

towards the unMaking of Heaven

Balant: A Beginning

by Sam Smith

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Balant: A Beginning
Sam Smith

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Author's Email – smithssj@aol.com
<http://www.freewebs.com/thesamsmith/>

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All the characters in this book are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

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Preface

When I first considered writing this book I envisaged it in the form of a handbook — for those unfortunate enough to find themselves marooned on a planet. No sooner did I attempt to order my thoughts to that end, however, than I realised the extent of my ignorance. For I know only of life on the planet on which I had been marooned. My circumstances, therefore, would not necessarily be those suffered on other planets. So I decided to write a history of my misadventure, relate how I and my companions coped with our straitened circumstances, recount the necessary states of mind that we adopted to deal with such a calamity, and detail our many mistakes; in the hope that you, the reader, will gain inspiration from our stumblings should some mischance place you in a similar predicament.

However, if you are one of those who are so complacent that you believe that nothing untoward will ever overtake you; or, if you are one who has no interest in the out of the ordinary events that overtake others, then I advise you not to open this book. You will only scoff disbelievingly at the story related herein.

Pi Pandy

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Chapter One

Describing the peculiar circumstances of my upbringing, the formative characters, my early education, the departure from my maternal home, my schooling, my fellow pupils, my dissatisfactions and my dreams.

My name Pi is a poor pun. My mother claimed that I was but four years old when she first noticed my propensity to abstraction. Hence Pi. Apparently by that early age I had already developed the habit of standing on one leg and staring into space. It is a habit I still own. To others it appears that I am in a trance: few believe me, when I tell them, that at such times my thoughts are tumbling pell-mell over one another.

Pandy was my mother's name. Of my father I know little, save that he was an itinerant technician. From him, I assume, I have inherited my physical wanderlust. While, from my mother, I have acquired the urge to know more, and which forever prompts me to move to places new.

I suppose that, in this brief summary of my early life, I should start at the beginning.

I was conceived out of a liaison between my mother and father on an outstation in another corner of this galaxy. My first memories, though, are of the outstation which my mother made her own.

The outstation existed to monitor a distant quasar. As everyone should know quasars are not to be trusted as natural phenomena; so my earliest thinking was bound about with the idea that things are not always what they seem. And my mother, being head technician, overseeing the machines which monitored the quasar, in explaining to me her function, she emphasised to me the singular importance of our intelligence, and the paramountcy of innovation within that intelligence. Machines cannot innovate: people can.

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Added to that was my mother's passion for music. On her early wanderings she had begun a collection of old musical Instruments and ancient musical scores. If I were to picture my mother now it would be with a cello between her legs, or a violin tucked under her chin, or frowning red-faced over a clarinet. For my mother was not content to simply collect musical scores, she also played and recorded them — recording first one instrument then another. Her ultimate ambition was to play a symphony. However, when I left, she was still puffing and scraping at quintets.

My mother, of course, tried to pass her enthusiasm onto me. Every day I had to practise one instrument or another. By the time I was eight I was playing violin duos with her. But, although I became proficient in the playing of all my mother's instruments, I lacked her zest. The best my mother would say of my playing was that it was 'technically competent.' That too gave me pause for thought: why, when my mother and I played an identical piece, would my mother's playing be lyrical and mine only an accurate rendition? Thus, at an early age, I was given to pondering intangibles.

To do justice to this sketch of my early years I feel that I must also tell of the other two inhabitants of our outstation, both of whom owned similar enthusiasms to my mother and which they too tried to press on me.

One was a horticulturist whose ambition it was to cultivate a nutritious plant which could be grown without light. Although while I was there all that he managed to produce were various forms of stinking fungi. Even so I was often inveigled into helping him with his seed propagation, indexing and research.

Our other neighbour's interest was metallurgy. His was the only enthusiasm on that outstation which was intended to bring self-aggrandisement. Consequently he was the most short-tempered with his failures. His dream was to manufacture an alloy as malleable as an infant's modelling dough, which at the same time would be as hard as tungsten. The intention being to make the alloy malleable only from the inside: the benefits of such a metal being readily apparent to all of us who dwell in space. The benefit he hoped to gain from it was to be the owner of the sole patent, and so become wealthy. I was also induced into helping him with his experiments; most of which ended in the alloy being either as hard as tungsten or as malleable as dough. Never both. His only real achievement lay in the manufacture of bizarre ornaments.

Add to that my own conventional education and you can imagine in what a rarefied atmosphere I was raised. I hope too that you have the

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imagination to see how limited it was. And by the time I was ten I began to sense this lack. My teaching machines had taught me the variety of life, and I knew only three living beings.

By the time I was twelve I had persuaded my mother to let me go to school. At first opposed to my leaving her care, my mother soon came to see that it was for my own good. She saw that I needed a tutor, someone disinterested to guide me, to show me what was worth learning — a task which she did not think herself fitted to undertake. And she harkened back to her own childhood, in circumstances similar to mine, said that she too had longed for companions her own age. I hastened to correct her, for I had no inclination to be with those my own age. That could they teach me? They, whose ignorance would be equal to my own? No, what I wanted was to meet with those who knew more than I did, who knew what I did not, so that I might learn from them.

When the supply ship next called my mother delivered me up to the Captain. She left me with many an injunction to take care of myself — to be careful of my diet, to exercise regularly, to be diligent in my studies, to keep her posted of my progress. But only one promise did she exact of me — to practise my violin every morning. For she had decided that the violin was the instrument best suited to me. Apart from a change of clothes, and a few of my mother's recordings, the violin was the only luggage I had.

"In time Pi," she said, "you will become one with it. Promise me."

I readily and gladly promised, and my mother, weeping, left the ship. As the airlocks closed, and we began to move away from the outstation, which until that moment had encapsulated my whole life, the Captain kindly turned to me and, to lessen the sadness of departure, to turn my thoughts to the future, he said,

"Well Pi, you've just taken the first and hardest step of all your future journeys." So it was that I took the name Pi on my travels with me. Subsequently I have been known to all I have met as Pi Pandey.

The school was on a supply station. Every week a freighter arrived from, or left for, another part of the galaxy; with, occasionally, and much to my excitement, an intergalactic freighter stopping by. When not in school I invariably found myself loitering about the docking bays eavesdropping on the crews' conversations. Where they had come from, whence they were bound, with my imagination making up for my ignorance of those places. Or I listened, enchanted, to strange beings conversing among themselves in even stranger languages. While

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I was at school many of the crews came to know me — the lone boy who hung around the dock bays.

For, despite my mother's indulgent smile, I had already known myself well enough to have foreseen that I would not enjoy the company or those my own age. I shared none of their facile enthusiasms. Few seemed as hungry for knowledge as I. So long as they did enough to satisfy their tutors the majority were content, were far more interested in playing games, in competing with one another in silly contests. While I was at that particular supply station free-fall diving through the gravityless centre was the fashion. A dangerous fashion. Several hit the sides of that long tunnel, suffered cuts and broken bones. It seemed that they had to artificially prove their daring, or their endurance. For, after the freefall diving, it then became the fashion to run around the rim of the station, the person who ran the most laps being acclaimed the winner.

To me this all seemed very foolish, as any excess must seem to a rational mind. The daily exercises I did in the privacy of my room were enough to maintain a healthy body. To take such exercises to extremes was injurious to health.

Nor did I share my fellow pupils interest in one another. On my mother's outstation everyone had been permitted their own idiosyncrasies, here they had to outshine. And that desire to outshine manifested itself in what, to me, was the most ludicrous of affectations.

On my mother's outstation the four of us had worn the simple tunics that all space dwellers wear — identical except for length and girth. Yet, on that supply station, as fashion dictated, they painted their tunics, cut pieces from them, stitched pleats into them or added bits to them. All it needed was for a crew to arrive from one of the cities with a slight alteration to their tunics and, within a week, all the tunics on the station were thus altered.

Indeed, on that small supply station, the adults were as childlike as the children. So competitive were they with their peers that they seemed to go perpetually in fear of being usurped. So it was that the majority of adults there unreasonably expected all children to be polite to them while they were not in the least polite to the children. Of all the inhabitants their sole ambition seemed to be to become envied by their peers. To that end they even daubed their faces.

I must confess that even I, when I had first arrived, not wishing to appear conspicuous, I too had tried to keep pace with those changing fashions. Although I had quickly relinquished all such attempts. For I had seen that, if I was a week ahead of fashion, then I was laughed at for

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a fool; and, if I fell a week behind fashion, then I was also laughed at for a fool. So I reverted to my simple unadorned tunic, which for a while became The Fashion; and so I was heralded as a trendsetter. When the fashion had passed I was told that I was out of date. In my weekly letter home I told my mother to tell the metallurgist that his fortune probably lay in selling his ornaments to the gullible inhabitants of supply stations.

As you will probably have gathered I was not popular with my fellow pupils. They mocked, not only my tunic, not only my refusal to take part in their games, but also my diligence in my studies and my faithful practise of my antiquated violin. They also took a puerile delight in making fun of my name — for a time I became ridiculously known as Twenty Two Sevenths.

I was not alone in being mocked by them. But those others who were like me, who were also assiduous in their studies; like me they did not seek the company of their fellows. The butt of many jokes we kept ourselves apart and aloof. So I made no friends on that supply station.

When I was fifteen I passed all the exams to qualify as a fully-fledged technician. But, although I was deemed to know the mechanics of machines and machine languages, I still felt that my learning had only just begun. I also knew that I could learn no more on that supply station, so I wrote to my mother asking if I could go to university.

She consented.

My tutor, a kind man, helped me to select a university. I wanted to study comparative technologies. The university that accepted me did so because I was able to play the violin — they had an orchestra. The university was in a city two galaxies distant. Where the supply station was at least a hundred times the size of our old outstation, I was told that the city was (at least!) a hundred times larger than the supply station.

My final weeks at the supply station passed in a fever of impatience. In her last letter to me my mother made me promise to send her recordings of the orchestra.

Two days after I received that letter I boarded the intergalactic freighter, the Yilan.

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Chapter Two

The journey: where I make one friend, puzzle on another, as well as on philosophy and humour. So does my broader education begin. Before calamity strikes.

On the Yilan, much to my surprise, I became friends with two other boys. Or, if I am to be accurate, I should say that they befriended me. Both were already aboard the ship when I joined it.

Dag Olvess was the eldest. He was eighteen, tall and well-proportioned, had just completed a year's scholarship with an eminent professor, was on his way back to a university in the name city as mine. That a city should boast more than one university... My anticipation was heightened by his every casual utterance.

The other boy was Malamud Bey. He was fourteen years old and shorter than I. And, where I felt privileged to be befriended by Dag, I could not understand why Dag sought the company of Malamud. For Malamud was exactly like those boys on the supply station. Where Dag and I both wore simple tunics, Malamud had circles and squares painted upon his. He was also forever playing games and practical jokes.

Although Malamud was officially listed as the ship's errand boy, his capacity seemed to be more that of mascot. The crew of six seemed to welcome his pranks and silly jokes by way of light relief — to offset the boredom of their journey. Because I must admit that, where for me the journey itself was exciting, I could imagine how its novelty could pall. After only a few days, once I had explored the ship, exhausted its novelty, I too began to look forward to my destination, pestered Dag with questions about the city and its universities.

The only other interest lay in the stations we put into. Apart from the mail, our cargo seemed to alternate between metal ingots and

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ore. We would put into a smelting rig, unload the ore, take on the ingots. At the next supply station we would unload the ingots, take on more ore. And so on, as we zigzagged across the galaxy.

At each smelting rig we also took off the crew, who were replaced by the new crew we had picked up at the last supply station. (I do not know if this is common knowledge, but those crew stay on the rigs for only a few months at a time. Because of the dangers inherent in the use of such intense heat — one of the early smelters is now a small sun — the crews are not allowed to take their families onto the rigs with them.)

Many of the rig crews we carried appeared to know Malamud, were pleased to see him. I could not understand why they found his strange use of words and his pranks so amusing. So one day, about our third week out, I asked Dag to tell me why he so enjoyed Malamud's company.

Before I give his reason I feel that I must relate the immediate circumstances that led me to ask such a question.

A few days previously I had been leant against a wall in my customary posture — one foot on the floor, one foot on the wall behind me — and I had been gazing out to space.

Malamud had already found me thus several times and had rudely broken my train of thought with inane questions such as, "What can you see out there?" And he had made a game of pretending to examine each star before us. Yet another time he had knocked on my head and had asked if I was in there. I fear that I must have displayed my irritation for, on the day I have mentioned, he crept up, unseen by me, and — where my lifted slipper was pressed against the wall — he squeezed in some contact adhesive. He then crept away to fetch Dag and some of the crew. On their return he ran up to me and said,

"Quick Pi! Quick! You should see what's on the other side."

Of course, when I made to follow him, my slipper being stuck to the wall, I fell flat on my face. Dag, Malamud and the crew all laughed at my graceless fall. I, though, did not see any humour whatsoever in it. And, when I managed to extricate my foot from the slipper on the wall and I said that I did not see anything amusing about a slipper being stuck to a wall, they laughed all the more. I did not understand; and my puzzlement seemed only to add to their humour. While all I could see was that I had been made to fall over and now I would have to buy myself some new slippers. Though, to be fair, I should add that at the next supply station Malamud did buy me a new pair of slippers.

However, before that I put my question to Dag.

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"You must understand Pi," he said, "that Malamud has a different intelligence to you. You have closed your mind to him. You must open it. If you do you can probably learn as much from him as you will from many a learned professor."

When I doubted that Malamud could teach me anything at all, except to avoid him, Dag said,

"I learnt more from Malamud in one sentence than I did from a whole year's scholarship. Let me explain. Soon after I joined the ship Malamud asked me what I was studying. Now, as any philosophy student will tell you, as soon as you tell anyone that you are a philosophy student you are asked what philosophy is, and of what use it is."

I too had been intending to ask Dag just those two questions; but, not having Malamud's brash manner, I had been awaiting a more propitious moment.

"I endeavoured to explain to him," Dag continued, "by telling him how philosophers had defined intelligence, quoting to him one of the earliest philosophers — 'I think therefore I am.'" (For his degree Dag's dissertation was to be on the pre-Space philosophy of the planet Earth, its influence upon our culture.) "With such a definition to hand," Dag told me, "we can treat with other species, decide whether they are of a reactive or a rational intelligence. Malamud thought only a moment on what I had told him, then he said, "So — I don't think therefore I'm not?" And laughing he left me. During the past few weeks I've been trying to come to terms with that one statement. Which in all likelihood Malamud has forgotten. You should cultivate his company Pi. He may surprise you too."

Although I did not understand Dag's appreciation of such an irreverent upside-down retort, I did heed his advice and sought Malamud's company. And the longer I knew him the more I did come to appreciate his bright and provocative intelligence. In the weeks that followed I even played games with him; although he frequently became enraged at my unsportsmanlike equanimity. For it did not matter to me whether I won or lost; and, try as I might, I could understand neither his taunting jubilation in victory nor his curses in defeat.

Nor could I understand his or Dag's laughter at some mischance. In fact my lack of humour became a standing joke to them And to the rest of the crew. I learnt to patiently wait for their laughter to subside, then I would ask why they thought a particular remark so funny. Such a question, though, often set them to laughing again. So, thereafter,

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unless I was thoroughly perplexed, I learnt not to ask for explanations where the humour of others was concerned.

As I learnt to tolerate their incomprehensible humour so they tolerated my lack of it. And I was grateful to them for that, glad to be invited on their jaunts and excursions — onto the rigs and supply stations. Through Malamud's effrontery Dag and I met many interesting people, saw many facets of our civilisation which I would otherwise have missed on that journey.

By the ninth week of our voyage, two months from our destination, we were all three firm friends, inseparable companions. That week the longest unbroken stretch of our trip began — going on a loop around the outer rim of a galaxy so that we could make maximum speed. On the far reach of that loop we encountered a cosmic storm of terrific proportions.

At the last supply station our Captain had been notified of a cosmic storm in the area. As the storm had lain directly in our path the Captain had decided to steer a course behind it.

So, for three days we skirted that storm, the freighter rocking and bucketing about. At the storm's height, to stop the ingots crashing through the ship's hull, the captain had them cocooned in webbing and switched off the gravity. Malamud and Dag invented a weightless race through the ship's corridors. As Malamud complained that I didn't put my heart into it, I was made the judge. Even then, much to their chagrin, I once forgot to look to see who had won.

On the third day the turbulence ceased; and, the danger appearing to be over, the gravity was reactivated. Little did we know that we were now entering the most dangerous phase of the storm. For, in the aftermath of the storm, came the cosmic dust.

In a newer ship I doubt that it would have had much effect, but the Yilan was an old ship, had passed through the rear of such storms many times before. The velocity of the dust resulted in it pitting the hull. Where the hull had been previously pitted, those minuscule grains of dust penetrated the Yilan's outer skin. Our atmosphere began to leak into space. I suppose that, from the time we first noticeably began to lose pressure, to when the first plates began to buckle, took less than an hour.

Apart from our freighter crew of six, we had two rig crews in transit. Including Dag, Malamud and I, that made nineteen in all. However, due to some oversight, we had only ten spacesuits on board. When this was discovered the rig crews began to panic.

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As it became rapidly evident that the hull was going to collapse, the captain decided to take everyone into the command module and blast it away from the freighter. The command module could be sealed off, had its own inbuilt power supply and life-support.

As Malamud and I went to rush off to the command module, Dag restrained us.

"It'll be hopeless in there," he said, "If the hull's leaking, so will that be. Come with me."

It says much for Dag's character that, in such desperate circumstances, both Malamud and I followed him without question.

We hadn't turned two corners before Malamud, divining where we were bound, said,

"The shuttle!" Then I too realised Dag's intention.

On this voyage the shuttle had been used only the once — to take a sick woman off an outstation. She had been on the Yilan just the one day. And that had been weeks before. In their panic the rest of the crew had overlooked it. And the shuttle, being stored within the ship, it would not have been damaged by the dust.

With the ship buckling in on itself we had difficulty unjamming the inner airlock door. However, once we were through, we wasted little time in disconnecting the umbilical from the ship, and we very soon had the shuttle's door fastened behind us.

The shuttle had three seats — the third one between and to the rear of the other two. As I was the last to enter I took the rear seat. We hurriedly strapped ourselves in.

"Take us out," Dag told Malamud. Malamud had occasionally been allowed to pilot the shuttle on the small journeys it had made.

"The door won't open," Malamud said.

"Blast the bolts," Dag told him.

"How?" Malamud was trembling.

Neither Dag nor Malamud had studied to become technicians.

I undid my straps, leant forward between them and scanned the list of emergency procedures. I tapped in the code. The perimeter of the outer door shuddered. Slowly the door drifted away.

"Now — take us out," Dag said.

As the shuttle moved forward I began to strap myself back into my seat. Just as we cleared the ship I realised that I had left behind my luggage.

"My violin!" I exclaimed. At that moment all that I could think of was my solemn promise to my mother. And with that single thought in my head, not aware of what I was doing, I stood.

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Through the rear ports I watched awe-struck as the Yilan, silhouetted against the glittering sweep of the galaxy, collapsed in on itself.

All forms of propulsion that we know of are but a rapid series of controlled explosions; even to the movement of our own bodies. As the Yilan's hull imploded, the explosions of its reactors became uncontrolled. Forced in upon themselves they became a critical mass.

"Sit down Pi!" Dag shouted at me. But I was transfixed by the spectacle before me, saw the hull shake as the command module blasted free, and a moment later, when it seemed that the hull could contract no more, there came a blinding flash.

And that is the last that I remember of our departure from the Yilan.

End of Sample

See next page for series synopsis...

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Towards the unMaking of Heaven... Series Synopsis

The whole series of 5 takes place within an intergalactic civilisation known variously as the Supreme Civilisation, or, more often, simply as Space.

The first novel, **Balant**, has Dag Olvess, Malamud Bey and Pi Pandy marooned on the very edge of the known universe. Narrator is the priggish Pi Pandy. En route from his mother's substation to university in another galaxy, the ship he is travelling upon encounters a storm of cosmic proportions. The ship about to implode, he escapes in the ship's shuttle with two other young men, Malamud Bey and Dag Olvess. They end up on the planet, Balant, where they adapt to cave life. Finding an abandoned robot they repair the shuttle, investigate the planet, discover that they share it with some primitive savages and a marine intelligence, called Nautili, who are also capable of intergalactic travel.... Nautili, savages, musicians, slave traders, kidnap, rescue..... generally it's an updated Boys' Own adventure.

The second novel is called **Happiness**, which is the name of a planet, whose moon one day disappears.

This story is told in the third person from the viewpoint of its many different characters - a young girl called Belid Keal, a bureaucratic Head of Department called Munred Danporr, the young policeman Drin Ligure, Petre Fanne an over-the-hill gymnast, Anton Singh a mysterious businessman, 'Dr' Tevor Cade, several Senators, the maverick bureaucrat Jorge Arbatov; and, among others, the two principal characters - Awen Mendawer, a photographer, and the heroine, the astrophysicist Tulla Yorke.

At the same time that the moon disappears all radio (speed of light) communication to and from that planet is blocked. Within Space only farmers and cranks live on planets. An unseen force destroys any craft that tries to leave the planet.... During the investigation into the missing moon, there are 2 love affairs and many considerations upon the nature of intelligence, government and society.

The third novel, **You Human**, is in 3 parts, Prologue, Leander Chronicle, and Epilogue. Prologue and Epilogue are told by the randy poet Farley Judd. He is also a Director of Communication. Free of any sexual hypocrisies himself, he tells of other station inhabitants' sexual obsessions with his Talker. Talkers are telepaths in instant communication with all throughout Space. Talkers male and female have long sinuous bodies and very short legs. Misused and abused, the Talkers start to disappear, leading to disruption throughout Space. Farley Judd goes in search of them.... Leading eventually to the Leander Chronicle. The

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whole - Prologue, Chronicle and Epilogue - being an SF consideration of love, sex and hatred.

The fourth, **Not Now: Death, Dreams & Reasons for Living**, is an SF exploration of desire, dreams and self-deceit. A clever and conceited young poet, Okinwe Orbinson, is recruited from his artificial city world - part of a moribund space civilisation - by a small mysterious stranger calling himself Leon Reduct. Only when Okinwe has accepted Leon's challenge is he told that his mission is to save a, by now, rumoured hybrid-human race, Talkers, from self-extinction.... (All who have read 'Not Now: Death, Dreams & Reasons for Living' have said that it has left them feeling weird for days after.)

The fifth is **The unMaking of Heaven**. and is told in 3 strands, *The Recent Present, A History*, and *The Reconstituted Part-Memory of the Shining Knight Compiled Here as Narrative*. All of the characters are post-organic beings, minds become machines, calling themselves Synths or Eternals. Some Synths - led by the Shining Knight - decide that all Synths, including Sixthetes and Puzzlers, are Abominations, themselves included, and they set out to destroy them all. The survivors are those who hid. As did the Shining Knight....

Series 2, **Happiness**, is available now (release, September, 2009)...

http://www.thebooksale.com/zen-cart/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=88&products_id=460