGENE: *(To Office Lackies.)* Look it up.

(Office Lackies scan papers.)

LACKIES: Third.

EUGENE: That makes 16 total, right?

SID: According to my figures, it's only a dozen...or so.

EUGENE: Darn. And how many dead?

SID: None, sir.

EUGENE: None?

SID: It's right here in my reports.

EUGENE: Your reports are about as useful as a driver on a par three. Company policy is to falsify reports. That's how we stay in business.

SID: I can doctor with the best of them, sir.

EUGENE: Now we know what your second "doctorate" stands for.

SID: Very funny, sir.

EUGENE: Sid, I'll tell you what's not funny. What's not funny is my having to hold a press conference to answer allegations of malfeasance and, in the words of a Washington Post reporter, "Machiavellian machinations."

SID: Lord knows we're only incompetent.

EUGENE: Speak for yourself, Sid.
SID: Sorry, sir. I was only trying to help.
EUGENE: If you really want to help, then you can take this press conference for me.
SID: Sir, if I screw up—
EUGENE: I'm counting on it. You're my built-in scapegoat.
SID: Sir, I could jeopardize the program. The corporation.
EUGENE: Just say "no comment."
SID: What if I forget?
EUGENE: Then don't say anything at all.
SID: Sir, I'm not good in front of crowds.
EUGENE: Would you look better in front of an unemployment line?
SID: Point well taken. How will I explain your absence?
EUGENE: Tell the truth. Tell them I'm on the golf course.
SID: Sir, won't that seem contrary to the model of a modern major—
EUGENE: Got it covered. Here are the facts: according to Forbes magazine, there is a direct correlation between the amount of time a CEO spends on a golf course and profitability. The more hands-off a chief executive officer is, the more profits rise. And I'm certainly a hands-off kind of guy, wouldn't you say?
SID: Yes, sir.
EUGENE: I'm not afraid to delegate responsibility to get the job done. I take great pains to pick my fall-guys, isn't that true? Just because I'm in charge, why should I take all the blame?
SID: You have a great eye for failure, sir.
EUGENE: That's why I picked you, Sid. A perfect fall-guy. Only a matter of time.
SID: Appreciate your vote of confidence in me, sir.
EUGENE: Wouldn't you say my "laissez-faire" policy works, Sid?
SID: As long as we doctor the books, sir.
EUGENE: Remember that. While I tee off at 2:00 pm, you'll meet the press in the foyer.

SID: I'll be prepared, sir.

EUGENE: Whoever asks about my whereabouts, get his name, and cancel our subscription.

SID: Certainly, sir. *(Pause.)* Anything else, sir?

EUGENE: Try not to turn it into a circus.

(The CEO and Office Lackies turn heels and disappear into corporate Never Land. Sid returns to Livy and Jeremy. Jeremy looks like an octopus with all the electrodes and wires hanging from him. Lights up full.)

SID: Ready?

LIVY: What did putter-head want?

SID: He's going to fire me unless I speak to the reporters.

LIVY: *(Laughs.)* You? You'd get stage fright talking to a roomful of corpses. This program is D-O-A.

SID: Shhh. You'll scare the clientele. Now, where were we? Who is this again?

LIVY: Sid, this is Jeremy Marshall. He's here for a background check.

SID: Oh, darn. I was hoping it would be for something more exciting.

JEREMY: I keep telling you, I just want to deliver pizzas. Why can't you understand that?

SID: Young man, how would you like to join me in a detective hunt? Help me detect spatial and temporal patterns of the Noggin gene in the post-adolescent hippocampus?

JEREMY: Well, the—

SID: Livy, wouldn't he be a great candidate to measure the electric field and membrane potential of brainstem neurons by confocal microscopy?

JEREMY: I don't want to become a comma or semi-colon or any type of punctuation, period. I change my mind. I want out of here. Now.

SID: But a mind is a terrible thing to conceal. Won't you reconsider?

JEREMY: If you don't get me out of this electric web right now, when I get free, I'll go to the authorities and tell them what I saw – how some poor slob got vegetized.

SID: That could be embarrassing. Livy, do you think he might?

LIVY: You wouldn't dare.

JEREMY: Try me.

SID: Okay. Okay. Let's start over. Here's the deal. No experiments, just questions. We'll record your answers via the electronic harness, so we can get paid by the employment agency.

LIVY: Just questions and responses.

SID: I assure you that poor fellow will get the best medical care free of charge and a healthy bonus for his time and trouble.

JEREMY: Pain and suffering.

SID: That, too. So you'll be out of here in ten, fifteen minutes. Nobody hurt and everybody wiser. So what do you say, Jeremy? Is it a go?

JEREMY: Yeah, okay. I really want that job.

SID: Good for you! I'll leave you in Livy's care. *(To Livy.)* If you need me, I'll be in my office. Got to cram for the press conference. *(He exits.)*

LIVY: What he really means is that he's going to practice squirming.

JEREMY: Poor guy. Like a deer in the headlights and doesn't know it.

LIVY: Let's get started, shall we? Now, Mr. Marshall, the purpose of this interview is to determine whether you have the moral fiber to perform the job you're being hired for.

JEREMY: I thought I only had to have a good set of tires.

LIVY: To the point, Mr. Marshall.

JEREMY: Jeremy.

LIVY: I beg your pardon.

JEREMY: Call me Jeremy. Otherwise, it sounds like you're talking to my father.

LIVY: It's against the rules. Must maintain objectivity.

JEREMY: You have pretty eyes.

LIVY: Beg your pardon?

JEREMY: I like how those tiny flakes make your eyes sparkle.

Look like stars.

LIVY: Mr. Marshall, please!

JEREMY: I'll stop.

LIVY: As I was saying, the final part of your job interview is to take the Thurgood Audio-Visual Personality Profile Test. The T-A-V-P-P-T.

JEREMY: 'Course, your hair's too short. Makes you look butch.

LIVY: Mr. Marshall! What bus—

JEREMY: Don't know about your teeth. Because you never smile.

LIVY: Mr. Marshall. Jeremy. You will refrain from any personal remarks about my person. If you don't, I will terminate this interview and send you back to the sludge pile you came out of. Am I clear? I will not tolerate sexist remarks. Do you hear?

JEREMY: Loud and clear.

LIVY: Now then. This is more than your standard lie-detector test. The equipment allows us to literally see and hear what you're thinking. For my doctoral project, I developed software which allows the T-A-V-P-P-T to access "mental archives," as I call it.

JEREMY: I'd call it a trip down memory lane.

LIVY: Close enough. Your past is on display. R & D is working on the upgrade. Based on your attitudes in the present, we will be able to extrapolate future behaviors. Isn't that exciting?

JEREMY: Whoopee.

LIVY: Jeremy, I'm going to insert the card, and then the program will start.

JEREMY: Fire away.

LIVY: Now, the way it works is I'll ask you a question.

JEREMY: What if I don't understand the question?

LIVY: (*Ignoring him.*) You'll have ten seconds to respond consciously.

JEREMY: I was never good at timed trials.

LIVY: When that time has elapsed, your subconscious will override, and we will either hear what you're really thinking, or we will see an image from your brain projected on the view screen above. The stronger signal will prevail, audio or visual.

JEREMY: Sometimes I'm a total blank.

LIVY: If you lie, your subconscious will go into default mode, and your verbal response will be corrected by a visual or auditory one. Any questions?

JEREMY: What if I mess up?

LIVY: If you lie?

JEREMY: What if I get nervous and unintentionally miss a question?

LIVY: We'll hold you down and castrate you on the spot. *(Jeremy gulps. Livy smiles.)* My turn to be sexist. Okay? *(Jeremy nods. Livy inserts the card.)* These preliminary questions set the parameters for the program. We wouldn't want you to be missing a winkie, would we? *(Jeremy shakes his head no.)* Your name is Jeremy Marshall?

JEREMY: Yes.

LIVY: Correct. Your address is 9031 S. Decatur Boulevard, Las Vegas?

JEREMY: No. *(Jeremy receives a mild electro-shock through the helmet.)* Owww.

(From loud speakers we hear "5441 West Twain, Apartment 206, Las Vegas.")

LIVY: Why did you lie?

JEREMY: I forgot. I just moved. I haven't memorized my new address.

LIVY: Think before you respond. It could get bloody.

JEREMY: Don't remind me.

LIVY: Try again. You're 23?

JEREMY: Yes.

LIVY: You're unemployed?

JEREMY: Duh. *(Another electro-shock.)* Ah. Ow. Oooo.

(From loud speakers we hear "Unemployed.")

LIVY: Answer "yes" or "no." The program doesn't understand sarcasm.

JEREMY: Okay.

LIVY: You're applying for the position of pizza delivery person?

JEREMY: Yes.

LIVY: Okay. I think we're set. Now, for the good stuff. Do you consider yourself honest?

(Jeremy rips the helmet from his head and drops it on the table.)

JEREMY: Not gonna burn for that one.

LIVY: You can't do that. That's cheating. Put that on.

JEREMY: You put it on. A little jolt might loosen you up.

LIVY: If you don't cooperate, I'll terminate this interview. I'll call security and they'll haul you away.

JEREMY: Just like they did to that poor sap.

LIVY: Just like that. One more chance, Mr. Marshall. What's it going to be?

(Jeremy puts on the helmet.)

JEREMY: Go ahead. Zap me. I can take it.

LIVY: Do you consider yourself honest?

(Seconds tick. Jeremy hesitates. Finally from loud speakers we hear "yes" simultaneously as Jeremy responds "yes.")

JEREMY: Why didn't I get zapped?

LIVY: You were telling the truth.

JEREMY: But I'm not completely honest.

LIVY: No one is. Everyone steals paper clips from the office. Fudges on their income tax. Tells white lies. But you believe you are honest. It is your belief in your perception of reality that saved you.

JEREMY: Maybe I can get the hang of this after all.

LIVY: See, it's not so bad. Your "moral relativism" is in the normal range. Have you ever committed a crime?

JEREMY: No. (*Zap.*) I'm being honest. No. (*Zap. From loud speakers we hear "yes."*) I tell you I have never committed a crime.

LIVY: Let's test that theory. (*An image appears on the view-screen. It is Jeremy feeding pigeons.*) Well, what do you have to say for yourself?

JEREMY: That? What's wrong with that?

LIVY: That is against the law.

JEREMY: Feeding pigeons?

LIVY: Section 308-1b subsection 12 of the amended "Parks and Recreation" section of the city ordinance. Passed last January.

JEREMY: It was just bread.

LIVY: How do we know that? For all we know, it could be something that looks like bread. It could be bread laced with poison.

JEREMY: Why would I kill pigeons?

LIVY: Maybe you're a sadist? Maybe you're practicing for something bigger?

JEREMY: No way would I kill birds or anything else. During the Depression, my father's family practically lived off pigeon. There wasn't any money to buy meat. Dad told us, "Take care of the pigeons. They took care of us." That's all I was doing.

LIVY: Look at that picture closely. What about the bread on the ground?

JEREMY: What about it?

LIVY: It's litter, garbage, trash, refuse—whatever you want to call it.

JEREMY: It's biodegradable, for Pete's sake.

LIVY: It's a misdemeanor.

JEREMY: It's a victimless crime. You don't have any bird bodies. I did no harm.

LIVY: A law is a law. You broke it. I've caught the dreaded bread-dropper.

JEREMY: So I won't get the job?

LIVY: Not so fast. We're not done yet. It's not one minor crime
that can disqualify you. It's your cumulative record.

JEREMY: There's more than one?

LIVY: Check the view-screen.

[END OF FREEVIEW]