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Contents

Editorial.....pg. 4

Artwork

Dave Allwine

Photography.....pgs. 14 - 17

Fiction

Death Metal Music Box.....pg. 6

Matthew Burnside

*Effective dryness and weight Kant's Logic has on
philologus eyelids*.....pg. 8

Rachel Siemens

Romance: Beyond Thunderdome.....pg. 18

Matthew Burnside

The Future of Storytelling.....pg. 20

Nathaniel Heely

The Otter in my Apartment.....pg. 25

T. Fox Dunham

Poetry

Monkey Think.....pg. 36

Neila Mezynski

The Chronicles of Tim Part IX:.....pg. 38

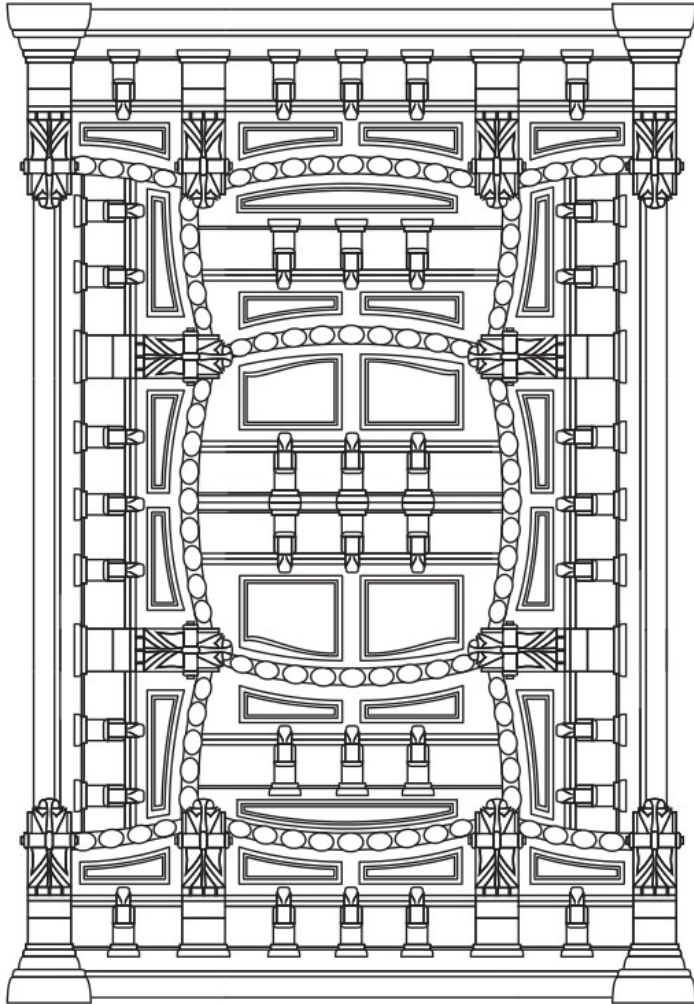
Mike Wiley

Contributor Bios.....pg. 47

Editorial:

Welcome. No, we don't take off our shoes here. Would you like a drink? Yes? Okay, but be warned, I'm going to join you. And it's hard to say what'll happen once *I* get started. Dancing? Not usually, but goddamnit yes, sometimes there's dancing. I hope you have fun, I will. I hope you feel okay tomorrow and remember everything. I may not.

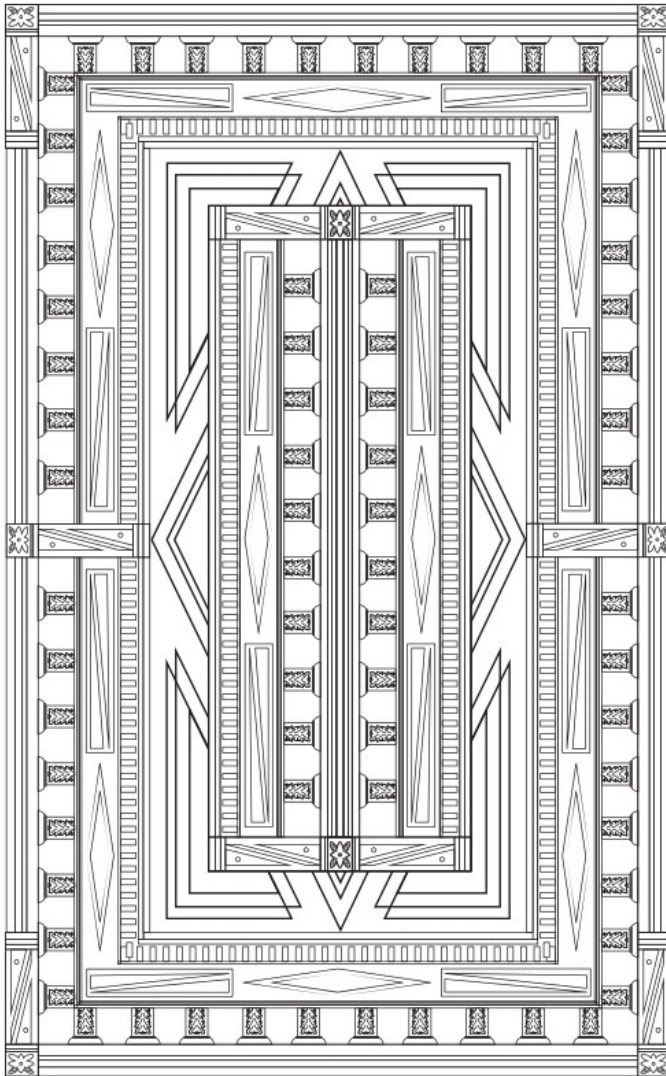
– Shea Newton



DEATH METAL MUSIC BOX

Matthew Burnside

Daddy Dearest where do I even begin to explain I am the snow globe that fantasizes only nuclear winter. No princess pink nor spleen of sunshine but tar-black licorice used to strangle birthday ponies. Or a purse full of poison, 250-volt electric pea coat, hi-heels built for bludgeoning neck bones. You would have me knit only kerchiefs all lifelong but if you noticed every Barbie is fast asleep in my Easy-Bake, all my tea cups slosh with wolf blood two sugar cubes apiece while this 12-guage ballerina carves butterfly wings on a rust-throated rooftop—skull full of night one gut-twitch away from her next fresh kill. Forgive me: I was curious to see how all pretty things eventually burst



Effective dryness and weight Kant's *Logic* has on *philologus* eyelids

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Abstract: In an effort to explore common critiques of Kant we investigated the effect an unexplained reading Kant's *Logic* would have on a philosophy major's (*Homo sapien philologus*) eyelids. How they would respond to prolonged battering of phrases like, "The lower concept is not contained *in* the higher, for it contains more in itself than the higher; but it is yet contained *under* the latter, because the higher contains the cognitive ground of the lower. *Further...*" The subject was placed in a calm environment and exposed to certain stimuli as the reading was held. The primary investigator found that the average time it took for the subject to fall to sleep was 10.3 min, and that indeed, for all his genius, Kant is an exceptionally dry and tedious philosopher.

Keywords: *Logic*, *philologus*, laughably rigid structure regarding titles of scientific papers, neurological stimulation, Kant, *palpebra inferior/superior*

Introduction: Having performed several literature-based experiments over the course of her career—i.e.

1997's "Physical Weight of a Novel vs. Personal Esteem vs. Probability the Subject will be labeled a Teachers Pet"[1] as well as 2001's "Stimulation of frontal hemisphere in juvenile cerebrum regarding parents coffee table art books and their effect on heightening pretension in minors"[2] (a particularly important experiment as it also lead to the study of pubescent female fixation on the beauty concept, and how a father could think it comforting to call a daughter 'rubenesque' when she displayed distress at the widening of her hips)—it seemed a natural move to finally study the physiological effects philosophy can have on *Homo sapiens*. Immanuel Kant has been cited as being one of the most dense and impenetrable philosophers in history. His musing, leaning heavily on the metaphysical as well as his thoughts on epistemology in his book *Critique of Pure Reason*, have been called 'dry' and 'unreadable' [3]. The *Homo sapien philologus* used for this experiment was chosen based on its high pretension levels as well as an above average ability for sustained silent reading [4]. Having been observed in the act of 'reading the day away' on numerous occasions, this specimen also seemed to have an inordinate amount of time to dedicate to the investigation. On average, the adult male mind can stay focused for up to 8 min before deciding to stroll off, exploring different avenues of thought or image [5]. The question posed for this experiment was, "how does Kant affect the ability of attention of *philologus*, particularly one presumably so attuned to who Kant is and what he has to say? In regards to

physiological effects, will the subjects mind succumb to sleep? His eyelids slip down, coaxed into submission? Or will they remain wide and focused, enraptured by Kant's mind smeared over the pages of his *Logic*?

Materials and Methods: Prior to this experiment, *Homo sapien philologus* was kept in a studio apartment (57°F) for 12-14 hrs out of its day. The other 10-12 hrs were spent at the organisms place of vocation (steak house as server), school, clam chowder shop, and with the experimenter herself. The study was carried out on PI's twin bed and the subject was supplied with a pitcher of filtered water and a mason jar to drink it with. *Philologus* was exposed to three different readings of Kant's *Logic* with the same condition applied to each exposure. At 10PM PST three evenings in a row, the subject and experimenter got into the twin bed. The subject then laid his head on her right shoulder while his right arm encircled the experimenter's ribcage. Both were then covered with one feather and two cotton comforters; two cotton pillows were placed under PI's head. The light was kept on at a semi-harsh level all throughout the experiment. The experimenter then began the reading and 60 sec after it had begun mechanical stimulation of the subject's hair and upper back was integrated (the method of alternate scratching and rubbing was performed). These actions were sustained until sleep was achieved (sleep being defined as deep and measured breath coupled with light to moderate stertorous breathing.)

Results:**Simulation 1**-10:00-10:09PM

Prior to first experiment subject became inebriated (therefore we conducted all three simulations with subject in similar state). When offered water, subject ingested 5 oz. The first 3 min were spent keeping subject on task. *Philologus* tried all methods of distractions including tactile and auditory stimulations— “Kant builds on itself; you have to start at the beginning” —speaking as if an authority on the subject matter (even though he only heard one lecture on the aforementioned Kant) as well as using various methods of seduction and annoyance. Subject displayed moderate tussis and rearranged body at 10:06PM. When asked if still awake at 10:09PM, subject did not respond. 10:13PM subject began stertor.

Simulation 2- 10:05-10:17PM

Subject ingested 8 oz of water prior to reading. Again, subject used verbal and tactile means to distract. First by engaging in a discussion of Kant, then by beginning a backrub. After several minutes of distraction on experimenter’s part the reading began. Subject began stertor at 10:15PM but seemingly woke self up and resumed stertor at 10:17PM.

Simulation 3- 10:00-10:10PM

Subject became jumpy and fidgety as soon as reading began. He repeatedly took the book from the experimenter’s hands (sometimes trying to read independently and at other times trying to hide the

book or put it out of reach of experimenter's grasp. Measured breath began within 3 min of actual reading and stertorous breathing began 7 min after that.

Discussion: It would appear from the findings that regardless of interest in subject, or respect for author; content is key in regards to eyelid-to-interest-level ratios. It was as if all the weight of Rubens' "Three Graces" was pulling closed the subject's eyelids over the course of this experiment. An average of 3-6 min were spent trying to shake them off; their fleshy dimpled fists pummeling the subjects eyes with sleep, seducing his mind with three bodies bathed in serotonin. Interestingly enough, post-procedure, the subject expressed continued interest in Kant and his philosophies. One might consider the question of self-denial in regards to upkeep of personal reputation contained within *philologus'* intrinsic sense of self as a follow-up to this study.

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ROMANCE: BEYOND THUNDERDOME

Matthew Burnside

Aunty Entity,

I am thinking of you tonight masturbating on this lonely patch of highway in post apocalyptia watching an atomized sky ribbed with platinum-haired plutonium cloud. The way the shapes swirl slow-blown like skin collisions so obscene, I have to pack dust in every orifice just to keep my honor. Tell me: am I still your raggedy man? It is so dry here without you. You, the beginning & end of all my thirst. Gasoline is overrated; for you alone I burn. Do you remember the first time we shared a molotov cocktail at the atomic cafe? There is still a hole in my heart where you burned rubber through me with your motorized parade. You looked down, said the words: *Ain't we a pair?* & just like that my leathery heart caught sparks. You made a feral kid out of me that same night in the bungalow with your bodacious boomerangs, backwards Kama sutra-style like a sexual samurai. Here I sit sucking acid rain from a nipples bottle, & I can't help but remember all those nights we slipped inside Thunderdome after dark. All the kinky games we played. Do you remember? I'd pretend to defy your tyrannical rule & you'd lash me with a look, puff out your gladiatorial shoulder pads & slide down to me on your zip-line chair. Sideways smirking in a peacock pose, you'd command me: *Bust a deal, spin the wheel!* & the foreplay would ensue. Whether riding backwards donning that

Gulag mask or pumping away performing "hard labor," we would embargo the night with primal scream. Sometimes you would whip me with doll's hair or call me PIG KILLER until I squirmed. O that we might return to those nights! How I long to be your Master Blaster, your Dr. Dealgood, your Lord Humunugus again! To make a nest of your hair is all I ask. Let's pretend those thighs are a Transavia PL-12 Airtruk. I'll twiddle your propellers, grease your wings until we're aerodynamic over the waste while I whisper low in your ear: *You run Bartertown, baby.* Just for old time's sake let me be your Captain Walker & take you to Tomorrow-morrow Land? I may be here, but my heart remains in Thunderdome, where two hearts enter, one heart leaves, *broken.*

-MM



The Future of Storytelling

~Nathaniel Heely

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Jack Stanton's trip to McDonalds® could be categorized as a modern day odyssey. While it took him a scant twenty minutes to walk from the north side of campus to its location three blocks west and across the street, it nonetheless came with an emphatic amount of obstacles among which was a hospital visit, a separate near death experience and unexpected rain.

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Energy® companion product, Energy Base®. Drinking 12 Hour Energy will provide the alertness you need for productive work all day. 12 Hour Energy: When You Don't Have the Energy to Make it Through the Day. At All.

Jack was under the enormous pressure of a paper deadline due by noon the next day. At 7pm he left his Comparative Literary Analysis of Herman Melville's Moby Dick as it relates to Postmodern Literature, half finished without a works cited, to pursue his metabolic need for digestion in the form of the new 30 piece Chicken McNuggets® for \$4.99 available for a limited time. Jack jogged the four flights of stairs down and crossed the quad below that was the site of a soccer game, though Jack, being a demonstratively big fan of Liverpool and the FA Premiere League did not actually refer to the game as soccer, but by its proper name: football. It was here that Jack stepping upon the concrete faced his first obstacle.

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Upon reaching the concrete walkway a shower of water and small pellet sized ice rained down on his head with a cry calling to "look out" coming precisely

one second after the first drop of water made contact with his head. Laughs came from the players on the quad and Jack was flush with anger. He looked up and searched for the perpetrator responsible only to be staring at a closing window on the third floor. Even though he had been sufficiently humiliated in front of two dozen people, he felt that time was of the essence despite his jubilation of having left his dorm for the first time in over six hours. And so he pressed on amidst the laughs and sideways glances.

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The late February evening started to send shivers across Jack's body and the staccato clattering of teeth excited him as he walked wet and dripping past the Library and the on-campus Starbucks® now serving the new Hawaiian Blonde Bombshell Roast. Jack used his pullover sleeve to wipe his face and neck of the water. In the evening darkness he could start to see slivers of his cold breath illuminated in the ghostly pale light that haunted the campus. It was at this point while walking entranced in the color of his breath that he came across his old roommate Grant Gables.

"Hey Jack!" Grant called when he was about thirty feet away.

Jack gave him an upwards nod to indicate a mild pleasantry hoping he might pass without interruption.

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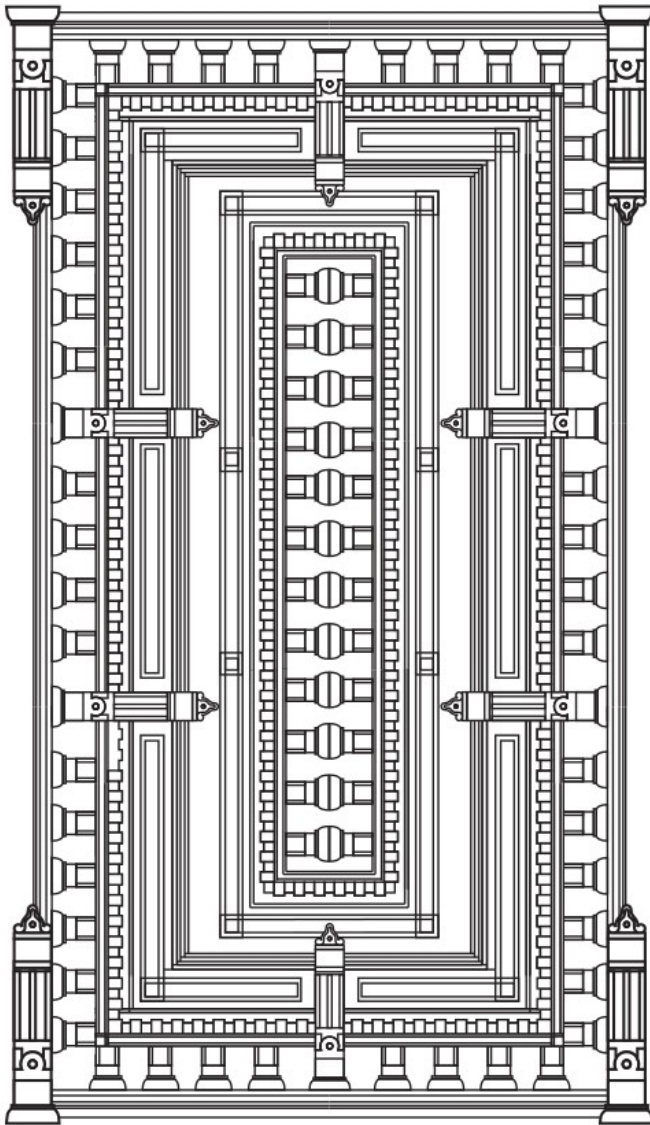
“Dude, it’s been forever man.” Grant said shaking Jack’s hand vigorously like an overly eager presidential candidate.

“Yeah, it’s good seeing you.”

“You too man. Hey did you hear? Daniel’s in the hospital?”

“Pff, what’d that idiot do this time?”

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The Otter in my Apartment

~T. Fox Dunham

Manny pulled the clock from the wall, stuck its face to her ear, listened for the tick tocks—slow, like two drunk galumphing home from Jay Jays after a night of beers and Jack Daniels chasers.

“Broken clock?” the otter asked, getting comfy on the couch.

“Seven-thirty Willy told me. There was a small chance he’d have to meet a new client after work. Eight at the latest. Called me his little bunny.”

She would have remembered if there’d been a talking otter sitting on the couch below the Tiffany’s silver mirror. Perhaps the otter was one of Kimmy’s plush dolls she’d left out before Manny put her daughter to bed. No. This otter had lungs and wiggly feet. The otter sipped from a martini glass, and none of Kimmy’s toys had a taste for liquor. Manny didn’t think otters could talk, though she didn’t know much about the natural world. She’d have to watch more Discovery channel. She did like the show about the exterminator with the spiky hair. He was kind to animals.

Perhaps this had something to do with the green pills Doctor Helsinki prescribed. One in the morning. Call back, he said, if she started thinking crazy notions like scooping out her brains with an ice cream scoop. Doctor Helsinki had studied medicine at some old, ivory school with neoclassic columns in Sweden, didn’t take their medical insurance. Each

visit cost three hundred and twenty dollars.

“Excuse me. I don’t wish to sound rude. What are you doing there?” Manny asked.

“Drinking a 'tini with extra olive juice,” the otter said, perfectly naked except for the fur and a pair of galoshes, twin, wild eyes spinning about the downtown Philly apartment. “I always run out of juice before I run out of olives.”

The otter tipped back the last of her drink then held the empty glass in the air.

“Oh,” Manny said. “I’ll fetch you another.”

Manny slipped off her heels, kicked them at the wall, then she blushed at her temper, remembering she had a guest. Her arches pinched like walking on a carpet of wasps—the last pair of heels she’d ever wear. Might as well surrender and start wearing house coats and slippers all day like Mom.

She took a martini glass from the cabinet, examined it in the sallow candle light for smudges. The tall tapers had burned down to stumps, spilling a puddle of white wax, building a bridge from the crystal candle holder to the serving charger, mixing with the congealed fat dripping off the cooling roast.

“How’s that ‘tini coming?” the otter said, giving Manny a water-wobbly smirk, exposing her stiletto choppers. Manny hadn’t realized otters could be so pushy.

“Be polite, or I will ask you to leave,” Manny said.

“No way Josey,” said the otter.

Manny sighed, got out the vermouth, grabbed

the shaker.

If Willy wasn't coming home, maybe tonight she'd setup her studio. She'd been putting it off for so long though it felt snow melting days. They'd moved into the condo after Kim's birth. She'd be ten next July.

"I likes 'em with extra olive juice, nice and salty. There's more in the icebox if you need it. This is a real nice joint that keeps extra olives on hand. Thinking ahead."

She put poured the mixer into the glass. Her fingers slipped their grip from the condensation, spilling the drink down the Valentino, black party dress she'd bought for tonight—the night of promises, when Willy swore on a Bible, Geeta and Koran, poke his eye out, cross his swollen heart and on his mother's grave that he'd be home and not out entertaining clients, making deals, baking the dough that pays for another year of private school for Kimmy and Manny's weekly visits to the spa.

"Darn it," she said.

"You swear like a wuss," spoke the otter, sitting on the end of the couch. She had a children's plastic bucket like the one Kimmy took to shore. Clams filled the bucket. A briny aroma stagnated the air. She carefully selected one, sniffed it with her snout, then scarf down the meat. She tossed the spent shell over her shoulder, splattering on the lavender wall of the living room in their two-thousand a month apartment.

"Jesus H. Christ," the otter said. "Shit. God damn it. Mother—"

“Stop that!” Manny said. “This is a proper home. A family home. My daughter is asleep in her bedroom.”

“Like the ill tempered tailor said, *Suit yourself lady!*” The otter chucked another clam at the wall.

“And if this is such a proper home, then what is that *thing* doing in the bedroom?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Manny said, blushing like a frying tomato.

Soon as she was down dabbing her dress with club soda, she’d toss the vulgar thing out. What had she been thinking? Women like Manny didn’t buy such trash—soft latex that retained the heat absorbed from bodily contact. She’d never have the guts to take it out. Ordering it online had felt so liberating. Perhaps the latex would absorb enough fire to burn like a torch, to melt through the glacier.

She’d toss it out and wash her hands after handling it.

“Nearly done my ‘tini?’” the otter asked.

“Yes,” she answered, using the same whiny hound voice she did with her husband. She hadn’t meant too. The otter turned the lever on the side of the couch, reclining back, laying out her stumpy legs. Manny served her martini.

“Here’s to swimmin’ with bowlegged women,” the otter said and tossed back the drink. “Less vermouth next time, but I think you can be trained.”

Sip.

Manny pulled the pins from her hair, let the dark waves spill like soiled oil down her neck. She stepped into the master bedroom, searching the wall

for the light switch. She banged her shin on her vanity, rattling the silver framed mirror, knocking over the brush from her set and a crystal bottle of toilet water Willy had picked up for her while in Paris on business. She released the side zipper and slipped out of the dress, carefully dressing a padded hanger. She hung it on her closet door handle. She didn't bother changing into one of her satin nightgowns and went back out wearing her slip. She liked how smooth, like pouring milk, it felt against her legs, thighs.

"Nice knickers," the otter said then whistled.

She didn't mind the otter whistling at her, felt like the real thing.

"Stuffy in here," the otter said. "Kind of like a pharaoh's tomb. Hey don't get me wrong, bub. It would be nice to be wealthy, all the clams an otter could want, surrounded by barges made of gold and canopic jars and jewels. But you're still end up worm shit! I'll take a bucket of clams and a beating heart any old day."

"I'll call him up," Manny said. "I have his cell number. I know I'm only suppose to call in an emergency but this qualifies."

"Yeah," said the otter. "You do that honey. Go call him up. I'm sure he'll melt like butter. Damn it's like an oven in here. I've got fur you know. Least you could do was open a window, make your guest comfortable. Do I have to give you lessons on being a good host?"

"Go out on the balcony if you're warm," she said, searching her purse for the cell phone.

The otter shrugged and took another sip from her 'tini.

She tapped in the numbers, dithering, her finger wagging in the air above the last nine.

“Go on then, honey,” the otter said. “This ‘ll be better than cable.”

“I will.” Manny said, punching the nine.

Buzzing.

Buzzing.

Buzzing.

Voice mail answered: “This is the voice mail box of William Freeman. Please leave your name, phone number and reason for calling.”

It beeped.

“Willy. This is . . . your wife. Well you should know that. I didn't mean to call this phone, but it's an emergency. I was cooking the roast. I got sidetracked. Was drinking with both fists. The oven caught fire. The apartment is going to burn down. I thought I'd call and ask what you wanted me to save from your stuff. I know you like that nice Armani suit, the one with the nice crease in the pants. Anything else?”

She shut the phone.

The otter clapped her tiny paws.

“I'm impressed.”

“I'm insane,” Manny said.

“You should take this act on the road honey. Wondering whether the repressed house wife is going to pop like a mouse cooked in a microwave. This was worth coming ashore.”

She slumped down at the De Repas dinning

table, her slip riding up. She played with the malleable wax down the side of the crystal candle holder. The wax bled onto the white, lacquered glass top. She knew the stain would resist cleaning, blemishing the surface. Normally, she would have leapt from the chair, scrambled for a washcloth, but she sat there, playing with the molten fat.

“This table cost a fortune,” Manny said.

“How many points do you get for that?” asked the otter.

“You just can’t appreciate fine things.”

Her phone sang Claire De Lune. Willy’s emergency cell number flashed on the LCD in panicked, gray digits. She waited to answer. It demanded response. Maybe if she waited he would just go away, crawl back under the table at whatever three star restaurant he and his partner were dining at with the fat checkbook of the week.

“Better answer that before he calls the fire department,” the otter said.

“Hi sweetheart,” she answered.

“Wilma? What the hell’s going on?”

She heard the tingle of *muzak* in the background, the hum of a blowing dryer in a men’s room.

“Nothing. It’s fine. I made a mistake. And please don’t swear.”

“Is the apartment on fire or not?”

“Not really,” she said, picking at the wax, flicking bits of it into the bowl of peas.

“I don’t know what’s with you lately. If you want a divorce, just tell me.”

Her head wobbled like he'd punched her through the phone.

"Of course not. I'm very comfortable."

"Did you call about the condo rental in Boca Rotan? If we don't grab it now, someone else is going to grab it."

"Are you going to be able to get off that week?"

He dithered.

"We'll see. We're getting a new account with an aspiring dog food company. Health food for dogs and cats. What a country we live in. Could be enough to move us into another tax bracket."

She mouthed the words, ran through the perfunctory lines:

"Well that's wonderful, dear."

"So just to be sure, the apartment isn't on fire?"

She shook her head on the phone than realized he couldn't see it.

"No," she said. "Everything's peachy and hunky-dory."

"It's all insured anyway. You don't sound so good. Why don't you take one of your sleeping pills and go to bed early? You're taking the *other* ones Doctor Helsinki gave you?"

"Sure. That's sweet of you to be concerned. Maybe you could come home early?"

"I'll try."

She puckered and kissed the phone. He hung up.

The otter rolled on the Agra carpet, bowling with jolly, gut rushing laughter.

“Stop that,” she said. “Plain rude.”

“I can’t help it,” the otter squealed, gasping for breath. “Any more ideas, clever pants?”

The otter exhausted herself, then climbed back onto the couch, reclining back, taking it easy, sipping the last of the ‘tini.

“I think I’ll have a smoke out on the balcony,” the otter said. “You’re better than sex.”

The otter got up, pulled back the wall-to-floor drape. Points of light, like captured stars, fluttered in from the buildings across the way. The otter reached for the handle, standing on her toes.

“Damn humans, so tall.”

Manny sighed, flipped the lock and slid open the door. The otter scurried outside. Soporific, April air crawled into the apartment. Manny stood at the edge of the portal, shy wearing only her slip and looked down into the building courtyard. The in-ground pool, Olympic regulation, had been cleaned today, and workmen put in a new Jacuzzi.

“Come on out,” the otter said. “Get some fresh air.”

She took a step into the moonlight but stopped, covering her waist in reflex when she heard someone talking below.

“You’re a real gasser,” the otter said, whiskers jiggling in more hysterics. “Oh how the men-folk will come a’running when they get a load of you.”

“Please don’t do that,” she said.

The otter’s eye bulged, her mouth stretched wide, vomiting guffaws.

“I’m so glad I stopped in for a visit,” the otter

said. “This is a real riot compared to knotting kelp all day. I think I’ll stay a few days, move in. You’ve got the room, so many extra rooms. I’ll take the one on the left of the hall.”

“That’s going to be my studio. I paint you know.”

The otter gasped, its whiskers flailing.

She gripped the door, forcing the edge of the metal frame into her palm—cold like gripping an icicle.

“You paint? Oh that’s perfect. That’s rich!”

“Stop it,” she said. “I have the brushes, the paints, proper paper, even an easel. They’re in the closet, packed away.”

“For how long?” asked the otter.

“A couple of. . .”

“Rich,” the otter said. “Just too damn much.”

The muscle in Manny’s leg snapped, and the reflex fired like a trained football player. She swung her leg back, aimed at the shaking ball of whiskers and fur and contempt. Punt. The otter sailed like a missile, gliding on an arc and crashing into the pool.

Manny slid the balcony door shut, locked it and pulled back the drapes. She checked the front door too and the windows to make sure the otter couldn’t find her way back.

Her thigh muscle flexed, the tension spreading up her leg, spreading into the other leg, moving up her groin. It hardened, threatening to snap her body in two if not relieved.

She hadn’t done it since her teens, and then only twice.

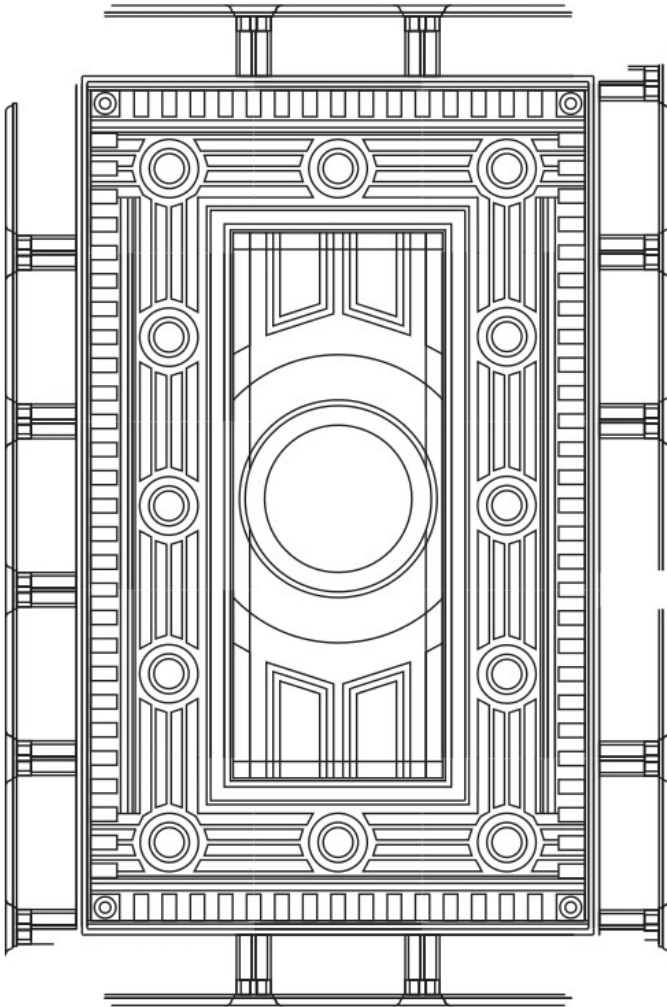
Manny blew out the candles, tossed the roast into the bin. She washed her face in the bathroom then laid out on their bed. She reached to the night table and grabbed the box of the vulgar thing she'd ordered over her computer.

The box declined to be opened, and she clawed away the top, ripping it free with her incisors.

Monkey Think

~Neila Mezynski

This girl, one forehead high, stood all day waiting for
pure, not realize she had it to do not think, some sort
of peace bliss in to do, hands on words paint clay .
Cake. Easy to say. Juice. Stir. Think. Do. Better. Out
the door. To do. Go. It.



The Chronicles of Tim Pt. IX - No Escape

~Mike Wiley

While Geryon heads into the forest to destroy the cookbooks, Tim struggles to figure out how to please the most recent daughter, Sahara. In order to do this, he must solve the riddle of the big hand and the little hand and figure out when to meet her at her room. James has just suggested to Tim that he take a moment out of his frenzied affairs to cool off in the lake.

Tim stood at the edge of the lake. The water was calm and clear and he could nearly see to the bottom from where he was on land. James had been no help in solving Sahara's riddle - if even it was one. But scouring the castle for a clock and racking his brain for an answer had not left him one bit closer to a resolution. Who knows? The hour to meet the girl at her room may well have passed already and Tim would have only to wait for Geryon's return in order for Sahara to ruin everything. The only real question now was: would Geryon honor Tim with a quick and painless death? Would there be a formal banquet for the family, featuring Tim a la plancha with a side of Geryon-fried eggs? Or would it be a textbook massacre, razor sharp teeth of that reptilian monster tearing the boozy flesh from Tim's body as he screamed and writhed in horror?

May as well jump in the lake, Tim thought. If I can't relax in the cool water for a bit, maybe I can at least find the courage to drown myself.

Tim disrobed and stepped out into the water. Chills ran up his legs as the first few inches of water told his body to turn back. The lake was much colder than he would have expected. Because he had nothing to gain by going back, he pressed on, stepping carefully on the twigs and rocks at the bottom, moving farther out towards the center. The water was so crisp he could almost smell its freshness. Tim stopped and wondered if he had ever noticed that clean water had a smell. Certainly foul water had a smell - anyone would agree that it is a most unpleasant one. But this lake water had a distinct odor. It was cleaner than clean. It was nearly pure.

Though the water was still and Tim the object that moved, the sensation was the opposite as his body plunged into the icy abyss and he let the cold rush over, and envelop him completely. He surfaced and swam a lap or two, enjoying the rush that the cool water offered his exhausted body. It seemed as though no one were around for miles (indeed there may not have been) and Tim took solace in what was possibly his last moment of peace on this earth, or wherever he was.

Tim turned his face to the sky and floated there on his back for some time, thinking about this and that, his old life or his wife, likely long since passed away, in the real world. Had she missed him? Was there a missing persons report filed and was there a search party? No. More likely she had just given him up for the drunk that he was and supposed that he had run off. That was that.

It was with these heavy thoughts that Tim flipped to face the bottom of the lake. He had never been a strong swimmer. Sure he could keep afloat in an emergency, but the current situation was of neither emergency nor urgency. He opened his eyes under water and contemplated what the next life might bring. Even if it was bad, as Christian theology had taught him it would be, it could hardly set him more ill-at-ease than the pseudo-purgatory he had been brought to.

With his head beneath the surface, all became quiet. Tim's thoughts drifted here and there, fleeting, endless. It was in this dreamy, watery state that he began to notice the shape at the bottom of the lake. Suddenly Tim lost his breath. The sunlight shot straight through to the very bottom of the lake. And there he saw it, round as a beer can top, laughing at him in his discovery.

It was the clock.

Or so he imagined it to be. The bedrock of the lake was laughing there at him in all his misery. The hands. The small one and the big one. They were concealed at the bottom of the lake.

Tim pushed himself down further. This had to be it. He was sure. What or where else could be the answer to the riddle he so desperately sought? It was at the bottom of the lake and James had been guiding him there all along. And at the bottom of this abyss, without apology, stood the answer to his question.

He swam in circles trying to decipher the angles, the direction.

As he spiraled down, the short hand did not move, but the big hand sped visibly about the circumference. It was all right there before his eyes.

The small hand was nearly due west and the large hand was rapidly approaching north. According to the clock he had ten minutes to make his appearance to Sahara. Because Tim couldn't be sure if a minute on this clock was anything like what he remembered a minute to be in his world, he had to act fast.

Any person that may have been casually glancing out at the lake that day, unawares that a person was swimming beneath its surface, might have witnessed a most extraordinary sight at that moment. Towards the center of the lake, initially calm, there began to grow a steady stream of bubbles. From this disturbance on the water then came a rising steam. This steam coincided with a low, and barely perceptible, rumble that, if one were paying close attention, could be felt around the entire estate. From the center, amidst the chaos, bubbling like a witches cauldron, a man erupted straight up into the sky. A witness, not at liberty to speak of the event ever again, swore that he went ten meters into the air. How this was possible, we may never know, but it is widely speculated that the answer is a simple one: a desperate man who has just discovered the key to his salvation is capable of unearthly feats. In this particular case we may not need to dwell on it so critically for the place in question may not be on earth and the man in question may well still be high from a theodine dose he received not so very long ago.

At any rate, he is up there in the air over the lake. Though past experience and reason may tell us that this man would have to come straight back down into the water after shooting straight up into the air, that is not what happened. After reaching a climax, Tim began to run across thin air and straight for the nearest entrance to the castle. He landed in a full sprint halfway across the lawn, still nude and dripping wet. After all, he had but moments to find his way to the girl's room.

As Tim blasted through the entrance, he found James waiting for him with fresh, dry clothing.

"Figured I owed you one," he said as Tim threw on the garments.

"You owe me more than that," Tim said. "An explanation, at least."

"Had to let you do some of the work on your own."

James then guided Tim through a series of service tunnels, unmarked doors and up twisting staircases in the dark. They at last came out into a corridor that looked like any other in the castle. James straightened Tim's lapels and produced some cologne.

"Can't have you smelling like you just crawled out of a dirty lake, now can we?" said James.

"But that lake smells cleaner than clean!" Tim protested. "I didn't even know clean had a smell before today. You keep that crap off of me."

"Oh, you think that was the smell of clean, do you?" James smirked.

Tim didn't have time to argue about what water smelled like to this person or that, so he consented to be splashed with the fragrance. James led him a few more doors down and faced him in front of a door that looked like the ten thousand others.

"You're sure this is her room?" Tim asked, already regretting questioning James.

"Do you really think there is anything that goes on here I don't know or know about, Tim?"

Tim rolled his eyes and allowed James to knock on the door. Tim turned to ask if he looked alright, but James had already disappeared - presumably into a painting or a dark shadow of hell.

A moment passed and nobody had yet answered the door. Tim wondered if he had the right room. He wondered if it was too late. Perhaps it was the right room and the correct time, but Sahara was too nervous to answer the door. Tim really needed her to answer the door. He knocked, this time louder than James had.

When there again came no response, he began to sweat. The heat was coming back over him and perspiration seeped visibly through his clothing. It was then that Tim noticed the faint music coming through the door he faced. He put an ear right up to it and pressed hard to listen. It was a faint, rhythmic, pulsing sort of music and in the background a stern woman was counting off, "...and two and three and four and one and..."

Sahara was watching an exercise tape.

Tim pounded on the door but this time only waited for a moment before he barged in and found

the girl with her back to him, sure enough, watching an exercise video, doing some freakish leg flailing and jumping here and there, presumably left and right, but there didn't seem to be even that much order to it. She had on an exercise bra and pink leggings and she was sweaty.

Because of the music and instruction from the video, Sahara had not heard Tim enter the room. She was surprised when he yelled at her from two feet directly behind.

"I thought we had a date!" he said.

She jumped and turned to face the intruder.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

Tim was baffled. Either she was playing at something or she honestly had forgotten the entire set up.

"I wasn't expecting you, Tim."

"Well," he began, "if I remember correctly, and I hope I do because my day has been all hell, we seemed to have had a misunderstanding this morning and in order for me to smooth things over, I agreed to meet you here at your room when the small hand points west and the big hand points north. I've discovered the clock at the bottom of the lake and I am now here, right on time, as you wished. So here we are. In your room. At the appointed time... Does any of this sound familiar to you?"

Sahara turned off the t.v. set and picked up a towel to wipe at her forehead.

"You closed the door?" was all she said.

Tim turned around to check. "Yes, I closed the door," he said. "So?"

“So, you know it’s really quite inappropriate for an unmarried man and woman to be alone together behind a closed door, don’t you?”

Tim Shrugged.

“I suppose,” he said, “but considering what we’ve already...”

“What we’ve already *what*, Tim?” she snapped. “I hope your day was just awful because you put *me* through hell this morning, Tim. I had never been with a man before this, this... debacle they call love-making. I am the daughter reserved for last, always. Nearly all my sisters have been through this ringer many times, but I alone had never before partaken in their parade of fornication. You must have really dangled a charm or pulled some wool over my father’s eyes to jump so hastily to the last daughter but I want nothing further to do with you.”

Tim had not realized the score of events. He was still unaware of the particulars that had led him to the current predicament in the first place. Poor girl, he thought. Now she’s caught up in her father’s messed up game and she probably knows less about it than even I do.

He wanted to somehow make things right, but there didn’t seem to be anything he could really do. So he said this:

“I’m sorry. I’ll leave now.”

He turned to go and made it halfway to the door when she grabbed his arm and stopped him.

“Wait,” she said. “Don’t go just yet.” Tim’s spine began to tingle and the hairs on his arms raised. His pulse rate increased. He turned to meet

her eyes. "Since you're here," she was biting her lower lip at each pause, "you could at least take my laundry down on your way out."

Tim's heart sank.

Sahara danced across the room to pick up a large canvas laundry bag. She carried it back to where Tim was rooted to the floor and dropped it before him.

"Oh, and just one more thing," she said as she disappeared behind a folded dressing wall. Tim watched as the silhouette spun and removed the pants and the exercise top and flung them over at his feet. "Now get out."

Tim stepped out into the hallway and closed the door behind him. He shuffled slowly down the hall in a daze, wondering what had just happened. He didn't even know where he was supposed to take the laundry, but he walked on into the dizzying maze of the castle.

Back in Sahara's room, the girl threw on a pair of sweats, walked over to her dressing mirror and opened a small desk drawer. She removed a little leather-bound book and sat down with a pen and wrote in neat, bubbly letters:

"Dear diary, this morning I became a woman and that part is done. This afternoon I have fallen in love. Tim is the one for me and there can never be another..."

Contributor Bios

Jaime Gleixner occasionally stops watching television just long enough to paint portraits of weasels or pet the cat. She aspires to successfully do all three of these things at once, but knows she's gonna need that bachelor's degree first.

Dave Allwine - (ADVERB) working on his (NOUN), (PERSON) believes coffee should (VERB) (ADVERB) in his mouth. His (PART OF BODY) is always (ADJECTIVE) because of his computer monitor. (NOUN) applied every (MEASUREMENT OF TIME) helps... (EXCLAMATION)! daveallwine@gmail.com (SILLY WORD)

Matthew Burnside enjoys cereal and simplified bios.

Rachel Siemens is currently a student at the University of Idaho studying biology. She is also a total babe. A super classy, total babe magnet, who one time ran eleven miles all by herself. That is probably her greatest achievement to date.

Andrew Haffner is a major creative influence on so many musicians and writers working outside the bland mainstream, both in his native North America and here, too. As recently purported, Haffner always told it as it was, and without compromise. His disturbingly honest presence in modern iconography

is always occasionally relevant. Andrew Haffner died in 1992.

Nathaniel Heely is an undergrad writing student at the University of Arkansas. He knows you don't want to hear that he is currently writing his first novel as people who write novels are insufferable so he won't even start. Recently he had an essay featured on The Drunken Odyssey Podcast and his mother liked it, which is good enough for him.

T. Fox Dunham resides outside of Philadelphia PA —author and historian. He's published in over 150 international journals and anthologies, and his first novella, *New World*, will be published by May December Publisher. He's a cancer survivor. When he's not writing, he's catching trout with a black lure or playing D&D with his mates. His friends call him fox, being his totem animal, and his motto is: Wrecking civilization one story at a time. Blog: <http://tfoxdunham.blogspot.com/>. <http://www.facebook.com/tfoxdunham> & Twitter: @TfoxDunham

Neila Mezynski is author of *Glimpses and A Story* (2013) from Scrambler Books, pamphlets (*Girls In Trees* and *Tucson Dessert*) from Greying Ghost Press, echapbooks from Radioactive Press (*Yellow Fringe Dress*) and Patasola Press (*The Pure Girl*), chapbooks from Folded Word Press, (*Men Who Understand Girls*, 2012), Nap Chapbook, (*Floater*,

2012) , Deadly Chaps Press, (Dancers On Rock, (2011), Warriors , 2013), Mud Luscious Press (At The Beach 2011).

Mike Wiley is an active author and musician. He graduated from the University of Oregon in 2006 with a bachelor in philosophy before moving to New York in 2008 with his wife. Drop him a line a rosebombsexplode@gmail.com to say whadup!

Cat Baldwin is an illustrator in Brooklyn. She recently had work featured on the Epicurious blog, Epi-log. Those and other works can be seen at <http://catbee.com>. She views the shortening of days with trepidation and likes to fill the endless void of evening darkness by sharing gallons of homemade vegetable soup, netflix and red wine with her best guy and two cats.

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