

In the Film Room With the Big Guy Upstairs

by Con Chapman

"A lot of guys say, 'You got to the play. You're not that fast, but it seems like you see it before it happens.' I think it's God-given instincts."

New England Patriots rookie linebacker Brandon Spikes, Boston Herald



It was a stupid thing, really, but one I'd gotten away with before. My bagel was stuck in the toaster, and I carefully probed a knife down into the slot without unplugging the appliance. BAP!—sparks and smoke, and before I knew it, I was transported weightlessly down a long corridor towards a soft white light into a room just like the one my high school football coaches used to sit in to watch film of upcoming teams on our schedule.



"Hey," the man at the desk said, barely looking up. He had long flowing hair and a beard and was dressed in a sort of white resort bath robe.

"Where am I?"

"Heaven—where'd ya think?"

I was—to be frank—a bit surprised, given the number of guys I'd chased down on personal guaranties of bank loans. And the fact that I never called that girl Carol, like I said I would.

"I, uh, figured I was slotted for the other place."

"Nope," the man said, picking up a clipboard and running his finger down a column of names. "You've been golden since, let's see—1975, when you saved the life of a Puerto Rican junkie who was choking on his vomit by giving him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation."

"Huh—so the whole Boy Scout thing paid off?"



"Yep. Then there was that kid with his earbuds in who didn't hear the truck backing up who you saved a couple years ago, but that was really just icing on the cake. You want a beer?"

"Uh, sure. Rolling Rock Light, or any light beer you have."

The man gave me a look of disbelief. "Dude—you're in heaven now. Calories don't count."

"Oh, great. Gimme a . . . let's see . . . a Harp."



"Attaboy," the man said. He reached down into a mini-fridge, pulled out two bottles and handed me one.

"So you're . . ."

"God," the guy said. "You were expecting maybe Jeff Bridges?"



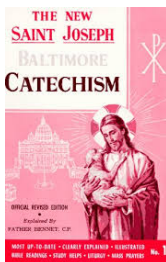
"You do kinda look like him."

"I get that all the time," he said, then produced that slurping sound that the star of The Big Lebowski and Crazy Heart always makes when he takes a drink to show that he's a manly man, or that his glass doesn't have real booze in it.

"I guess I was suspecting someone a bit more . . . dignified."

"What did they teach you in Catholic school?"

I searched my random access memory for facts from the Baltimore Catechism. "Uh, that man is made in the image and likeness of God?"



"On the nosey," the man said. "And since you humans all look so different, I must—by logical necessity—look different to each of you. I'm you're own personalized—but not monogrammed—godhead."

"Wow—cool." I took in the guy's office and had to admit it was pretty much my idea of heaven. CD player, nice big desk, TV, a fridge that, when you looked into it, seemed to stretch away to infinity, bottles and cans of beer on one shelf, yogurt on another. "So what are you watching?" I asked.

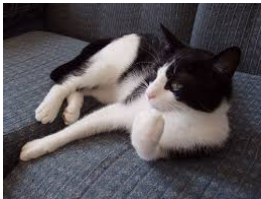
"Game film," he said, as he clicked on the remote, causing the tape to rewind. "This is the Patriots' second-round draft pick, Brandon Spikes, out of Florida."



"I think he was a real steal at number 62 overall."

"Yeah, he's good. A lot of people questioned his speed, but he's quick, you know what I'm saying?"

Of course I did. As a high school linebacker in a 4-3 defensive alignment I would never win a footrace, but I always got to the play. As Foster McGuire my eighth grade coach used to say, I was quick as a cat. Of course he hadn't met my cats.



"Yeah, sure. You read a lineman's eyes or his stance, and you get that quick first step to the ball carrier."

"Precisely," God said. "But I like this guy so much, I'm going to give him a little extra juice." He looked down at the remote and pushed the fast forward button, and Spikes jumped up into the hole and stuffed the run for a loss.



"That is so freaking cool!" I said. "Are you going to do that when the regular season starts?"

"Why the hell not?" he said to me with a laugh. We both watched the replay with satisfaction. As we did, the scrolling news ticker at the bottom of the screen said "Pakistan flood toll hits 1,500."

"Uh, did you see that?" I asked.

"What?"

"About the floods in Pakistan."

"Yeah," he said, as he took a long draw on his beer.

"So—aren't you going to do something?"

"About what?"

"The loss of human life."

He looked at me with the pitiless disdain of the counter help at the post office. "I'm . . . kinda busy here."



Lisbon earthquake of 1755

"But . . . don't you prioritize?"

"Remember the 'image and likeness' thing? I'm just a projection of your world view, which sometimes seems to extend no further than your nose."

He had me there. On the other hand, I didn't want to end up like Mrs. Jellyby in Dickens' *Bleak House*; so consumed by causes on the other side of the world that I didn't take care of problems near at hand that I could actually do something about.



Mrs. Jellyby, consumed by correspondence

"Unlike your typical Hollywood starlet, I don't have the time or money to jet off to the godforsaken mudhole *du jour* with my press agent in tow," I said with a defensive tone.

"Believe me—I'm not criticizing," God said. "If all I did was avert natural disasters I'd never have time for any fun."

"So . . . the world is kind of like your basement train set. You turn it on . . ."

"Go upstairs, play pool, take a nap, make a sandwich, come back down. I can't be a Supreme Being *all* the time."

For some reason, I found God's indifference . . . comforting. "So you weren't watching when I . . ."

"Picked your nose in an empty train car at six o'clock in the morning?" he asked, one eyebrow hiked up in skepticism.

"Thanks, I 've got better things to do."

