

## **Head Trip - Sample**

*by Preston Orrick*

Rhonda Hubbel's head was sore after continuously banging it against the cushioned walls.

She was bored, having been wrapped in a straitjacket for what seemed like hours with nothing to do but pace around a small, padded room.

She must have acted out again and been forcefully drugged. It wouldn't be the first time she had woken up dazed and confused. There were times when her anger became so strong she would pass out.

The only thing that seemed to alleviate her rage was setting things on fire. The addiction had led her to commit a number of crimes, but she couldn't help herself.

Her hobby, as she called it, had quickly earned her the label of arsonist.

Being locked up in the room day after day bored her to no end.

Knocking her head against one of the padded walls, she waited. As usual, she had no idea of what hour it was or how much time had passed.

Sometimes, she liked to sleep for days on end to pass the time.

For one hour of every day, she was allowed to walk around a caged-in recess area, confined by its high glass roof and linked metal walls. There was no better feeling than the relief that came from those sixty minutes, when her hands could wriggle and twist, free of their bindings.

Rhonda let herself fall into the wall and slide to the floor with a soft thump. Soon, she would be fast asleep.

Foiling this plan, the smell of smoke entered her nostrils.

Her eyes darted open to see smoke billowing out from the floor in a corner of the room. A line of red fire originated from the smoke and snaked its way around the room, encircling her as flames burst upwards and ignited the walls.

Alarmed, she retreated to the middle of the cell, watching as the inferno melted the padded walls.

With her hands wrapped across her chest, Rhonda was trapped. The door from which the orderlies came through could obviously only be opened from the other side.

"Help! Help me! There's a fire!"

There was usually at least one orderly keeping watch over the many padded rooms, with one clearly visible security camera for every room.

The pads absorbed her cries, but she screamed anyway. "Please, there's a fire!"

The flames burned the floor, the rubber melting under the intense heat. Nobody would come to save her; she was going to burn alive.

The heat from the blaze was becoming intolerable now, her head stricken

with unbearable pain. The small patch she stood on remained untouched for a while. But then, it was quickly devoured by the fire.

Screaming in agony, her legs were set on fire. It felt like her flesh was melting away as the orange-red flames danced around her.

The floor gave way as she fell through it, the fire passing her by.

With a loud crack like her eardrums had burst, she remarkably landed on her feet atop what looked like a giant, shattered mirror. Looking down over the straitjacket at her legs, she expected to see ghastly wounds from the fire. It had felt and looked so real, but her orange pants had not one burn mark on them.

*Another bad trip.* Rhonda's thought encouraged her to remain calm, believing that none of it was real.

She looked up to see nothing but empty darkness around her.

Another crack and a mirror appeared out of thin air, seemingly levitating in the air. More shattering sounds of cracking glass created more floating mirrors.

The ever-increasing number of mirrors shattered around her, pounding at her eardrums. Within the shattered fragments of the giant mirror at her feet, Rhonda could see books beginning to silently fall inside the reflections.

Looking up again, she expected to see stacks of books falling toward her, but there was nothing but darkness.

A cacophony of cracked mirrors assaulted her eardrums once more, swallowing up the darkness by surrounding her with images of her reflection. A final crack returned her attention to the large mirror at her feet.

Kneeling next to one of the broken sections of glass, Rhonda watched the books pile on top of each other inside the many mirrors around her. One by one, the books burst into flames. Other sections of glass showed a similar fate for the books. The spectacle let off a soft, orange glow as the glass began to tremble beneath her.

The giant mirror broke away under her and she was falling again. Something soft brushed against her back and rolled under her legs and over her face. It felt like a tangled bed sheet, tightening until it rolled completely around her.

*A really bad trip.* It was all Rhonda could think as she was forcibly rolled around inside the white cloth.

She couldn't move, trapped by the constricting sheet.

Feeling cool at first, the sheet gradually became hotter and hotter. It burned, and Rhonda tried to twist her arms free of the sheets, but it had already tucked itself tightly around her.

Struggling to breathe amidst the growing heat, she coughed in spite of a terrible scratching in her throat.

Something tore, and she was rolling out of the blazing sheet, her head spinning in circles. Lightheaded from the heat, Rhonda let herself fall and

tumble onto what felt like another bed sheet. The surface felt soft and cool against her body, relaxing enough that all she wanted to do was lie there.

She wanted to sleep, but somehow pain was always waiting for her when she was at her most relaxed.

Gentle sounds of rustling sheets filled the air, and a surprising gust of cold air brushed against her face. She adjusted her arms inside the straitjacket.

Despite the bizarre occurrences, she felt somewhat overjoyed by the pleasant feeling of the sheet against her back. She truly wanted to believe this was her worst trip yet, that it was all in her troubled mind, but the fire and now the calmness around her felt so undoubtedly real.

New sounds of children playing amongst the rustling of many sheets lulled her more into sleep. She stretched her legs and looked around for what she thought would be happy children.

Rhonda had apparently fallen into somebody's backyard. Several bed sheets had been spread out and hung on clotheslines to dry.

The greenest grass she had ever seen led to a house just beyond the last row of bed sheets. Painted yellow, with a thatched roof, the house oddly had no driveway, and it seemed to be the only house on the block. A road to its right stretched between empty lots, all separated by white fences.

Three small shadows approached from behind one of the sheets, calling to her. "Come play with us."

Getting to her feet, she was not surprised when the sheet burst into flames.

Through the burning sheet walked a large figure draped in fire, like a creature straight from hell. The walking inferno was faceless and twice her size. Grass burned under its feet, each advancing step creating another small blaze.

Rhonda made a dash onto the street, and then headed for the house.

The burning figure walked slowly at first, its gait affected by the wall of fire encircling it. It stepped onto the concrete, impossibly setting the road on fire and spreading a stream of fire. Chunks of concrete cracked under the heat.

With the straitjacket still firmly wrapped around her, Rhonda ran to the nearest window and started kicking at the glass. The glass cracked, and on the fourth kick, the glass shattered. Jagged shards lined the window's edges, but she didn't have time to worry about it.

Taking a few steps back, she ran toward the window and jumped through it headfirst. She rolled onto her back across a hardwood floor.

After examining her legs, it was clear the jump had not been a clean one—tiny pieces of glass had cut through her pants and nicked her skin.

Ignoring the cuts, she awkwardly got to her feet.

She took one glance toward the window, seeing nothing as the flames grew around her. Rhonda ran through a large kitchen and a small library toward a laundry room at the back of the house.

There was an opening for small pets, and Rhonda, still squirming under the straitjacket, shoved her foot through the gap, and pulled the door open from the other side. She slipped inside just before the door's spring brought it slamming shut again, and she crouched down against the dryer.

It wasn't long before she could hear the sounds of crackling lumber coming from somewhere outside the house. Even in the back of the house, she could hear the front wall giving way.

Soon, it sounded like the whole roof was falling around her. The strong stench of smoke permeated the air.

She was trapped with nowhere to run, unable to escape.

The smell of smoke became even stronger as it poured through the pet door. Every breath she took felt like somebody scraping sandpaper on her throat, each time rubbing harder and harder. Her eyes watered, and she was desperate to rub them, but she could only clumsily bump them against her jacketed shoulder.

Rhonda waited, not taking her eyes off the crevice under the door.

The shadows of two feet appeared just under the door as the sweltering heat reached its peak. Unable to escape the blaze, she could only cough repeatedly, eventually spitting blood onto the floor.

The handle of the door turned red as the door itself melted like wax, revealing the creature from hell standing there.

Short of breath and with tears flowing from her eyes, Rhonda couldn't stand to look at the creature. It advanced toward her, and she could feel the dryer against her back boiling with heat. It became so hot so quickly that she had to pull away from it. Her eyes felt like they would melt in their sockets, and her heart must have been beating at three times its normal speed.

A burning hand grabbed her by the top of the straitjacket, the fire instantly burning through and searing her skin. For a reason she still couldn't explain, the flames didn't hurt her.

She cried out, but her voice was gone, the coughing having taken its toll.

"Look at me." The creature's voice was deep and dark.

She couldn't bear to look, closing her eyes and praying she would wake up. Another hand grabbed her by the chin and forced her head forward. Her skull felt like it would burst apart, the flames from within the jacket bursting out of every seam.

"Look at me!" shouted the hellish fiend, causing the remaining walls to break away.

Its hand squeezed her chin so hard it felt like her jawbone would snap like the tiniest of twigs. More tears streamed down her face as she opened her eyes. Rhonda couldn't make out the creature now, only a bright light as strong as the sun.

The creature laughed maniacally as it threw Rhonda onto the ground. She yelped, smashing hard onto the ground. The mess of rubble burned under her, forcing Rhonda to run and flee.

Just ahead of her, a lone, blue door looked to be untouched by the flames.

Behind her, the flaming creature roared. Rhonda coughed and wheezed as she ran. The house melted around her like wet paint running down a canvas.

Rhonda lunged at the door and stumbled into the familiar padded room. The door closed by itself behind her and disappeared.

Out of breath, baffled by the sudden transition, and still in the straitjacket, she laid against the wall, hoping that it was indeed over.

A familiar burning smell invaded her nose as a wisp of black smoke ascended from one of the corners in the room.