Trilliards

I'm nearly done with my second read through of Alan Moore's epic 2018 novel *Jerusalem*. At 1262 pages, reading this book once is quite the commitment. Reading it a second time (while also listening to the audio version, brilliantly delivered by Simon Vance) is most likely a sign of some sort of obsessive disorder. And yet, I persist.

This book stands alongside *Ulysses*, *Underworld*, *Les Miserables*, *The Divine Comedy*, Milton's mislaid Paradises, and the great Russkie epics as towering constructions of sustained genius. (Among many! Tell me your favorite.)

I don't toss the word genius lightly, especially *sustained* genius. Most of you know that *Infinite Jest* is my favorite novel. But I can't quite characterize it's brilliance as *sustained*. For all its glory, it has evident flaws, passages that make you puzzle just how DFW hornswoggled the editor into letting them pass.

But *Jerusalem* hits the mark. There's not an ounce of flab in its dozen-hundred pages. The voices across a cast of what seems like thousands are each distinct and alive, even – or especially – the ghosts. The detailed attention to history, the digressions on time, theology, free will…all of it rings like brass bells from one sentence to the next. And the architecture of the thing – a labyrinthine structure that is every bit as awesome as the multilayered cosmology of the Universe it purports to explain – is breathtaking.

It took Moore, renowned for his graphic novel masterworks like *V For Vendetta* and *The Watchmen*, ten years to complete *Jerusalem*. One chapter is rendered in the style of Samuel Beckett. Another unfolds in the style of *Finnegan's Wake* to give voice to the mental illness of Jame's Joyce's daughter Lucia; that one took him a full year of working on nothing else.

I know 1200-plus pages seems ridiculous. Who has the time, and can't he just get to the point? The answers are, "You do" and "Getting there (the point) is half the fun." So get cracking.

One of the central plot pegs concerns the four Master Builders, powerful Archangel types responsible for the shape and sustenance of the Universal order. While they go about their work of building the Past, Present, and Future, these characters simultaneously engage in an ongoing game of cosmic billiards, played out on a table so vast, and with so many balls – each of which represents a human soul (living, dead, and as yet unborn) – that it is called Trilliards to denote its universe-encompassing scale.

It appears that the Master Builders' shots are the force that directs each person's life and death. God may not play dice with the universe, but these guys are damn sure fiddling at snooker.

That's all I'll say about it for now, though I expect to come back to this work again and again. There is just so much to chew on, especially if you find yourself agonizing over the apparently deranged randomness of the universe that is the curse of the brooding class. Like me.

But that is not the point of this post. Or maybe it is.

I was glum on the way home yesterday from yet another week of hospital treatment for the dreaded C-word. Damnable random universe, etc. We were late leaving. We were hungry, but since the weather was bearing down on us we did not want to stop and

get caught in the storm that was chasing us.

After much dithering we pulled off at the Live Oak exit on I-10 to get snacks at the Busy Bee.Busy Bee is a glorified, Walmart-sized truck stop where people fill shopping buggies with various chips, pecan rolls, trucker hats, and tacky Florida souveneirs. The place has its own Facebook account, ffs. The Bee was swarmed with a line of cars waiting to turn in and some scary looking parking lot jockeying underway. But we were off the highway and hungry, so we turned away from the Bee towards fast food hell.

But lo and behold! There amidst the burger joints and the hate chicken shack was a Moe’s, purveyors of better-than-decent burritos. A sign!

Standing in line, I noticed a scruffian just ahead of me who looked familiar, but really and come on, who the hell am I likely to run into in some rando Moe’s on I-10?

The best 1-2 guitar combo you never heard.
Yup. My brother in guitaristic arms, Chris Griffin. We've been playing together since 2003 in Bongo Wrench. Over the past 20 years, Bongo Wrench has performed live four times (a grueling pace, I know) and recorded well over 200 CDs. Fully improvised and often quite stunning. Our Motto: We Can't Repeat That. Our other motto is: We Never Play the Same Thing Once. Damn, I miss those guys.

Anyway, other than running into him at a Crim show, I've not seen since Chris in a couple of years, him always on the road with Drivin and Cryin and running his recording and mastering studio in ATL, me in the Panhandle trying to string a few words together. Standing in line at Moe's, he was the farthest thing from my mind.

And then I realized. Called his name. He gawped at me for about ten seconds.

“Chrissie! Don’t ya know me?”

“Robbie!”

And then it was all hugs and holy shits and what the fuck are you doing here you’re supposed to be in the hospital or something. We sat and ate and caught up. Turns out we have a Bongo Wrench YouTube channel now to go along with our 200-CD box set.

We Can’t Repeat This
I was fair and true gobsmacked for the rest of the ride home, one of the coolest things to happen to me in quite a while. We could have left on time. We could have eaten earlier. The Busy Bee could have been less crowded. The Taco Bell – his first choice of destination – was slammed, so they ended up at Moe’s. The slightest variation in any of these utterly unrelated details would have had us just missing one another.

Out of all the bean joints in all the towns in all the world, we walked into this one.

And then it struck me.

Trilliards.

I’ll just be damned. That was one helluva bank shot.