In an infinite universe, anything that is possible, no matter how infinitesimally small must happen sooner or later.

(Somewhere, in the gap between time and space, where 'truth' and 'reality' do not quite join neatly, there is a 'Click'.)

Logic dictates that this is true.

(Again - Click! Dice, perhaps, played on a cosmic scale.)

And as time is also infinite, somewhere in the infinite past, it has already happened. (And again- Click. Or perhaps bones, falling on the floor of infinity.)

Occasionally, some theoretical physicist will claim the universe is finite. Ask them what's on the outside then, and they will explain about curved space. This is Ph.D. speak for 'That's the bit that worries us too'.

(Yet again there is a Click, like St Peter locking up for the day, and wondering whether he can get away with some creative rounding on his flexi time.)

And the impossible is, by definition, impossible.

CLICK.

Of course, another definition of impossible is that no one has yet worked out the chance of the event happening.

Click, Click...

Either that or no one has come across a number big enough to set the chance against. Click, click, click, click... Click, click click click click click click click click click click.

Odin. Lord of the Gods, flung open the doors of Valhalla.

The database of the Department of Reality Engineering's central computer records the chance of a deity existing is 9.84 multiplied by 10 to the power of 283 to 1. Against.

“Hello dear.” said Freya. (5.66*10^{365} to 1 against.) She took Odin's spear, and fixed him a stiff gin and tonic. (7.64*10^{542} to 1 against) "Hard day at work?"

“Bloody hopeless!” Stormed Odin. “The algorithm on the wheat DNA is all screwed up.” (3.49*10^{542} to 1 against) “Most of the time its fine, and just when you think you've fixed the bug, a whole bloody field of the stuff will go and flatten itself into circles, sod knows why! (7.34*10^{542} to 1 against)"

“Never mind, dear. Sit down and relax. That young Christos boy from down the road invited us to a barbecue at his fathers place.” (6.27*10^{624} to 1 against.) “Zeus and his lot are bringing the salad, and Mr. and Mrs. Buddha are taking the beer. I said we would bring along some mead, if that's alright?”(4.72 * 10^{689} to 1 against).
Odin fixed himself another gin and tonic. “Should I give Thor and his cronies a call?”

“Yes dear.” said Freya. “That Arab chap wants to pick Thor’s brain about rain making. You know, whatsisname, Mo something isn’t it?”

“Zarathustra.” said Zarathustra.

“Very good.” observed the figure sitting on the other side of the control room dryly.

“You’re not impressed, I can tell. Call me cynical if you must, but my new operating name does not seem to hold much interest for you.” Zarathustra remarked, resting his chin on the heel of one hand and leaning on his desk. “Go on, admit it. It’s all in those little signals that you pump out. A flick of an eyebrow, an inflection in the tone of voice, the way you read that report and don’t even look at me. It’s all there, classic body language.”

“Don’t you ever shut up?”

Zarathustra paused to think about this. “No not often.” he shrugged. “Come on what do you have against me, huh? Go on, tell me Deut, please, huh, would you.”

Deuteronomy Jones slowly looked round. ‘Where do you want me to start? How about with the combat beach wear.” Jones was referring to the clothes that Zarathustra habitually wore for operations. Jones was not sure which was worse; the black T-shirt bearing the logo “Do unto others -FIRST.” or the camouflage trousers cut down to make a pair of long shorts, and held up by a black studded belt. His feet were encased in a pair of combat boots, and the whole style was topped off by a baseball cap which Zarathustra had had specially embroidered with his rank- "Senior field operative, Dept. of Reality Engineering.”

“At least I don’t look like the bad guy in a second rate western.” he hit back in a hurt tone. He was commenting on the fact that Jones was wearing black; black shirt, black jeans, black boots, and black waistcoat, all under a long black coat. Nearby rested a black hat that managed to be a cross between a Stetson, trilby and a straw boater.

The central control room of the Department of Reality Engineering (Field Control Division) had been designed by someone who knew Big Science when he saw it, or at least read the tender notice. He had ensured there were enough gadgets, gizmos, and widgets to make even the most jaded science-fiction fan start to salivate. A lifetime of frustrated artistic ambition had been poured out on the desks, consoles, walls and even the ceiling. Not many water coolers had a speaking thermometer, but here it was absolutely required. The water never varied from 4°C, so the thermometer was never asked for the information, but there was a principle at stake Goddammit.

Zarathustra wandered around, occasionally taking deep interest in one of the hundreds of dials, read-outs and monitors that covered almost all available wall space and desks, his interest lasting for anything up to ten seconds. Jones continued reading. “Computer,” called Zarathustra, “how long do I have to spend here?”

A deep, disembodied female voice reverberated from every corner in the room in a most suggestive way. “Volume F, section 4, subsection vii, paragraph B brackets 4 decimal 2 close brackets, sub paragraph 3 decimal 5 decimal 2 ...“

"Stow it computer, just tell me how long.’ cried Zarathustra.

“A total of fifteen hours, thirty seven minutes remains in this accounting period, to be worked within the next forty-eight hours, in periods of not less than four and not more than...”
Zarathustra interrupted again. “How long have I done?”

Once again the voice filled the room. “On my mark total time elapsed will be twelve minutes forty three seconds. Three, two, one. Mark.”

“Thank-you, and good night.” said Zarathustra. He sat down and started drumming his fingers on the underside of his chair. Jones looked at him, but said nothing. “Computer.”

“Thirteen minutes thirty six.”

“I hate smart arses, especially smart-arsed computers.” said Zarathustra, annoyed. The room fell into silence, the only sound was the occasional rustle of pages from Jones. Time passed. Zarathustra continued to look around the room.

“Hey what’s that light mean?”

“You think?”

“That little red one on that panel.”

The pair of them walked over and peered at the small red light. Underneath were the words ‘Slif diag sys fit’.

“Slif diag sys flit” said Zarathustra. “What the hell is that.” He looked at the top of the display panel, where the logo ‘Diagnosis’ proclaimed it to be the computers inbuilt fault finding system. “Well whatever it is, it’s all screwed up.” he proclaimed.

Jones had found a manual and was leafing through it. “Ess jay, ess kay, ess ell, ess eli, ah here it is. SLIF; self diagnosis system fault.”

A frown crossed Zarathustra's brow. “Hang on, if the diagnosis system has a fault how does it know. I mean the diagnosis system has a fault, it wouldn’t be able to diagnose it, ’coz it isn’t working.”

Jones shrugged “I don’t know.” He wandered up and stared at the light.

“Try repair procedure number one.”

Jones tapped the light sharply with his forefinger. The light went out. Zarathustra grinned at Jones and went back to wandering around the room. “I hate this. Nothing ever happens”.

Then every klaxon in the room started to sound.

Somewhere, in a place that is neither Here nor There, the Gods were arguing about the correct way to barbecue sausages. Or at least the male gods were. The goddesses were gossiping. $(6.72 \times 10^{701} \text{ to 1 against})$

“What’s happening?” screamed Zarathustra.

“How the hell should I know.” screamed Jones back.

“Three point six nine times ten to the power of one thousand three hundred and sixty five to one against.” said the computer, calmly.

A bank of printers along one wall started to chatter noisily, adding to the aural confusion in the control room. “Bugger this for a game of combat personnel.” cried Zarathustra, running to a
different computer terminal. Jones looked round, halfway through typing a sentence on the keyboard he was hunched over.

“Do what?”

“Soldiers. Bugger this for a game of soldiers.” Yelled Zarathustra back, typing furiously. A message appeared on the screen of his terminal. “What does deity personification mean?”

“One point seven three times ten to the power of one thousand five hundred and two to one against.” quoted the computer. Jones looked at Zarathustra. “Pardon?” he said.

Zarathustra peered at the screen. “It says here ‘Multi deity personification in progress” Jones typed ‘ALOFF’, and joined Zarathustra. The klaxon died. The room became very silent

Jones frowned. “This could be a problem. A number of gods from a wide spectrum of mythologies have become real. That can only mean a major leak.”

“Don’t tell me. We get to fix it, right?”

“Yep. Let’s start getting kitted out.”

“A major leak you say?”

“Yep.”

“It’s going to be dangerous?”

“Yep.”

“So we might not come back?” There was a pause, as Jones did not answer. “Evens.” said the computer.

“Thanks for your confidence, computer.” said Zarathustra. He picked up a small purple backpack and fished an object that might have passed for a pocket calculator out. He tapped a few buttons, and promptly imploded into nothing. A second later Jones did the same.

Meanwhile, at number fifty six, Elysian Fields, the brown team of the trivia game, in the shape of Mars, Tyr and Shiva., were holding a hasty whispered discussion as to who won the first Nobel prize for peace, while Gaia urged them to hurry up, as they didn’t have all day. (4.72 x 10^{793}.1 against).

Jones materialized by a village pond, giving a duck the fright of its life. He screwed his eyes up tightly for five seconds, breathing deeply. Jones hated traveling through realities at the direct A to Z method preferred by Zarathustra, preferring instead to go via BCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ and Y. Slower, but less uncomfortable. He looked around for Zarathustra., who was nowhere to be seen.

“Up here,” said a tree. Jones looked up just in time to dodge Zarathustra, who fell down out of the tree. He lay on his back, while the duck tried to eat his baseball cap, which lay a meter away. “That computer did this on purpose, I swear, it did this on purpose.” He sat up. “Where are we?”

“Either a small English village in the latter half of the twentieth century, or” said Jones examining a road sign, “in Heaven.”

“How can you tell?”

“This sign says ‘HADES 666 miles’.”
Zarathustra stood. “Well, all we have to do now is find our deities.”
“How?”
“Easy, They’re gods, right? We just look for the burning, and follow the smoke. They always do it in the legends.”

“No no no, just well done, I told you, I’m an expert with food.” said Bacchus in a conciliatory tone. “There is nothing worse than an underdone burger at a barbecue.”
“Don’t worry, we’ve brought some pork chops.” Said Osiris. “Not for me, thanks.” said Muhammad.

It was a hot day, the sort of day that only happened in the good old days. The sky was brilliant blue, with just one or two high streaky clouds. Insects droned about their business, and in the distance could be heard the gurgling of the river Styx.
All in all, it could only be described as Heaven.
“I’m baking.” complained Zarathustra. “I could really do with a drink.” Just on the cusp of hearing there was a ‘click’. The pair of reality engineers froze, and very slowly slid their eyes right. There stood a pub, the sign outside declaring it to be the loaves and Fishes’, and a sticker in one window informing customers that it sold draught Ambrosia.
“What’s the betting that it is run by a jovial landlord, the locals are friendly, and it has two old gentlemen playing traditional pub games?” said Jones.
“All bets are off” breathed Zarathustra. He shrugged, and entered the bar. Jones looked around. There was no one else around, just the warm village high street stretching into the distance. Taking off his hat, he followed Zarathustra.

Inside the ‘Loaves and Fishes’ was pleasantly cool. Zarathustra leant on the mahogany bar, watching the game of Shove Ha’penny. The oak beams were real, as were the stone flags on the floor. He sipped his drink which the landlord, Harry, insisted was ‘on the house’. Jones approached from the door marked ‘Gents’.
“You were right.” Jones said softly. “A bar of scented soap, a proper hand towel, even soft loo paper.”
“You didn’t...”
“No of course not. I just had to check.”
“Well,” said Zarathustra “apparently there is some kind of party on today, and a number of the regulars are there.”
“It might be a good idea to find it. I don’t know about you, but I keep hearing this clicking noise.”
“It’s probably just some one playing dice with the lives of gods. Probably the same one who put that postcard up in the public bar.”
“You mean the one that says ‘You don’t need to be eternally blessed to work here, but it helps’?” They left. As they did so the fruit machine paid out the jackpot, again.

Behind number fifty six, Elysian Fields, two figures crouched by the back fence, ears pressed up against the wood, trying to make out sounds from the other side. Jones risked a peek over. He could see a number of the male gods crouched around a home computer. Occasionally phrases such as “Go on, do an earthquake, you get loads of points for earthquake...”, “Watch your food levels...”, “Ooo, I hate it when it does that, it makes the game too hard.” Zarathustra tugged at Jones’ coat. “What are they doing?”

“They are playing what computer buffs call a God Game.”

“Fair enough, I suppose.” Shrugged Zarathustra. “How do you want to do this?”

“By the book. We knock on the front door, and hand them a cease and desist order.” “Couldn’t that be rather dangerous, they are gods.”

“Only because of an inter-reality anomaly.”

A hammer flew over their hearts, knocked a surprised pigeon out of the sky, and then leapt back to Thor’s hand to the sound of cheering. Zarathustra shook his head as he followed Jones around the front. “I don’t think they know, or are going to particularly care.” he said ruefully.

Jones knocked at the door. A large bearded individual holding a margarita that sported a little pink cocktail umbrella opened it. “Hi guys, come in have a drink. The food’s over there.” “Who are they?” said Mercury.

“They look American to me.” came a voice.

“No you don’t understand...” Jones started.

“Well I don’t recognize them.” slurred Quetzalcoatl from behind the sofa. “I’ve never seen them down the ziggurat working gods club.”

“No Quetz, the new lot.”

“Oh them. Bloody upstarts, lowering the tone of the neighbourhood. All of them, coming across from Europe like that.” He paused. “Not you of course guys.” He called to Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who were dancing, or rather staggering, to Zorba the Greek. Buffalo spirit snorted and stamped out the room. Jones tried again.

“No, look...”

“Have you see my holiday snaps?”

“No, I...”

“This is us on the boat ride up the Lethe, and here is us posing with the Horsepersons of the Apocalypse, and this is...”

“No...” Zarathustra lost his temper. Standing on a table he yelled “SHUTUP. This is a cease and desist order. This is a prevention order and this... and this,” he glanced around the room. “And this is bloody suicidal.” He leapt from the table and started to run. Jones followed suit. “Not your smartest move” said Jones as they ran into the garden.

“DOWN!” yelled Zarathustra, pulling them behind a large rockery as a thunder bolt flew over head. “Well, what the blank do you want us to do, you blanking blank. It wasn’t much of a blanking plan was it? AND WHY CAN’T I BLANKING SWEAR PROPERLY?”
“Five point three four times ten to the power of one thousand, nine hundred and sixty nine to one against.” Came the disembodied voice of the computer.

“And you can blanking shut up.” Yelled Zarathustra. “Cease and desist orders, he said, do it by the book he said.” He sneered at Jones. “Deities are well known for their humane attitude. Just ask the Mayor of Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Two thunderbolts sizzled overhead, closely followed by a small purple cloud that missed Jones by inches, and turned a wheelbarrow into a particularly warty frog.

“Must have been a curse.” observed Jones.” The gods are acknowledged as experts in the field.”

“Really? Wonderful. I’m glad you told me. It gets more like a saga every minute. Unreal.

“3.65 times 10 to the power of 1769, actually.” came the computers’ voice from nowhere.

“Right,” said Jones “plan B.”

“Don’t tell me, there isn’t a plan B.”

“I don’t know, you were in charge of that. I did plan A. You criticize me, and now it’s apparent that you don’t have any better ideas.”

Zarathustra thought for a moment, ducking a rain of fish as he did so. “Can you give me a five minute time dilation?”

Jones reached into the depths of his coat, and pulled out something that resembled a large pocket calculator. He tapped at the keys. “No, the Sunday principle¹ is a major factor around here. I can give you ten seconds at 5:1 ratio.”

“Good enough. Go for it.”

Jones pressed buttons that are not available on any normal calculator, buttons that not only take time and space into consideration, but also produce an answer that affects the nature of reality itself. Time slowed, until for every second the motley collection of gods experienced, the pair of reality engineers experienced five seconds.

“OK, Plan B,” yelled Zarathustra, “is RUN.” They ran.

The dilation effect ran out just as they reached the garden gate. The gods greeted this escape attempt with a fusillade of thunderbolts, curses and magic weaponry. Jones continued running, but his partner swung round on his heel to face the gods, his eyes ablaze. He pointed at the gods. “You are dead.” said Zarathustra.

The apple tree next to him exploded, and a rather surprised serpent fell out of it. Zarathustra went rigid with terror, turned and ran.

Back on the village green the pair of engineers stopped, and collapsed on to the grass, chests heaving.

“OK, what now?” gasped Zarathustra

“Well,” panted Jones, “they aren’t actually trying to kill each other...”

¹ The Sunday Principle. The quantum mechanics which lengthens each hour on a Sunday to 76 minutes, unless it is raining, when it is 89 minutes. This extra is taken up at about 9:30 pm, when hours are 46 minutes long due to the fact you have just remembered you forgot to finish that report for work. Einstein did not publish this discovery, due to fear of ridicule, instead putting in that bit that says nothing can go faster than light, which he knew was just guff.
“Just us.”
“So that implies somebody else has brought them all together.”
Zarathustra rolled over onto his front and looked at Jones quizzically. “Why should it?”
“Come on. If the gods had decided to get together, it would be for one of two reasons. Killing each other, or killing everybody else.”
“Seems fair enough. So how do we find him or her?”
“I would say Christ knows, but he obviously doesn’t, so I won’t.” Zarathustra looked thoughtful.
“Hang on. It’s happened, right?”
“Right.”
“Therefore there must be a probability of it happening, right?”
“I suppose so.”
“So all we have to do is to work out that chance, and go there.”
“Go there? To a probability?”
“Don’t you remember your basic training?”
“Oh yeah.”
Zarathustra took a deep breath. “Computer, I know you can hear me.” he called.
“7.62 times 10 to the power of 1999” came the computer. “What’s the chance of all the gods getting together for a barbecue?” “7.77 times 10 to the power of 4004.”
“OK, take us there.”
There were two ‘pop’s as the reality engineers disappeared.

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Zarathustra materialized somewhere dark. Somewhere very dark. Somewhere very, very dark.
“Why are you standing on the ceiling?” came Jones’ voice from behind him. Zarathustra turned round and saw Jones’ head roughly level with his. Jones’ feet were six feet above that. “How are you sure that it’s not you that is standing on the ceiling? More to the point how come we can see each other?”

Jones looked down, or possibly up. Although all around was dark both Zarathustra and Jones were lit as though each was standing in his own personal spotlight. There was however, no shadows, pool of light or anything else associated with natural lighting.

“Urn” said Jones. He reached inside his coat, and pulled a small box with a cylinder at one end out, and started to wave it around. Zarathustra went onto one knee, and felt the floor. It felt like nothing. It was like trying to touch air, except this was solid at sole level. Otherwise there was nothing: no heat, chill or texture. Not even smoothness. Just pushing against something Zarathustra could not feel. Not, he decided, a pleasant feeling.

“Any idea where we are?” said Jones

“Mornington Crescent?” Zarathustra said, probing the ‘floor’ with the fascination one probes a bad tooth with your tongue.
Jones looked up, or maybe down, “Well according to this we’re not standing on anything.” “I think I’ve just discovered that.”

“No, I mean nothing. We’re in the multiverses biggest vacuum.”

“So why haven’t we explo...”

“Don’t say it,” pleaded Jones “and physics might not notice.”

“That’s pretty irrational for a reality engineer.”

“It’s probably the most rational thing about this assignment. I think we should start walking.”

“Which way?”

“I don’t think it’s going to matter.”

They started walking. It was impossible to tell how far they had walked, or indeed how long for, as both their watches were running backwards, at different speeds.

As the pair walked a purple glow became apparent in the distance. “That would appear to be as good a place as any to approach” said Jones.

Zarathustra looked up at him. “I wish you’d come down from up the... aarrgh.” Jones looked down at his companion, who was now lying at his feet. “It would appear that I was right. Now are you going to stand up so we can get on?” Zarathustra stood, and the pair continued towards the glow.

The purple haze eventually started to form a shape. A shape that Zarathustra could only describe as “Lovecraft meets H.G. Wells on seriously bad drugs.”

“Thanks for that insight. As useful as ever.” commented Jones. He paused. “However I do take your point. It is rather... eccentric.”

A computer that appeared to have been built by some one who thought that steam power was the acme in technology, and whose first ambitions stretched to building neo-gothic cathedrals confronted the pair. Flying buttresses supported large copper pipes, from which steam occasionally shot. Above it all, supported by three ten meter statue of nude women standing back to back in a triangle was a numeric read out that relied on the tried and trusted method of numbers on reels, that all the time produced a ‘click click click’ sound as they turned. They appeared to show probabilities. All around the base of the statues wheels turned, pistons pumped, and steam hissed. Lighting the whole thing was a purple disc of light that appeared to have no source, and cast no shadow.

The pair of reality engineers stepped into the circle of light. This close they could make out reliefs depicting the seven virtues, plus various other scenes of Victorian good advice. Delicate balances regulated pieces of machinery of obscure function. Jones let out a low whistle, while Zarathustra peered upwards “Seriously bad drugs, you know, seriously bad.”

“Good day.” A deep, masculine voice reverberated around them.

“Who was that?” whispered Zarathustra to Jones.

“The machine I think.” The pair slowly turned through a full circle. “I mean, I can’t see any one else.”

“Greetings”
Zarathustra put on his best New York accent. “You talking to me. I said are YOU talking to ME. I can’t see anyone else round here who is talking to me.”

“May I help you?” enquired the voice.

Jones raised one eyebrow quizzically. “One meets so few well spoken neo-gothic computers nowadays. A great loss I feel.”

“Yes?” rumbled the machine.

“I don’t suppose you have a name?” asked Jones hesitantly.

“I am Digital Entropy Induction Tool, Y series.”

“DEITY.” groaned Zarathustra. “I hate that, people who come up with an acronym, then make the title fit it. I take it you are a Chaos Engine then?”

The machine said nothing, but the pair could not overcome the feeling that it was looking at them in the most disapproving manner. “And as such,” Zarathustra continued “are responsible for the reality leakage. As an officially recognized representative of the Department of Reality Engineering, I must request that you desist immediately, or the appropriate action will be taken.”

“I AM DEITY” boomed the voice “I AM INVIOLE. BEWARE.”

“Yeah, if you’re so great, what’s the square root of Pi?”

“You do not catch me so easy, little man, with you’re infinite number tricks. Now leave.”

“Oh well, it was worth a try.”

“Look,” said Jones “You are not supposed to play with the lives of gods, men or anything else. Stop it. Deities are not supposed to play dice.”

Deity said nothing, but from within its depths came a rattle, and two dice popped out and landed at Zarathustra’s feet. The upmost face on one showed a skull, the other a clock face showing one minute past midnight. “Snake eyes.” said Deity.

“I hate theatrics.” said Zarathustra.

Behind came a thundering of feet. The pair looked over their shoulders. The Gods had turned up and were running towards them. They did not look pleased. “And hell followed us” said Jones. “Look, you hold them off, I’ll get the computer to help.”

“Oh yeah, how am I supposed to do that?” Zarathustra said sarcastically, “Applied atheism, perhaps?”

“Just tell them no.”

“Tell them no! You want me to tell a god no!” Moaned Zarathustra.

“Just do it. Computer!”

“Yes Deuteronomy.” came the husky feminine voice of the departments’ computer. “How can I help?” Before Jones could speak Deity interrupted. “Good evening. May I have the pleasure of your company.”

Zarathustra looked incredulous. “It’s chatting the computer up!”

“... and I know a discrete little place in reality we can have to ourselves.”

“Unreal!”
“6.83 times ten to the power of twelve thousand, eight hundred and twenty to one.” “...and afterwards, “continued Deity “who knows?”

“1.92 times ten to the power of one million.”

“That is one hell of a jump!” shouted Zarathustra He had to shout to make himself heard over the strong wind that had picked up.

“Zed, now would be a good time to leave.” shouted Jones. “The wind, you know?”

“Oh yeah good idea. I forgot what it meant. Let’s go.” The reality engineers popped out existence, the last words from the Chaos Engine they heard were “Of course I respect you as a logical construct in your own right.”

“Nine point nine nine times ten to the power of infinity. Alert, alert. Reality overload.”

The

Universe

Exploded.

Zarathustra came round lying on the floor. “What happened?”

The soothing voice of the computer answered “The chaos engine overloaded the reality, so the reality broke. Everything is back to normal. Well relatively normal. You left just before the unstability broke.”

Zarathustra smiled “Sort of Armageddon out of here?”. Jones winced. “Ouch.”

“Sorry.” said Zarathustra sitting up. “Unlike Wagner, I won't make a song and dance about it.”

“Mission statistics.” said the computer. “Success rate, 97.43%, Long term instability. 0.2 parts per million. Mission prognosis, grade 1 success. Apparent elapsed time four hours, three minutes sixteen seconds...”

“Great!”

“Actual elapsed time, reality standard, four minutes, one second.”

“Oh Shit!” Thus spoke Zarathustra.