

## JANUARY 1 (Part One)...

I awoke to find myself in a bathtub full of melting ice. I was fully clothed. That was a relief. Nothing would be worse than passing out in a strangers tub naked. Who knows who could have walked in and seen my manhood. Or not seen it. It was pretty cold...but warm in a weird way. Maybe I had wee'd in there while I was away. If I had, which I don't think I did, I hope all the party goers present had adhered to the old tip of never eating yellow ice.

I could tell I was still clothed by the way the rejected beers bounced against my body like lonely buoys in an Antarctic wasteland. I felt nothing. Not a thing. Just a bobbing sensation. No need to open my eyes. I was comfortable. No need to look. Just relax.

Unless...

Unless I was so numb I could feel nothing because someone had taken advantage of me while I was asleep. Normally I would never be that lucky. Maybe someone had snuck in, chopped my legs off and sold them to a Pygmy colony looking to move up in the world.

Maybe, just maybe, I had drowned and those beers bumping against my body were actually other people's bodies. Dead people's bodies. Hands. Or feet. Maybe we had boarded a boat and I was so drunk I forgot and maybe the boat sunk and now we were all in a subzero tomb. Maybe I'd get to see Leonardo DiCaprio and he could show me around. You know, get to meet the other frozen corpses. Maybe there were sharks. In wetsuits.

I opened one eye.

Nope- they were beers. Couple of cans of kiddie flavoured spirits too. I checked my kidneys. It was all good. No one had ripped them out and hurriedly transported them to a foreign country just hanging for a bit of Aussie kidney to go with their steak pie.

Just as well too... I would have hated it if this year's new year's resolution had already been broken on the first day. "Do not lose kidneys" was one resolution I was confident I could keep. If they were gone I would have known once and for all that I was truly jinxed.

I closed the eye. I opened it again. Signs were good. No real bodily pain at this stage. I dared not move though. I had been in way too many New Years Eve's to know that the hangover, let alone the mother of all hangover's- the NYE hangover- can sneak up and bammo!! smash you without warning. One eye at a time I told myself.

My second eye opened like a rusty garage door. It squealed and halted and for a moment I thought I wasn't going to be able to get the car in. But I did. Perfect park too, plenty of space to get out either side. No shopping trolleys. No cars parked at a degree of difference that enforced the need to carefully extricate oneself from the vehicle.

I hated that. I hated cars that were parked at skewiff angles. When you have to cruise a car park for hours on end, searching for one space, any space, and you finally get a park , and as soon as you see the park, the excitement inside is killed by the realisation that the only reason you got the parking space was because every other womble in the car park- the other five million who have already parked and are inside filling up on donuts as they hitch their trackies over their crackies - have seen the parking space and thought ' too hard' and found another park.

You know you can't drive on, away from that space, because if you do drive on you just know there isn't another park and reality, in conjunction with Murphy of Murphy's law fame, dictates that you are going have to park six blocks away and walk back. You just know it. Deep down you just know you don't have the luxury of passing up on that car park. You've got to take it. You don't want to, but you've got to.

... So you take the car space.

You hook wide. Wide as you can. Wrench the wheel hard to the right ( or left if that's the way you're seeing it). Bring it around. Real close to the bumper of the neighbouring parked vehicle. So close that for a second your heart jumps into your mouth and starts screaming " You're not going to make it! You're not going to make it! We're all going to die!"

But you do make it. Never in doubt.

You unhook your belt, grab whatever you need from the centre console and perhaps, if time permits, flick down the visor and check your look in the mirror.

Checklist. Got cash- back pocket; got keys- in hand; clean underwear... mmm.

That's when you realize the skewy park by the bozo next door means you're going to have to develop anorexia, or squeeze through the exhaust pipe, just to get out. You're forced to think. You don't want to think. You're at the mall for Pete's sake. Malls aren't made to be thinking in. Who the hell is Pete anyway?

There are a few ways to handle such a phenomenon.

One. Jam the door open as hard as you can. Who cares about the dent. The scratch. It's their fault anyway for parking so carelessly. You're only going in for munchies and bread. You'll be in and out before they even know it was you.

They will never know you were there.

Two. You're actually going in to buy Christmas presents. You have to get one for mum, one for dad, one for Aunt Chrystal with the Terrier that deep down you think may be more than a pet. One for each of your brothers and sisters. One for your boss. Why? You have no idea. You just better. Unless of course you work for yourself- then you can spend up big on the boss in the safe knowledge that your position within the organization will only be enhanced and you will be looked favourably upon

should the possibility of a promotion arise.

A present also for your neighbour who collects your mail for you- whether you are away or not- and helpfully opens, reads, and highlights all the interesting bits of every piece of your mail for you.

Until, that is, you order sex aids. Five times. No, you never see those ones do you! Yet your neighbour does look increasingly cheerier each time you see them. You can't help but wonder each time you wave hello over the back fence whether they are wearing your special, limited release, Vienna chocolate jocks. If they are you hope they choke on them. In the nicest possible way.

If you are Christmas shopping or getting your hair done, or something that is going to take a bit of time, you have to think about the skewy park situation a bit more strategically.

You can't just go the slam and scam in this scenario. You're going to be gone too long. Too risky. Chances are you're going to be sprung. You could deny it of course. Do a Shaggy and say it wasn't you.

But another factor needs to be taken into consideration here- security. Is there car park camera's? If so, do you think they are real or fake? Is anyone really watching them? Who would actually watch a closed circuit car park camera anyway? Car enthusiasts? Asphalt sicko's? Yep, somebody would be watching for sure.

It's a complex situation. All you want to do is get out of your car.

In the end the slam and scam is canned. Too much to do. Too little time. The risk is too great and without knowing the vital statistics of the driver of the potential slam and scam victim, the risk cannot be taken.

Because that is where the true gamble is.

Not whether you smash the skewy car next to you without being caught by security or otherwise, but whether you can 'take' the driver of the skewy vehicle if you happen to be caught indulging in the slam and scam.

Ninety eight year old woman struggling to carry a discounted, too good a deal to refuse, ball of wool? No problems. She might get one or two good shots in, but in the end your superior fitness and seventy year age difference should see you get over the top of her. Bodybuilding boofhead carrying a sheep on each shoulder, who still believes if he takes enough steroids he'll be able to speak like Arnie? Priceless. What are you going to do? The guy's only got to sit on you to eat his sheep and all you're going to be able to give him back is haemorrhoids. They ain't the type of roids you were looking for- trust me. Forget the slam and scam.

So, do you cross the front seat and get out the passenger door? Climb over the gearstick and squeeze your body through like toothpaste? Depends on your age. Young and lithe- no problems. You probably know your way around the front seat, back seat, bonnet, boot. You know your car and

you know exactly what you can do in every one of your vehicle's crevices, spaces and nuances. Rule number one- know your car.

Knowing your car also comes in handy when a young girl's irate father is searching high and low for you. Just so he can kill you. For fun. You took advantage of his little girl. The same little girl who taught you that Karma Sutra didn't refer to mellow business-wear or mean 'slow down the suitor-ing' in sex speak. (She wanted Karma Sutra, so I slowed down, then she told everyone I was a dud in bed. How would she know- we never did it in a bed). We only ever boffed in the Vauxhall.

You cannot say this to her father no matter how bad you want to.

Know your car. Intimately. Irate fathers never look in the glove box. Teach yourself how to get in and get out of the glove box quickly and quietly. When you have mastered this move you will be able to kiss yourself on the ass. Literally. You probably won't need a girlfriend by then and will inevitably end up spending most of your life alone, by choice, in the glove box. Ah the great circle of life.

If, however, you are too old for the across to the passenger side exit option, also known as 'the straddle', and you know your hips will lock up as soon as you try to conquer the gear stick and you'll be writhing in agony and someone walking past thinks you're a pervert and dry humping your front seat, hence the squealing and groaning, and calls the police, and they have to extract you from your vehicle with the jaws of life while shoppers returning to their vehicles spit Wendy's ice cream and toss failed scratchie tickets at you- then, well, the slam and scam may have been the better alternative.

Nope - leave the 'passenger seat straddle' in the emergency box behind the 'break to remove, only in emergency' glass. Better still, if you are over thirty five- make it one of your life's major rules to never attempt the front seat straddle. Ever. For starters your body may not handle it and besides, if you're thirty five or over you're more likely to be able to financially afford any fallout from a slam and scam scenario gone wrong. Take the punt.

Therefore, having ruled out the 'slam and scam' and 'the straddle', the 'slide and glide' now becomes, through the process of elimination, the technically correct choice required for the situation at hand.

The slide and glide is a manoeuvre that all drivers squeezing into skewy parks have to develop. They do not teach you these moves at 'learning to drive' school. No - these moves are mothered by necessity and outlawed in many states. They take years of rat cunning, nerveless guile, and casual retail work to perfect- so use them wisely. No moustachioed, excessively sweating, former taxi toting driving instructor will tell you about these. They are the holy grail of mall parking.

The slide and glide itself is now the more universally accepted option in car park etiquette. It is the PC move of today. This is because it can be performed by the normal looking, the physically challenged; or just by those exceptional human beings out there who are made of stern moral fibre and are of sound social conscience, who truly believe in and respect their fellow man... Liars.

The slide and glide is also performed by the majority of people because they quite simply don't wish to end up as someone's all day sucker in a state penitentiary or have the life punched out of them in front of people. Fear is a strong deterrent. So is embarrassment.

"What happened to Dad?"

" Well son. It happened at the mall. It was a simple car parking situation that went horribly wrong. Your father tried the slam and scam, was caught, and subsequently bashed senseless by two savage, special's only shopping sheilas who tonked him into oblivion with pillows fresh from Target's 15% off Manchester sale."

" Will it be all right mum?"

" Yes son. The sale lasts 'til Thursday."

The beauty of the slide and glide, especially in company, is that you can nudge the slam and scam scenario, but because you look like you are trying so hard to do the right thing, most people forgive you for any minor damage. They think you were sincerely attempting the slide and glide when in reality, you knew you were going the slight slam.

The slide and glide is beautiful camouflage for the slam and scam. It's like a polite bandit holding up a corner store. Everyone involved is abhorred that the local corner store with the lovely Indian man was held up at all, but when they discover the bandit was very well mannered and his gun was actually a water pistol, they automatically forgive him. He was a nice bandit. That's what the slide and glide is- the polite and well mannered persons slam and scam. Be nice and most people would forgive you anything. Give a blatant slam and scam and you'll have lynch mobs chasing you for blocks, quite willing to string you up by the Cohuna's for being so awful. You can bomb the world- just don't touch the Holden.

The only hitch to the slide and glide is when the car you know you are going to nudge when you get out, is occupied. This becomes a high pressure situation. You know the person in the skewy car, (or the lookout they have left behind in the skewy car), is watching you.

What else are they going to do in a car park? Stare straight ahead and listen to their saliva as it gulps down their throat? They are already angry because (a) they were left in the car on purpose or (b) they have to wait in the first place for whoever it is inside the mall they are waiting for. It's the modern day part time padded cell. Self administered.

Funnily enough, many old men choose to stay in their car, in the car park, whenever they go shopping. If they are feeling particularly daring, you may spot them standing at the rear of their vehicle rolling a smoke while the missus is inside. You will, however, never find them straying more than three vehicles from their own.

There are many theories on why this is the case. The most common is that if the old man strays too

far from his car, and he unexpectedly develops Alzheimer's, he may never find his way back. There are many industry stories spoken in hushed voices of frail men wandering aimlessly around the bowels of huge shopping centre car parks crying out "Dot. Dottie. Are you there?"

Little known fact- more old blokes have lost their friends to car park disappearances than war. What's worse is if the old blokes wife develops Alzheimer's at exactly the same time. She gets found in a shopping centre and can't tell anyone who she is or where she is from. He's in the bowels of the car park trying to remember what he is looking for. U2 blaring through the car park speakers. The authorities can't get a straight answer out of either of them. The car gets towed. It's all over. He ends up in a home. She also ends up in an aged home. If they get lucky it might be the same old aged home . They may meet and fall in love all over again. Who knows?

What I do know is that there is nothing more frustrating than knowing you have a car but not knowing what sort of car it is or where you left it. Same goes if you have a wife.

This driving fear of losing everything inevitably keeps the old man either in the vehicle or standing at the back wheel. Occasionally, when in a chirpy frame of mind, he may even kick the tyre... Of the car next to his.

Let me tell you something - when you are waiting in a car in a car park, everything else happening around you is interesting. Everything.