

He has a tan and a plan

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"I don't know about you champ, but I'd rather see 28 dead bodies in Somalia than lose that green Frisbee."

I stared past crazy Frisbee beach man, hoping he'd ignore me as he slid his bulky headphones back over his ears. God only knows what he was listening to – that is if he was listening to anything at all.

He took off his beat up tennis shoes and slid down his calf-high white socks before he tip-toed into the water to pick out the few discs he had accidentally chucked into the calm ocean. For the past few minutes he had been tossing five or six Frisbees at a time along the beach, sauntering back and forth after each couple of throws to collect what seemed to be his only possessions.

"It's hard to throw five Frisbees at once!" the darkly-tanned psycho proclaimed to the beach as a few tourists dodged his chaotic progeny.

I think I may have inadvertently drawn the crazy man to our slice of the beach: I had been watching him as he casually juggled Frisbees, trying to pick out the intermittent insanity he spouted out to the spring-breakers immediately surrounding him. He had taken off his baggy "I 'heart' sex" t-shirt to creep in front of my friends and I. "I woke up this morning without coffee, a cigarette or money," he shouted not so much at the two girls lighting up a smoke as he did at the sand and the gulls and the beach, "but that's every morning for me!"

We'd seen the crazy tanned man every day we ventured to that particular beach: the tropical sun had cooked his once white skin until it hung loosely from his otherwise slender figure. He seemed fast and dexterous, despite the sloppy manner in which he moved across the beach. His long matted hair covered a head that I don't think was merely baked to insanity by the sun: rather, I felt like I myself had tasted an inkling of what had driven this tan man mad.

We were in the midst of spring break in Key West, surrounded by SUV-loads of drunken college kids. Never before had I experienced such a blatant fulfillment of a stereotype, yet I consoled myself in the fact that my entourage and I were different. We weren't just on spring break; we had also come to the Keys to visit our recently graduated friend who works running booze cruises and party boats. Our interests in vacation extended beyond our personal vanities, didn't they? We were at best being good friends and at worst Epicurean hedonists: playing hard but also playing smart.

Paradise was a wonderful place to vacation, but I could see how a life there could grate at one's mind. I slept on a couch under my friend's home, and two mornings in a row I awoke to violent shouting: depressed neighbors' voices drifting down the canal. I couldn't imagine how, for example, a dog's accident in the living room could drive a man two houses down to such heights of rage. The next morning a woman stormed at her boyfriend about how miserable she was with him and screamed something unintelligible about Prozac.

I've seen a fair share of depression in my short lifetime, but it was something unnerving to hear such rancid anguish in the middle of a wealthy and serene paradise. Unnerving, mind: I certainly didn't feel depressed myself. As I compared my situation to that of our

neighbors, I was happy with the knowledge I was not wrapped up in my problems and that I could enjoy the warm air and sunshine.

Every morning a retired man across from us would tinker under his house for an hour before starting up his boat's engine and going out to fish for the day. Somebody suggested he couldn't sit still in his retirement, that he always felt a need to work and adhere to a schedule. I felt it went deeper than that: what difference was there really between the retired man fooling around with his boat and the crazy tan man with his Frisbees? They had both escaped.

"Don't listen to me though, I'm crazy!" the tan man screamed to his audience.

I was starting to see his point.

Did Ball spend too much time lying in the Key West sun? Let him know at viewpoint@technicianonline.com