Ski Story

Okay! Remember the Inquisition? Remember the dialogue of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoyevski's "The Brothers Karamazov"? Well, there's this shoe made of iron. If you don't pay your taxes, or say 'shit' or something, they come to your home, sell your wife and kids on the open market for whatever they're worth, and open the iron boot. It has spikes on the bottom and sides, and has been coated with spores of terminal athlete's foot. They delicately place the tootsies in the end and slam it closed, tightening it up with screws until it's like putting a Japanese sumo wrestler in a Volkswagen, like fitting King Farouk on the average bar stool; like investing your life savings on the New York Stock Exchange; like getting Carol Doda in a 'B' cup bra. That's how it begins. Then they attach long wooden planks on the shoes, put you on a cable car, take you to the top of a mountain 3000 meters high and say "pay your taxes and stop saying 'shit' or I push you off the cliff."

The average knee is built like the upper ball joint of a 1963 Chevrolet. It does just fine going up and down in a casual motion often described as 'walking'. When the Grand Inquisitor first pushes you over, you look down, gently picking up speed. "Not so bad", you say to yourself. "After all, they could have put the iron jock on me and besides, look at all the wonderful scenery." Then you hit the first ice. The only instructions you were given were something called the 'snow plow'.

The snow plow is as follows: Take the planks and touch the tips, move the backs of the planks apart and sit down so that the inside of the planks are digging into the snow smartly. By 'sit' down, I don't mean rest; no, far from it. You are standing up, but hunching your ass downwards as if you were going to sit. The immediate effect is to wrench both upper ball joints directly out of their sockets, sending excruciating pains down through the femur and the tibia fibula, thereby meeting in the middle with the northbound pains from the Inquisition boots. The hips and thighs try to compensate by relaxing the tension on the knees and feet, thus defeating the purpose of the snow plow: to wit, to push a ton of snow in front of you thus

decreasing the speed. As the hips/thighs let up, precisely the opposite effect is observed to the casual observer over on the sidelines. The inside of the skis no longer bit the snow and the observer notices the skier passing by at approximately Mach 3

Now comes Step 2: The skier (by now terrified) remembers something called a 'stem christie'. Stem Christies are not unlike a snow plow in the following sense. To turn with a snow plow one must lean to the right to turn left; left to turn right. The effect is a gradual turning effect and, unfortunately, cannot be used when going Mach 3 over ice. To turn with a 'stem christie', one traverses at a gentle angle with skis together, uphill ski a little above, or ahead, of the downhill ski, with all the body weight on the downhill ski – like so...

To turn, it is a simple matter to move the upper ski a little (since there is no weight on it), turn the back of the ski out, place the leading pole in the snow and slide the former downhill ski back, becoming the uphill ski now, and the weight – and direction – is distributed in the opposite way.

First of all, let's assume our Inquisitee (as opposed to the Inquisitor) was able to slow down with his 'snow plow'. I forgot to define 'traverse' the beginning of the elegant and graceful stem christie turn. Traverse means the body is upright, knees slightly bent, skis close together but inner edges biting the snow with, as I mentioned, the upper ski a little ahead of the lower ski, all weight on ht e lower ski, shoulders facing the valley – away from the hill. The skier should be well balanced, relaxed – and now it's time to turn. Except you've made the mistake of looking down. It's an 80 degree slope.....

And it doesn't end. You decide to traverse a little further. And a little further. Trees coming up.

1. You can grab the nearest tree, take off the skis and walk casually down five miles of neck-high snow. As you arrive for breakfast the next day, all your friends who are comfortable resting on the veranda of the hotel sipping 'gluvine', having previously managed to get down the

mountain by doing an infinite succession of 'Stem Christies' will point at you and laugh until their eyes begin to tear. The pain coming from collective derision is worse than the pain of the boots – so you turn and pray you can make it down.

2. Since the beginning of the turn is much like the snow plow, you start to push the uphill ski out. Now in order to have this work, as I said, all the weight must be on the downhill ski. It isn't. The skier, having seen the 80 degree slope is already staining his shorts. Being more comfortable with a snow plow turn he actually has his weight more or less evenly distributed on both skis.

The left ski, as shown in the diagram, cannot physically turn, so the skier begins to lean towards the valley, trying to force the ski to turn. The left leg says "Turn", the ski says back "fuck you" and the skier does one of two things. Either he is up to Mach 3 again with no hope of salvation this time, or else he falls with the skis in the following position:

Now the skier needs to be righted again. If he's smart, and the ski bindings haven't already broken off, he pulls the safety straps, undoes his skis, unties the knot in his legs, firmly places the skis parallel to the hill, braces himself with the poles, steps into the skis one at a time, refastens the safety straps, and off he goes with no worse than a broken ass, but that's OK since it was cracked anyway.

He doesn't do the above. He tries. What he learned the first day in beginners school, the ridiculously simple 'in place turn'. The procedure is as follows:

1. Untie knots in legs, get upright – but you're facing the wrong way, dummy, with no room to turn.

2. Place downhill ski up in the air with back of ski resting on ground – brace yourself with both poles downhill to prevent the 'bod' from falling.

Note placement of 'bod' defying forces of gravity.

3. Swing upright ski in opposite direction and place parallel to upper ski.

Note feet placement

Note pain in left leg

4. Slowly bring right ski completely around in the horizontal plane, reversing hands on poles, and settle ski in parallel 'traverse' position.

5. Remove testicles from left pole.

6. Traverse in opposite direction and make elegant 'stem christie' turn again.

You're on your way, but without knowing it, you are about to confront your first 'mogul'. A mogul is a small hill of ice. It is formed by many thousands of skiers doing elegant Stem Christie and, especially, the even more elegant, parallel turn. By turning in the same places, the snow is pushed up into mounds. Since on 80 degree slopes that's the only way one can turn, one faces an entire acre, vertically, of moguls.

A good skier uses the mogul to begin his turn. He approaches the mogul, traversing, slides up the face of the mound, picks up the weight of his body off both skis, flicks his downhill pole with insouciance, twists his body in the opposite direction. Thus bringing both skis around in the opposite direction as well, and slides down the mogul to begin the next traverse. Here's what happens with our Inquisitee.

1. He hits the mogul completely unexpectedly after having picked up a lot of speed traversing down the 80 degree slope – having learned that it's difficult to turn when going too slowly.

2. The traverse has been executed on nice level ground to start with soft two inches of snow over a solid packed base. Easy.

3. He hits the first mogul expecting to turn just after it and gets launched approximately like Apollo 13.

4. Skis continue to rise, gravity takes over, body is most probably backwards leaning to compensate, are and poles waving frantically to maintain balance.

5. Skis are wide apart now as he lands on second mogul, with transverse rotation taking place on the torso in one direction, and legs in other direction.

6. Skier, if luck, is once again going downhill at Mach 3, snow plow position, with left pole firmly imbedded in his ass.

7. Skier has operation in hospital to remove pole, said operation costing ten times the original expense of six week ski vacation including transportation, hotels and meals.