

## **Chapter One:** **In The Beginning**

Everyone in the universe feared that Bill Friday's writing career was completely finished. This included his longtime agent Bernie who, through thick and thin, good times and bad, had represented Bill ever since he graduated at the top of his class from the prestigious College of Leaflets, Pamphlets and Brochures, which was located over in the working class galaxy of Bumstead 9. This was the same literary university that produced such great authors as Orenthal-Yanni, Lily Throckmorton and of course Stokes Von Stokington, author of the crime autobiography *How I Infiltrated The Choonagian Mafia And Didn't Live To Tell About It*.

It had been centuries, however, since Bill typed a single word on his trusty Luxelite III typewriter, model number 1001, a machine that had spewed out trillions of words over a very lengthy and lucrative writing career but was now as idle as a twenty five year old unemployed stoner living in his parent's basement. Rust had developed on many of the type bars due to severe inactivity and stagnation. Bill was deadlocked in the midst of the most crippling bout of writer's block he had ever experienced and it had completely paralyzed his creativity and his ability to think on a calm and rational level. He'd plunged head first into every author's nightmare by a crisis of boredom, procrastination, alcohol and, at times, simple, good old fashioned laziness.

Worry lines permeated just about every reader's face as they rummaged through newspaper articles and gossip magazines trying to figure out what had happened to one of the greatest writers the universe had ever known. Bill's writing comeback was surely inevitable, everyone tried to convince themselves, but no one knew exactly when it would occur.

Unaware of Bill's devastating creative brain cramp, the usually optimistic Bernie now found himself imagining worst case scenarios that became exponentially more serious and frightening the more he thought about them. He rushed over to Bill's home in a desperate effort to try and ease his mind and also locate his client, who hadn't been heard from in about three hundred and fifty years.

As he approached the mansion that Bill lived in and worked from, the first obstacle for Bernie to overcome was trying to get through the overgrown rainforest that now fully engulfed Bill's palatial compound. He began weaving and bobbing his way through the vines and branches, tripping and falling and stumbling over stones and tree stumps and garden

benches along the way, finally making it to the inside, only to have to fight his way even further through more vines that had breached the interior of the home.

Bill's mansion was certainly an ode to excess and he would be the first one to gladly admit it. Every room was the size of sports stadium and was lavishly decorated from floor to ceiling with the finest, most expensive furniture and art that money and credit could buy. The purpose was meant purely for impressing his friends so that they might be overcome with jealousy and desire and, if they were lucky, would have to be rushed to the hospital because of it. His mansion had been listed as one of the top private homes that one could literally die from envy if they weren't careful, which was why Bill had to stop throwing parties. At this point, however, there was no clear distinction between the inside of the home and the outside. It was now one continuous path of mutinous vegetation that consumed the stadium-sized rooms and everything in it.

After hours of hacking and chopping his way through, Bernie finally reached the office where he found Bill slumped in his Ergo Fit Adjustable Mesh High Back office chair, staring wistfully at a slowly disintegrating Luxelite III typewriter. A single blank sheet of paper jutted out of the top and reflected some of the table light back onto Bill's equally blank face. None of his eyes blinked.

"Bill?" Bernie cautiously called out to the completely motionless and seemingly un-alive writer. Crumpled sheets of paper that littered the entire floor crunched under his feet as he slowly approached Bill's desk.

Without warning, Bill looked up, startling Bernie who fell backwards but was saved by some low hanging vines that had entangled themselves between the coffee table and the couch. Bill shot out a huge smile, genuinely pleased to see someone after all this time.

"Bernie. Hi, what's going on?" he enthusiastically responded.

"B...Bill, what are you doing?" Bernie asked, brushing himself off as he freed himself from the vine nest. "We've been trying to reach you for a very long time."

"Who?" Bill asked. "Who's been trying to reach me?"

"Everyone!" Bernie blurted out.

"Oh," Bill said as he waved over the typewriter and blank sheet of paper, "well, you know, I'm just working on some story ideas. What...what time is it? Is breakfast ready?"

"Bill, no one has heard from you in centuries. Your pool is now being used as an anchovy farm by an indigenous tribe and you now have the dubious distinction of being voted Most Likely To Be Completely Forgotten

About If He Doesn't Show Up In The Next Five Years by more than half of the universe.”

“You know, that’s an honor in some cultures,” Bill niftily responded.

Bernie quickly glanced at his watch, “and, it’s four o’clock in the afternoon. Breakfast was a long time ago.”

Bill stood straight up, “Anchovies! You know I’m allergic to them don’t you?”

He stretched his one tentacle-like arm baaack over his head for a while and then extended it waaay out in front, arching his back like a kitten who was frightened by its own image in the mirror, “I was just starting to work on a...I was just beginning a...” Bill stopped and looked at the blank sheet of paper, placing his suction cup-like hand under his two chins. “Exactly how long have I been sitting here?”

“Well, a few centuries at least, that’s what I’ve been trying to tell you,” Bernie replied, relieved that his client was okay, but wondered how even the most reclusive writer could possibly have the discipline to sit in front of a blank sheet of paper for over three hundred years. “You know that your house has been taken over by a rainforest don’t you?”

Bill stretched some more, really getting the cramps out this time, “Yeah, I was going to call the gardener...I just never got around to it.”

When Bernie walked over to the typewriter and tried to pull the blank sheet of paper out, it disintegrated into a fine powder and gently wafted into the air. The typewriter also disintegrated. He looked at the pile of dust on the desk and finally came to an understanding, “Writer’s block, huh?”

Bill was still stretching left then right, then left, “What? No, I just was...making some edits...there was a...” Bill’s eyes finally landed on the same dust pile that Bernie was looking at, “...there was a typewriter here a minute ago.”

“These things happen, Bill. Do you need to go on a sabbatical? Maybe take a vacation, go somewhere and get recharged?” Bernie picked up the titanium trans-gamma phone that was sitting next to the pile of dust, “I’m going to book a hotel for you in Densely Foggy Springs. You go there, you get rejuvenated and you take all the time you need, okay buddy.”

“You know, Bernie,” Bill smiled as he gently took the receiver away from his agent and placed it back in its cradle, where the whole phone then turned into a pile of fine powder just like its desk mates did, “I...I feel really good right now. I actually feel totally refreshed.”

Bill continued to stretch some of his muscles that hadn’t been used in quite a while, “I just need a little more time. I’m on the brink of an idea for a story that will pull me out of this funk.”

“Are you sure? Because you don’t need to be pressured to write, Bill. Think about going away for a while. Just think about it.”

Bill turned his torso side to side to get some of his inner juices flowing again. “Say, who let all the houseplants get out of control?”

“Bill,” Bernie finally said, “you know I’m on your side. Just take some time and let it come naturally.”

“Thanks, Bern,” Bill replied. “Let me just wash up and I’ll get back to it. But first...” Bill started to speak, as he looked around at his home and saw for the first time in a long time just how far things had gotten out of control in his house. A forest of Albino Spruce trees occupied the entire kitchen where another indigenous tribe had set up a small, but profitable logging industry. They often did business with their neighbors who were expert lawnmower manufacturers and resided in Bill’s living room, a place that had turned into a sweeping grassy plain. They used the valuable grassland trimmings to barter with the loggers for much needed lumber, which was unavailable in the grasslands. The loggers used lawn trimmings to make herbal tea. Bill then casually shifted his gaze far off beyond all the commerce and into the distance as if to look into some kind of new chapter that he would write for himself, “...I’m going to need a typewriter.”

Like most successful Immortal Beings, Bill Friday resided in a very cushy estate that was located in a neighborhood at the far end of what was known to uncreative mortal beings as Outer Space. Specifically, he resided in a gated galaxy called The Manor, which was an exclusive place to call home for many well-to-do Beings who hailed from all avenues of success. The famous rock star Torque Melthouse owned ten colossal homes here just on one block alone. His purchase of so much real estate was due primarily to a party that he threw roughly a thousand years ago to celebrate the finishing of his fourth studio album and has been out of control ever since. Each night a home would get completely destroyed to its foundation, where the partygoers would then steer their way to the next house while a construction crew came in behind them to begin rebuilding the demolished house. In a thousand years of partying the cops were only called one time and it was because someone had accidentally locked the liquor cabinet.

The famous 3D painter Santo Filiunga also called The Manor home. He lived in a giant modern steel and glass structure that was several stories tall and was covered in giant spikes that poked anyone that tried to get into the building.

The Manor also had several amenities that residents who were stressed out from being so wealthy and so famous could utilize for rest and

relaxation. They had a zero gravity polo field. There was a Black Hole that had been converted into a quaint little bed and breakfast. One of the spiral arms of The Manor was one giant nail salon/water slide. And they even had an ice cream truck that came around once a day and sold every flavor of ice cream known to the universe except vanilla.

Bill's own success was the result of having written some of the most popular novels in the universe, which were often made into feature films shortly afterwards, and it afforded him the opportunity to live in such a splendid and insulated area while the rest of the universe remained in a constant and unending state of struggle and fear.

The rainforest that had previously engulfed Bill's compound while he was frozen in the grip of writer's block was now dramatically cut back thanks to the indigenous loggers, revealing the scale and luxury of Bill's vast property, part of which contained a sprawling hydroponic vineyard where he produced award-winning wines. A further look inside his palace one would be confronted with an impressive collection of blenders that Bill collected from tourist attractions all across the galaxy. There was a room filled with the results of Bill's old obsession, macramé, a craze that captured everyone's attention and then flamed out as fast as it had come.

Inside the master bedroom was a waterbed that some might describe as oceanic or sea-like due to its vast, almost preposterous size. It was a hundred miles across and a hundred miles wide and even had a shipping port near the footboard where cargo ships would make daily deliveries of sea containers that were filled with everything from sofas that converted into giant adding machines to do-it-yourself portable dairy farm kits. Cruise ships also stopped at the port and often dumped passengers off for the weekend where they would wander around Bill's bedroom looking at all the dirty laundry and wonder when it was the last time anyone cleaned this place.

The waterbed was also stocked full of one of Bill's favorite creatures in the universe, a creature that he had grown to love and ultimately respect over the years. They were called Sea Monkeys. Because they lived in extremely efficient civilizations that had no use at all for Immortal Beings and mostly because Immortal Beings took great offense to this, Sea Monkeys were very difficult to obtain due to the severe restrictions that had been placed on importing them into foreign galaxies where Immortal Beings simply weren't going to be ignored by someone who wasn't an Immortal Being. Bill first saw the tiny sea monster-looking rascals when he was vacationing in Densely Foggy Springs and accidentally swam up on a whole colony of them. They were so busy, he thought at the time, so busy ignoring

him with such disregard and paid him all kinds of no-never mind that Bill felt he just had to have them, so he shrunk the entire colony down to the size of a chickpea and hid them in his fanny pack until he got home.

Even though there were thousands of different species of Sea Monkeys that could be found in just about any corner of the galaxy, the species that Bill liked the most had little tails that curled up at the end and had pointy ears and were covered with reptilian type scales. This species also lived in tiny communities and often paired up for purposes of reproduction. If a Sea Monkey stayed single for too long they were often pressured by their older relatives that maybe it was time to find someone and settle down, for cryin' out loud. After a while the Sea Monkeys had developed the craft of farming and harvesting their own food, to the point where Bill no longer needed to feed them anymore. They often elected leaders to guide their miniscule societies along, distributing power and wealth as the leaders best sought fit for the entire community, all in the interest of the advancement of their species. Bill would spend days and weeks and months observing how these tiny sea creatures figured out how to survive and thrive all on their own without any outside help, especially without the help of an Immortal Being. It was all very cute to him and, like all Immortal Beings, he never gave any thought as to how this was all occurring.

“Sea Monkeys,” Bill thought to himself, “are for entertainment purposes only. Hmm.”

And Bill wondered.

And then he wondered some more.

And then it hit him.

Bill suddenly realized that his beloved Sea Monkeys, these organic creatures, were conducting their tiny little inconsequential lives without any support from him whatsoever. Most Immortal Beings were extremely insecure due to their unending body and trust issues, so, to make themselves feel better by feeling superior to someone they naturally gravitated towards the business of lording over some lower form of life that was completely helpless and relied heavily on them for simple existence. This 'benevolence' on the part of the Immortals usually gave their self esteem a quick boost and a little hope for the future, much like your friend who owns boxes full of unopened action figures and refuses to get rid of them because they may be worth a lot of money one day. You just never know. Anyway, the relationship was symbiotic, the Immortals were entertained by organic life and organic life unconditionally loved the Immortals for keeping them alive. These Sea Monkeys, however, didn't have the faintest clue that Bill Friday,

one of the greatest writers in the entire galaxy, even existed at all. And more interestingly to Bill, they didn't seem to care one iota.

This was exactly the epiphany that Bill was waiting for. He sat down in his favorite Corinthian Leather chair and began furiously pecking away at his brand new Luxelite IV typewriter, all the while thinking about Sea Monkeys.

Several months had passed and Bill Friday continued to stitch together the mind-numbing details of his latest writing project. His oval-shaped suction cup of a hand pounded on the keys of the typewriter, spitting out words and sentences and complex phraseology that may or may not have had anything to do with the story but he kept them in anyway. He was eager to not let this creative surge get away from him like it had the last time.

"This is going to be one of the most inspiring works I've ever written," he thought to himself as his words continued to spill out onto the page.

Bill went over his notes again and again, honing each sentence so that they fit neatly into his tightly woven story, refining each paragraph so that they practically read themselves. When it came to his writing, Bill believed that everything he produced was the greatest, the most fantastic, the most inspirational and the most entertaining. But this story, Bill imagined, was definitely going to stand out above everything he had ever done up to this point. It had to. The Universe depended on it.

Bill's office was lined with dark rhubarb wood and smelled like ice cream sundaes most of the time, while the rest of the time it smelled like a barnacle factory. Almost all of the intrusive vines had been removed except for a few of them that actually complimented the interior. There was a wall of trans-optical monitors that continuously displayed news reports, reruns of TV shows and old movies from all across the galaxy. He didn't necessarily watch any of the shows, he just kept them on for background noise and inspiration.

Bill himself was a large slug-like Being with twelve rather intimidating tentacles that protruded from his head where twelve eyes rested on the ends of each one. Behind his head he had a saddle shaped shell where a small blowhole was located near the center. On his right side he had one large tentacle with a suction cup on the end that served as his arm and hand. His mouth was a gaping, smiling hole with no teeth. Immortal Beings rarely required teeth.

It had been six months since Bernie rescued Bill from being totally overtaken by a tropical rainforest. Bill took a confident sip of his martini and then dialed a number on his brand new trans-gamma interstellar space phone. A holographic image of Bernie quickly appeared in front of his desk.

“Bernie. Hi, what’s going on?” Bill answered.

“I think you called me, Bill. What’s up?”

“I called you...oh yes, I did,” Bill replied. “Just finished the outline for the new project. I think this is going to be the one.”

“Outline?” exclaimed Bernie. “I thought you said you were going to finish it.”

“Change of plans,” Bill gleefully retorted. His excitement could hardly be contained. “Gonna let the characters tell the story this time.”

“The characters?” Bernie asked, a little stunned. He rubbed his head with his own suction cupped hand. “Are you sure?”

“Yep,” Bill took another swig of his drink. “I’ve been telling these stories for centuries and then it came to me, why not have the characters in the story tell the story themselves? Why do I have to do all the work?”

“Well, Bill, because you’re the writer.”

“It’ll be very visual,” Bill continued as he slowly swept his arm from one side to the other, imagining a great title that only he could see, “in fact, I’m pretty sure that there will be no reading required at all.”

“Isn’t that called a movie?” asked Bernie, a little more confused now.

“No, the characters will be real, live organisms and they will evolve as the story evolves. Writing characters on the page is one thing,” Bill said, “but to give these characters life and movement and freedom to think and make decisions on their own is something that macramé will never, *ever*, satisfy!” he finally admitted in a significant breakthrough.

“You know, I think I’ve actually told you that before,” Bernie answered politely.

Bernie and Bill’s professional relationship goes back millions of years to when Bill was starting out as a young writing student. Bill had a natural gift for writing stories that literally gripped the reader and held them hostage until the story was finished. He sent writing samples to thousands of literary agents until one of those manuscripts finally landed on Bernie’s desk. It was a short story called Dinglecake Jake. The story was about a rock hopper penguin that decided to buck the system and build an escalator to the top of the community’s traditional nesting grounds against the wishes of everyone else. In the end, construction costs skyrocketed out of control and ultimately plunged the tiny penguin into chapter 11 bankruptcy and everyone learned a

quiet lesson that penguins had no business grappling with engineering ideas and complicated financial plans since their brains were so small.

Able to recognize true talent, Bernie forged a partnership with Bill that, thanks to the popularity of his novels and the savvy of Bernie's business acumen, made them one of the most successful creative partners in the entire universe. Their friendship, however, was complicated in that Bernie always thought of Bill as a son, while Bernie had always been more like a trusted mechanic to Bill.

"Uh, I have to admit that sounds a little dangerous," Bernie was now more concerned than ever upon hearing this new twist. "That sounds like creating life, *aaand* that's not really your thing, Bill."

"I know it's not my thing, but telling stories is," Bill defended himself.

"But, you just said the characters are going to tell the story themselves."

"They will, but I'm still going to write the overall narrative."

"Uuh," Bernie didn't like the direction that Bill was headed with this new story, "this sounds awfully close to..."

"I know what you're going to say and I've already checked," Bill said in a reassuring tone.

"Checked what?" Bernie asked suspiciously.

"The Grand Scheme of Things," Bill replied.

"The Grand Scheme of Things?"

"Yes."

"What about it?"

"Well," Bill had lost his train of thought, "we, uh, don't have to worry about it. You know, about...about it. We don't have to worry. Heh heh. Hey!"

"Your new story is not going to interfere with The Grand Scheme of Things, is that what you're trying to say?"

"*Interfere!* That's the word I was looking for," Bill smiled as he refilled his martini glass with a high-grade alcohol called *DANG!*, a powerful intoxicant that was also used to jumpstart powerboat engines.

"Bill, I don't think that overhauling a whole genre isn't the best way to make a comeback right now."

'Overhauling' was a word that mechanics often used.

"Trust me, Bernie, it's not going to interfere," he said the word again, slowly, as if to savor it, "In-ter-fee~~eeer~~."

"Are you sure?" Bernie asked. "Because, that's what you said about your last book, remember? *How To Interfere With The Grand Scheme Of*

*Things And Not Get Caught*. That one almost got us both sent to the Trango Prison Fortress for the rest of our lives.”

“Listen,” Bill calmly reassured, “I was only pushing the envelope on that one. I was young and reckless and really good-looking. I wanted to find out where the boundaries were and now I know. I mean, even you have to admit that book of outdated laws is nearly impossible to understand.”

“Listen Bill, you’re one of the best writers in the universe, there’s no doubt about that. I honestly believe in you,” Bernie remarked. “Your books have made us both very, very wealthy. It’s just that after such a lengthy time out of the limelight I don’t think you should be toying with the authorities. Things have changed. They take this stuff very seriously, nowadays.”

“And so do I,” Bill quickly replied, this time in a more severe tone. “How many Beings do you know have even read the Grand Scheme of Things? Hmm? How many own a copy or even know where to *get one*?”

Bernie remained silent. It had been centuries since Bill had written anything at all. Although his books remained wildly popular, Bill’s stature as one of the better writers in the universe was slowly circling the drain. Bernie had always hoped that Bill would come out of his writer’s block with newer, fresher material, but nothing that would irk the authorities, and certainly nothing that would get them both sent to prison. Especially that prison.

“Listen,” Bernie finally broke in, “I understand where you’re coming from. But, The Grand Scheme is what maintains order in the Universe. Even you have to admit that.”

“Did you know,” Bill asked rather smugly, “that the original draft was written on the back of a children’s breakfast menu over the course of three mornings?”

“I didn’t know that,” Bernie answered. He did know, he was just placating Bill in order to avoid a long, drawn out discussion of whether he *really* knew or not.

“Did you know that the One who wrote The Grand Scheme of Things has never been seen since? Don’t you think that’s a little strange?”

“Gee, I didn’t know that,” Bernie fibbed. “Anyone know where he is?”

“Of course not! No one knows who to go to if they’ve got a question about something. We just blindly follow the rules in this book and never question what they mean.”

While listening to Bill, Bernie produced his own alcoholic concoction, a twizzler fizzy martini, which was a regular martini that was shaken, stirred,

shot into outer space, shaken again, and then put in a blender at three times the speed of sound. It was also made with several ounces of DANG!

“Because of these so-called *rules*, artistic integrity gets compromised. Every artist has to create their art only if it conforms to the rules of this book. Know what kind of art you have after that?” Bill asked.

“What’s that?” Bernie already knew.

“Pretty boring art.”

Bill did have a point. The lack of understanding of the Grand Scheme of Things by most of the inhabitants in the Universe was further complicated by the fact that over billions of years, hundreds of thousands of amendments have been tacked on to the original draft in an effort to better understand its meaning, ironically making The Grand Scheme one of the most complex and difficult to understand documents in history, not to mention the thickest children’s menu anyone has ever seen. Only the insurance giant Cosmos Insurance has a document that is slightly more intricate and baffling. It is an auto insurance policy that is so elaborate and convoluted that it attacks one’s sense of reason and logic, destroys it completely, and then sends the Being into fits of severe laughing until they finally lapse into irreversible madness immediately after signing.

The Grand Scheme of Things, as any Immortal Being will tell you, contained all of the rules and regulations of the universe that was used to guide and direct anything that existed, living or not. It provided law, order and stability. It gave everything a reason to exist, and if you found yourself fumfering around without a clue that usually meant that you and your species was about to be blindsided by extinction with no questions asked.

“You’re right,” Bernie quietly admitted. “You’re right. I’ll submit it to the Nature Counsel tomorrow and we’ll see if we can get this thing off the ground.”

“Fantastic!” Bill exclaimed excitedly. “I’ll throw a party tonight. We’ll celebrate.”

Bernie remained optimistically skeptical as he poured his drink down his throat where it immediately went to work blurring out Bernie’s neurons and synapses.

“Just bring ice,” was Bill’s last transmission before the trans-gamma phone on Bernie’s end went dead.

Bernie sat in his chair contemplating the project. He hoped it would go well. He honestly did. They would have to run it by the authorities and get their final endorsement before Bill could even begin, however. They would also have to clear up some long overdue legal issues that Bill was involved in before the Nature Counsel could approve his new story. This

was going to be a challenge, thought Bernie. Working with Bill often tested his lawyer and agent skills. But, after reading the latest treatment Bernie was confident that this project would run smoothly...he hoped.

Why did he always have to bring the ice?

Unbeknownst to Bill or Bernie, however, there would be an incident that would occur in the middle of Bill's great story that would call into question everything that The Grand Scheme of Things stood for and would involve, of all things, a lowly organic being. At the time of the incident the universe would be innocently gliding through time and space and, much like Bill and Bernie, would be unaware and oblivious that there were other forces at work that were completely out of everyone's control. For you and I, this was way, way, way back in the olden days when everything was new and shiny and relatively uninspiring. This is what historians often refer to as 'the beginning'.