

WATCHING THE AMBULANCE PULL AWAY from the curbside, I entered the dark club and asked the bouncer what was happening. "Some guy passed out in the bathroom. Overdosed on Special K."

"What the fuck is 'special K'? Isn't that a cereal?" "It's an animal tranquilizer. He took too much and went into a K-hole."

The term 'K-hole' was the most frightening slang I'd ever heard for a drug experience. Recreational drugs are supposed to induce euphoria and enlightenment, not shove you down a black hole and force an ambulance to haul away your drooling hulk.

It was at that moment that I knew I would have to try Special K.

ON A BLACK RAINY DECEMBER NIGHT a year later, a twinkly-eyed, goatee-wearing young man stopped me at a party and told me he enjoyed my writing. As we began talking, I pegged him as a "Dr. Buzz" type—my label for a white male who compensates for possible social awkwardness by knowing everything there is to know about illegal drugs.

Dr. Buzz revealed that he was on a paid sabbatical from work and, to pass the time, he'd been shooting ketamine hydrochloride—the medical name for Special K—into his ass muscles daily for the past eleven nights. He said that after doing ketamine, the "real" world seemed boring. He seemed bright and well-adjusted enough that I began to trust him. Touting the drug's glories, he and his bespectacled chum offered to share some K with my girlfriend and me. I still suffered from the impression that ketamine was merely a tranquilizer that would induce a heavily stoned "body high" rather than the most terrifying psycho-death trip of my life. He cautioned that since K impaired motor skills, it was not a social drug and we'd have to ditch the party and repair to his quiet lair far in Southeast Portland. He promised we'd be lucid after an hour or two and that he'd drive us home.

Foolishly, we agreed.

WHEN WE REACHED HIS SAD, FLAT HOME, the lights were off and a man was already there sitting in darkness, bathed in droning electronic music.

When Dr. Buzz flicked on the lights, the man's eyes were so glassy, he appeared retarded. He had reverted back to Apeman and looked at Dr. Buzz with faint recognition.

Dr. Buzz and Mr. Spectacles had already burned down some liquid ketamine into butter-colored powder for needlephobes such as me and my girl. He cut out three huge lines for us—enough to make a sandwich.

"That seems like a lot," I protested, sitting on a couch next to my girlfriend.

"No," he insisted, carefully drawing two syringe-fuls of liquid K from a vial with which to ass-spike himself and Mr. Spectacles.

NO NEED TO
DIE
TWICE

"That's a normal dose. You'll have to do that much to feel the full effect. You can do two lines, and she can do one."

He told us to snort it but to avoid trying to swallow it as if it were cocaine—just crush the crystals in our noses using our fingers. He said that within ten seconds, we'd feel a warmth in our feet that would rise through our bodies.

After snuffling my two monster rails, I handed the bill and mirror to my girlfriend, who inhaled her portion. I closed my eyes for a second and then looked over at her. She appeared to be already



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dead.

BOOM! Almost instantly I felt warmth and a savage disorientation. I began to feel sucked inside a hurricane's slow-motion roar. The floor dropped out beneath me. Everything was TOO BRIGHT AND TOO LOUD. *Wow...wow...wow...somebody turn this music off and turn the goddamned lights off...it's too much...it's too much...too much...too much...oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit.*

The one-level house suddenly had an upper and a lower level. It wasn't a house anymore—it was a spaceship casino. A deafening strobe effect pounded my head as if I was tied to the bottom of a subway car as it screamed through the Bronx. Faster than I could blink, images and sounds flew by like neon shrapnel. I was being munched alive by a giant digital machine, a computer-screen wonderworld where my identity was pulverized and pasted into a cold, endless tapestry. Pieces of

UWA
NEVER DO
"SPECIAL
K"
AGAIN

I myself were chopped up and spat back with epileptic speed.

I was being smashed down and torn apart and fused with "the one" against my will. I was separated from myself and could observe my identity stolen and broadcast on the Jumbotron screen of existence. Even my voice had become digitized and sounded as if I was speaking into an electric fan.

A crushed pile of plastic chips. Utterly synthetic. Bland virtual-reality mazescapes, the triumph of math over feeling. Dead flat cybernetic soullessness. Mechanical insect brain. The only emotion left was the most primitive one—fear.

I was a biology-class frog, my brain severed from my spinal column, pinned down in a steel tray, unable to move or feel.

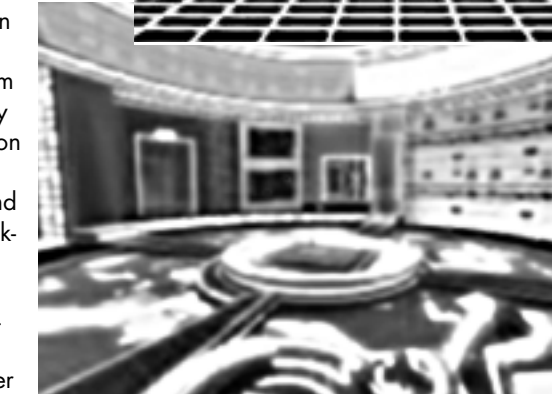
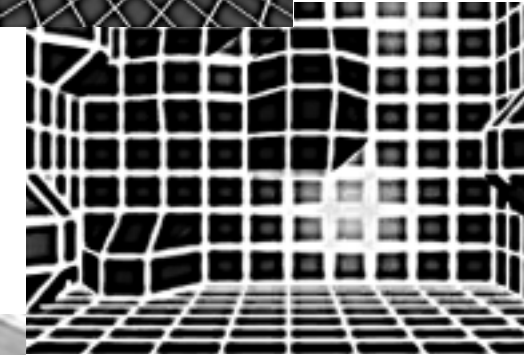
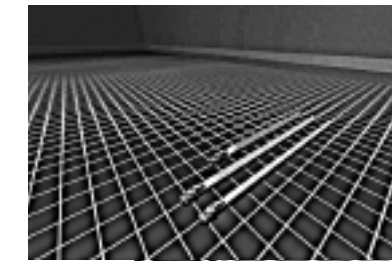
Suddenly all was quiet and eternal. All the colors were burned to ash. Cold, dark space and emotionless planets. A dull grey orb surrounded by hissing blackness. Many things are deader than we'd imagined.

Rearing my woozy head, I realized where I was. I just saw shadows of other humans. No one was stirring. The music had stopped and the lights were off. A James Brown bobble-head doll on the table next to me reflected the middle-of-the-night moon rays and radiated cold, sadistic, voodoo death.

I squeezed my girl and said, "I love you." I heard my voice, but it came from two feet above my head and over to the left. She replied with an "I love you." I hovered over her as she stood in downtown Portland where I met her...I saw where she fit in my life's thread, all the events that led up to meeting her and winding up here, lost in a K-hole. We kept saying

"I love you" over and over again to save both of us, huddled against a blizzard of blackness.

She said she had to leave. She had to go. Had to get out of there. She stood up and I reached after her. *Don't go. As bad as it is here, it's worse out there.*



She took two steps and collapsed on the floor.

I stood up. I looked down at my feet, which seemed to be only three or four inches below my chin. On the floor beneath me was the unconscious Mr. Spectacles with a Mongoloid grin.

I began vomiting. On the couch. On the floor. On the doorknob while walking outside. On the rock garden. Power-puking until all I could taste was my own stomach acids and the rank chemical ketamine taste. My eyes were watering, my foggy breath shallow.

My girl and I sat out in the carport in thirty-five-degree December rain for a half-hour, feeling no cold. Every time I opened my eyes to focus, I saw three of everything swirling around kaleidoscopically.

She finally managed to call a cab. Vomit rose in my throat the whole way. At a stop light, I opened the door and sprayed gut juice onto the asphalt.

"Don't do Special K," I mumbled to the driver as he pulled up to my building."

I FELT A SPOOKY MALAISE for the next week.

Everything seemed dead or in the process of dying. Cheap computer-generated TV ads and my rattling kitchen-stove fan threatened to suck me back down into the K-hole.



Researching ketamine on the Internet, I discovered that the recommended powder dose is a small "bump" rather than the twin peaks I inhaled. One study determined that users experience memory loss and "mild schizophrenia" for days after ingesting it. I also learned that Special K can induce seizures and cause severe brain damage in epileptics and left-handers.

I'm left-handed and mildly epileptic. Thanks, Dr. Buzz.

KETAMINE WAS INVENTED IN 1962 as a safer alternative to PCP, the drug of bloodthirsty psycho legend. Its molecular structure is almost identical to that of its scari-er older brother.

Ketamine was employed as an anesthetic during the Vietnam War and is still being used on house pets and children worldwide. Its



painkilling properties are so powerful, it's used in burn trauma and for post-amputation stump pain.

Along with PCP, DXM, and nitrous oxide, ketamine belongs to a class of drugs called "dissociatives," so named because the user experiences a clear split between ego and body. Physicians refer to such a hallucinogenic near-death state as an "emergence reaction."

Some people find the blotting out of self to be euphoric, an erasure of all self-consciousness; others, like me, find it nightmarish and run screaming back into themselves.

After media horror stories of its use as a "date-rape drug," the Feds finally declared ketamine illegal in 1999. You can still buy it over the counter in Mexico, which is where Dr. Buzz procured his stash.

Ketamine's most ardent spokesman was the neuro-physiologist John Lilly (pictured below), who invented the isolation

tank in the 1950s. The films *Day of the Dolphin* and *Altered States* are based on Lilly's writings and experiences. Lilly is perhaps best known for his extensive studies trying to decipher dolphin communication patterns. What's not as well-known is that he was a lifelong K addict rumored at one point to be injecting himself with ketamine once an hour twenty times daily for the better part of a year.

After enough time surfing the K-hole with dolphins (he never gave K to dolphins but claimed he once dosed one with acid), Lilly started believing that the gentle cetaceans were intermediary entities between humans and the space-alien agents of the "Earth

Coincidence Control Office (ECCO)." In the 1970s, he went so far as to warn President Gerald Ford that the dolphins could save us from ECCO. Lilly once told a reporter:

Dolphins have personalities and are valuable people...But what about their spiritual life? Can they get out of their bodies and travel?...I suspect that they're all ready to talk and carry on with us if we are not so blind. So we open up pathways to them with ketamine, LSD, swimming with them, falling in love with them, and them falling in love with us.

In short, John Lilly was insane, and ketamine probably played a role in his cognitive unspooling. He spent his life in and out of the funny farm.

Marcia Moore, a wealthy heiress and astrologer, was another ketamine cheerleader. She wrote a 1978 book called *Journeys into the Bright World*, which included this eager endorsement of falling down the K-hole:

If captains of industry, leaders of nations could partake of this love medicine the whole planet might be converted into the Garden Of Eden...

On a frigid night early in 1979, Moore climbed into a tree, injected ketamine, dozed off, and froze to death.

The creepiest endorsement of ketamine, and the one which came closest to emulating my experience, is by David Woodard, described as a "requiem composer and a Dream Machine fabricator." His essay "The Ketamine Necromance" includes this psychotic passage:

Although ketamine is a drug administered and experienced by living beings, the necromantic communications facilitated by its use tend to benefit the dead, offering their spirits a tantalizing portal through which they may experience the world of the warm-blooded. Perhaps the dead are desperately clustering around an elusive window they have been chasing down for five or six thousand years of gnashing, burning, excruciating torment. Perhaps one of them would manage to claw his way into the ketamine user's fleshy, nubile brain for a 56-

minute respite. Such communication seems a match of spirits—at times fencing, at others playing mah-jongg or a game of decapitate the endless row of tractor drivers or amputate the hand-capped. In a ketamine experience, you are likely to become a subatomic particle sniffing at the ominous butt of nuclear

war, the pinnacle of NDE-driven necromantic glory and the greatest hope of all dead spirits that are not enjoying themselves.

I SAW DR. BUZZ AT A CLUB about a month later, at a point when he'd been shooting Special K in his ass every night for seven straight weeks. He asked me if I wanted to do it again.

NO.

No more Ku Klux Ketamine for me. Despite all the psychonautical jibber-jabber about ketamine's satori-inducing potential, or its application as a pharmaceutical biofeedback machine, or even its use in helping the dolphins save the Earth from ECCO, all it taught me is this: I don't want to die. **X**

