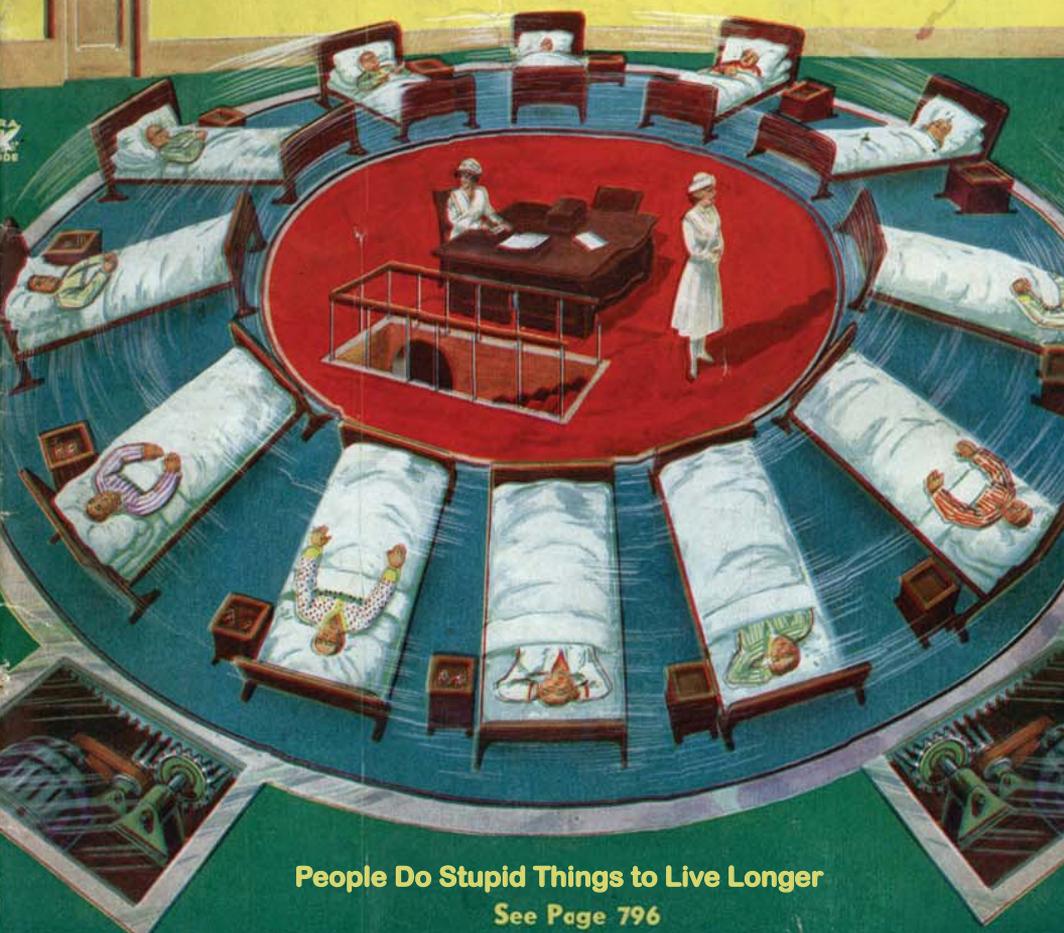


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ISSUE 8

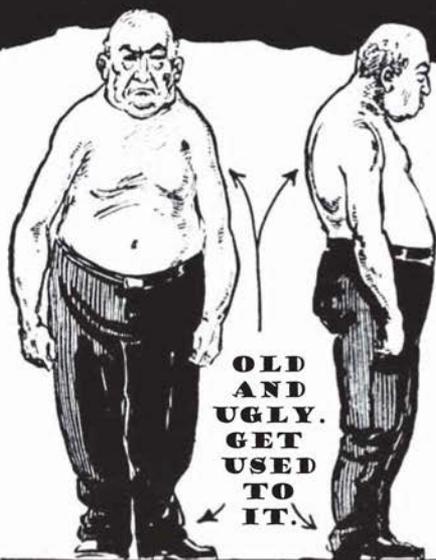
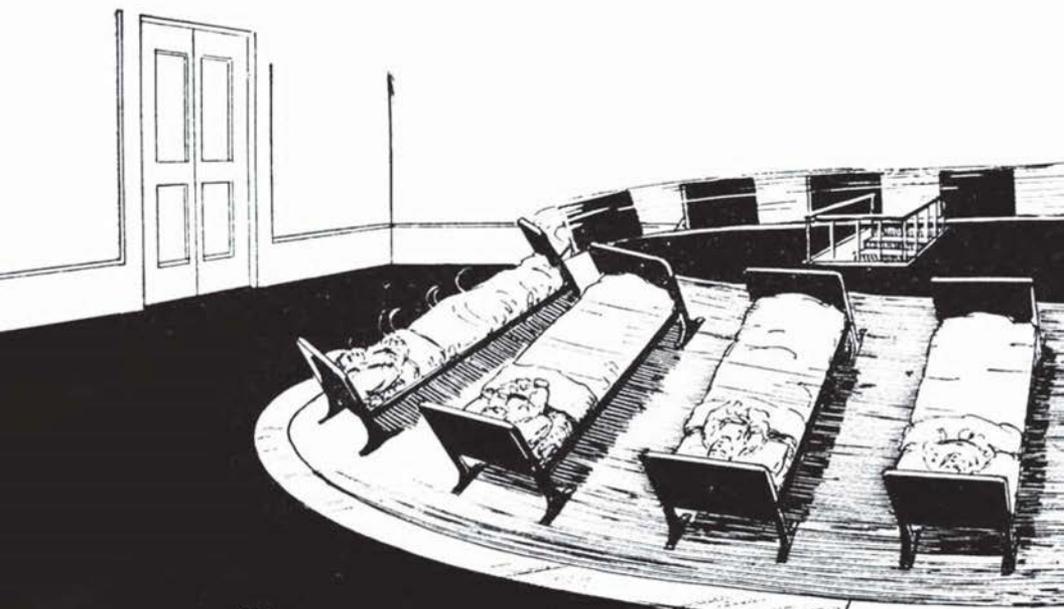
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People Do Stupid Things to Live Longer
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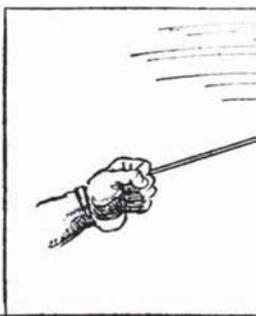
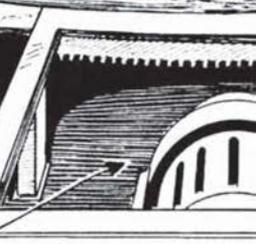
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OLD
AND
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GET
USED
TO
IT.

I
THOUGHT
I'D BE
WISER
WHEN I
GREW UP.
INSTEAD
I'M JUST
FAT AND
BORING.



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● PERHAPS Ponce de Leon kept too far south in his search for the Foun-

come all that brings In describing trip

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Editors

Shea Newton, James Welch

Cover Art

Marc Calvary

Website

<http://www.usedgravitrons.com>

Designed By Wes Morishita

Email

usedgravitrons@gmail.com

Art Coordinator: Cat Baldwin

<http://catbee.com>

Printing

<http://www.thecarbonbasedmistake.com/>

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Editorial:

“Do you drink beer in the shower and leave the can on the shelf next to the soap and sleep late, even when the sun through the window is too hot and you have to curl up under the blankets?”

– James Lipton

Yes James Lipton, I do. Thank you. I'll see you on TV later and remember this moment. I have glasses too btw. We have so much in common, let's keep in touch. I'm adding you on Goodreads right now. I love that you love xTx and Maxine Hong Kingston.

– Shea Newton



Simple Pleasures ~Anika Ledlow

It's the kind of Tuesday that sidles up beside you with its wayward secondness. You step outside. The leaves on the Japanese maple are motionless. There's no way to know where your body ends and the outside world begins.

You walk down the dirty street in your black flats. Your steps are tentative because your shoes are a size too big and you look for all the world like an orangutan in booties.

When you get to the park, you sit down on an empty bench. A hefty man with a Pomeranian jogs past you. A man in a suit plays Frisbee with his golden retriever and a pair of tall women with small eyes walk past with their Great Danes.

You take a roll of sparkling star stickers out of your coat pocket. The afternoon light gleams off the edges of the roll. You run your finger over the slightest ridge of each star.

Orange. The color of fragmented sentences. A kind of hobbling, black sheep, second cousin.

Yellow. The color of a 'by the skin of his teeth' save. It's sickness and near sickness.

Red. Swelling poppy heads preparing to enter the ground and reemerge in spring time as conifers or lemon grass.

You see a couple kissing behind a tree.

Purple. It's the sound of the hammer striking the

note on the inside of a piano. It's the wood beginning to rot from the outside in.

Blue. It's an aquatic creature blooming within your lungs.

Green. A bruise, a hangnail. A dusty carpet beaten and beaten and beaten.

You put the roll back in your pocket and sit very still. You try to sense any hint of cold in the atmosphere. There is nothing. The air is still.

The Frisbee player has gone.

You breathe in and close your eyes. You sit this way for what seems like a long while. You listen to the sounds of the park, but they grow dim. Then, you feel it. You don't breathe. Then you feel it again – a small circle of coolness on the round of your nose.

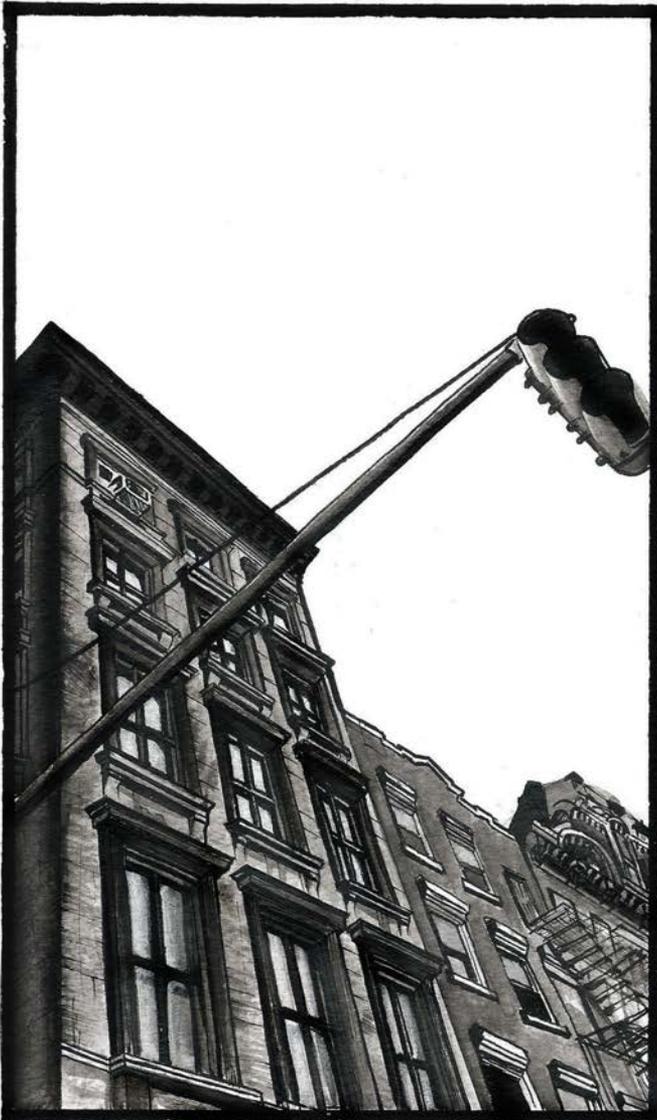
There are two colors missing from your roll of stickers. Grey and black.

Grey is morning and mourning. Many people think that black is mourning, but they are mistaken. Black is too strong for the grief stricken. Black is the color of a hardened soul.

You open your eyes.

The couple behind the tree is gone.

There are only dark figures in the distance. You stand up and walk home, watching the pavement the entire way back.



No Gold Watch ~Pete McArdle

J-23 sipped his drink and watched the evening news on the 3D-viewcube over the bar. Riots in Antarctica, mutant viruses carried by cats, and yet another plutonium spill in the New Mormon Territories. What a fucked-up world, thought J-23 as the vacuous, big-haired bimbo who covered the economic news came on.

“With the world-conomy tanking, thanks to renewed hostilities in Persiran, the board of Trans-World Corporation announced today that the mandatory age of retirement had been corrected, from fifty-five to fifty-two---effective as of last Fursday.

“In protest, Cool Sal-9, the president of AARP, set himself on fire during a live-cast of Ziggy’s Playhouse, the doogely popular children’s show. Network executives were snick to distance themselves. . . .”

Fifty-two, thought J-23, downing yet another shot of Neuro-Schnapps. What on Earth must it *feel* like to be that old?

Dad-kins would know, he was fifty-two today and now his birthday bash would also be his retirement party.

The young man punched a sequence of buttons on his wrist and like that, a Retirement Cake was winging its way to the C-Mack residence, courtesy of Trans-World Corporation, “We Run Your World!”

I’d better get a groove on, thought J-23, or I’ll miss

the festies. He stepped into a sonic-pod, strapped himself in, and said, “Home, James.”

“Yo, Dad-kins,” said J-23, affectionately slapping his father’s face, “How’s it feel to be a caboose-less dinosaur?”

“Leave him be,” said Brown Betty, J-23’s sister, “You know he’s been dreading retirement.” J-23 looked up at his Sis, all seven-foot-four of her, and pantomimed zipping his lip.

“It’s O.K., B. B.,” said Dad-kins, playfully elbowing his son in the crotch. “It happens to everyone, sooner or later. You wake up one day and you’re old, moldy toast, ready for the trash-sposal.”

“But you’re not old, Dad-kins,” said Brown Betty, encircling her father with her long, serpentine arms. “I don’t want you to retire,” she said, “it’s not fair,” tears leaking from her huge obsidian eyes.

She must have forgotten to eat her Sed-Flakes this morning, thought J-23. “You’re downin’ me, Sis,” he said, “How ‘bout a blast of Smooth-eral?”

Before his sibling could reply, the portal gong sounded.

“I got it,” yelled Mom O’Rama from the bedroom. J-23 heard her prosthetic feet clomping down the hall, the whoosh of the open portal as thousands of pods flew by, and the surprised howl his mother let loose when she saw the Retirement Cake.

“Fuck a duct,” muttered J-23, “she must’ve snoozed through the entire evening news.” His mother had recently turned forty-five, and more and more she napped instead of simply increasing the voltage.

She lumbered into the family room, holding the cake with her hooks, her face as pale as the frosting.

“It must be a mis-spake,” she said, trembling, “Dad-kins is only fifty-two.”

“No mis-spake,” said J-23, grabbing the cake and keeping a safe distance from his Mom’s shiny hooks. She could be overly emotional at times.

“Those yumb know-it-alls at Trans-World lowered the Sol-darn retirement age today,” Dad-kins grumbled.

“Jim-Lo, don’t talk like that,” whispered his wife. “They might be listening.”

At this, her husband snorted and said, “What are they gonna do, Sweet-Lumps? Fire me?”

J-23 laughed hard at his father’s joke, the laughter dying in his throat when he caught sight of Mom and Sis’s long faces.

Women, he thought, shaking his badly-scarred head.

“Listen, fam-units, it’s still my B-day,” said Dad-kins, smiling kindly. “So why don’t we kill the fatted hound and just make the best of it, eh?”

In a blink, J-23 had slit the beagle’s throat and thrown it into the sink. While their dinner bled out,

Brown Betty opened a bottle of El Dopa and poured everyone a generous cube. J-23 sprinkled a little crank in his and offered it around, but no one wanted any.

After Dad-kins tore the dog apart, handing everyone a limb, the C-Macks quietly ate their dinner, the only sound the puh-whump, puh-whump of Mom O’Rama’s artificial heart and the occasional crunching of bones. J-23 found the meat juicy and delicious, albeit a bit stringy. Beagles are just too active, he thought, next op we should snatch a Shih Tzu.

When the bottle of El Dopa had been drained and all that remained of dinner was a small, cinnamon-and-white tail, Mom O’Rama hosed down everyone’s hands and faces and passed around an old, thread-bare towel.

It was time for cake.

As J-23 placed the Retirement Cake in front of his father, Mom O’Rama became hysterical and started swinging her hooks, opening a gash in Dad-kins’ forehead and nearly cutting off Brown Betty’s nose.

Blood dripping from his brow, Dad-kins reached behind his crazed mate and hit the “Pause” button. He kissed his wife’s frozen face and addressed his offspring.

“Your mother hates birthdays, always has,” he said. “She’s scarified of getting old.” He smiled at his companion of thirty years, two kids, and five wars.

“But we all get old, it can’t be helped. What I hang my sprat on is the fact that I was blissed with two healthy, non-reproducing diploids like you.”

Dad-kins bussed Brown Betty on the cheek and slapped J-23 so hard, he fell off his chair. The father waited until his pasty-faced son regained his seat, then he continued.

“No, this is not a perfect world, kids, I rant you that. However, it was much berse before Trans-World took over, *much* berse. So while I flinge at the thought of retirement, I must accept it. Let us toast to Trans-World Corporation, the founder of the feast!”

The three functioning C-Macks clinked their cubes and drank the dregs of their El Dopa.

“To TWC!” crowed J-23.

Brown Betty said nothing, the muscles of her temples bunching.

Dad-kins grabbed a chunk of cake, hesitated for a moment and then jammed it into his mouth. His daughter wept quietly as he stuffed more cake in his craw, and then more, until the whole thing was gone.

“See you in Shangri-La, kids,” he said and pitched forward, his head slamming hard against the faux-mica.

J-23 gave his sister some time to collect herself. The last time he’d stressed her, she’d set his bed on fire--- with him in it.

“O.K.,” she said, taking a deep breath, “let’s do it.”

Sure is a bitch getting old, thought J-23 as he and Brown Betty grabbed their Dad by the shoulders and dragged his lifeless body to the curb.



On February 22nd, 2012 ~ Daniel Bagley

The following happened (syncopations to be added at length):

A bland army went off and toppled into a cauldron the size of Texas (massive explosions added for emphasis).

Wednesday divided the house into halves (all quiet).

Outside of Lovelock, NV, the moon demanded the cloud's congress and sex via satellite (cashing in).

An obscure chunk of Alaska broke off and sailed Bering Strait to Siberia, stopping only to note Aurora Borealis protesting off starboard (trail).

A brood of vipers began to celebrate, hence no longer called a brood (an asterisk refuses to insert itself here).

Multiple flights, circuses & seminars got mixed up: acrobats crash-landed in the Andes; a presentation on penny stocks tiptoed just past the ring of fire; by the watercooler the captain lamented lost altitude, venting to the bearded lady & the black box (rations, rations).

The great stretch of grass & low-lying timberland between here and anywhere else whistled a casual, jaunty Farmer-in-the-Dell-type tune reminiscent of summer days still to be; Julius, looking back on the affair, swore he was somewhere else like the Vanuatu coast, say ().

I found the demiurge asleep in a swath of cinquefoil (cosmological lounge).

Old crazy J struggled to still his tobacco-stained fingers against approaching death in the valleyway (heroic).



“Six Pack” Story: Perfume Nuggets

~ Stephen Schwegler

Part One: Okay, Let’s Do This.

After a long night out doing God-knows-what, Ted found himself sprawled out on the floor of the forest. Suffering from the wickedest of hangovers, he attempted to stand up and immediately fell back to the slightly moist earth.

“Fuck me,” he said.

“Excuse me?” said Charlie.

Ted looked around in search of the mystery voice from the woods.

“Who, uh, said that?”

“I did,” said Charlie.

He really wasn’t expecting it to have come from the trees themselves.

“And you are?”

“The tree growing majestically in the naturally enriched soil behind and underneath you.”

Part Two: Must. Keep. Going.

Ted, now standing, almost steadily even, really couldn’t believe that he was talking to a tree, but he

was, oh yes, he was.

“So you’re a tree,” he said for the eighth time.

“YES!” said the increasingly irritated Charlie.

“Cool.”

“Quite.”

“I’m, uh, going to get on my way.”

“Wait!” said the tree.

“Ye... Yeah?”

“I need your help.”

“How so?”

“My dear friends, the horseshoe crabs, are being harassed and I just don’t know any other way to go about saving them.”

“O...kay...”

“Great! Thanks for helping.”

“I didn’t say I’d—”

Part Three: Oh, Hell.

A smell engulfed the forest. A familiar smell. The kind of smell that smacks you in the face while walking through the fragrance section of Macy’s.

“Sorry about that,” interrupted Charlie.

“What the hell was that? And why does it smell like *Elizabeth Arden* or something.”

“I farted.”

“No way. You don’t have a butt.”

“You are mistaken, my little human. I do and it farts perfume.”

“That’s kind of awesome.”

“Yeah, it’s like my own little slice of Heaven.”

“Sounds about right.”

“Back to the matter at hand. The horseshoe crabs. Those bastard Fire Extinguishers will pay for their injustices. So many of our ancestors lost to those evil cone-faces.”

“Right, I’m on... The fuck?”

“What? Don’t they teach you this in your history classes?”

“No.”

“The genocide of our fallen crustaceans will not go un— ACHOO!”

Part Four: Close Your Mouth!

“Bless yo— Ah, what the fuck? Chicken?”

“Yes. I sneeze meticulously cooked chicken nuggets. Tasty. No?”

“Even though this is beyond disgusting and more than a little confusing; yes, they were tasty. But I’d really not like to eat anymore snot nuggets.”

“Fine, it’s settled then. You save my children and I’ll no longer blow my nose in your mouth.”

“I apprieci— Wait, I thought that they were your ancestors. Now they’re your children? Things aren’t adding up.”

“How about you shut the hell up and just help a tree out.”

Ted stared at Charlie. Charlie probably stared back at Ted. Maybe. Trees don’t have eyes, but they don’t have noses either. Or butts for that matter. The hell is happening?!

“You know,” said Ted, “fuck you. I don’t buy any of this. How can fire extinguishers commit injustice? Why aren’t you with them anyway? Don’t they help prevent forest fires? And how the hell are you related to horseshoe crabs anyway?”

“Uh,” stalled Charlie.

Ted waited.

“Magic?”

“Fuck you, dude.”

“Wait!”

Part Five: Things Get Awkward.

Against his better judgment, Ted waited.

“I love you?” guessed the tree.

“How would that even work?”

Charlie described, quite vividly, horrifically, and yet strangely sensually, all of the ways he would perform unholy deeds with Ted. Ted was more than a little concerned. As was his anus.

“Okay, okay. I get it. A lot of crying and splinters.”

“So you’ll help?” asked a hopeful and slightly aroused Charlie.

“Yeah. No problem,” said Ted, slowly backing away, looking for an exit.

Part Six: Help From Above.

And then, all of a sudden, up in the air, was it a helicopter? A giant turtle with five smaller

elephants? An invincible flying alien that can leap tall buildings in a single bound even though he can fly so why doesn't he just fly everywhere? I mean, come on!

"The fuck is that?" exclaimed a suddenly terrified Charlie.

"I AM BLAZONBERRIE!" said the weaponized enchanted flying horse. "CHARLIE, MY ARCH-ENEMY, YOUR REIGN OF TERROR HAS COME TO AN END."

Blazonberrie swooped down, rescued Ted from imminent forest sodomy and flew high above the tree tops.

The mighty steed clicked its hind legs together three times causing a trap door to open from the horse's undercarriage. Held inside his body were enough explosives to detonate and level the whole of the forest.

"TIME TO DIE, YOU USELESS PILE OF TINDER!"

Years later, the Menlo Park Mall was built on the charred remains of Charlie's brittle corpse.

And that, children, is where malls come from.



The Traveling Beard ~ James Lipton

Yesterday T.A. Berkeley did not have a beard. Aldous Gangee did. It curled from his chin. Clung to his neck. It was black, but in the sunlight it reflected red. From the bottom of his chin it measured fifteen inches and on windy days it whipped over his shoulder.

Aldous Gangee tried to dig quarters from his pockets as the beard slipped from his face. It made its way inching across the grimy corrugated rubber of the bus floor, gathering gravel and chewing gum in its unruly curls. At the fourth row of hard blue benches it stopped.

T.A. Berkeley was on his way to meet with the review board regarding tenure at Coriander College. He had shaved his face, as he did every morning, in the shower and he looked, as he did every day, twelve years younger than forty-one. If he had a wife she may have counseled him to wear glasses or helped him into a tweed coat, but as it was he looked more like a pharmaceutical salesman than a biology professor.

The beard's aloof posture puzzled T.A. Berkeley. He'd watched it approach and when it stopped he nudged it with his feet. "What could it possibly want with me?" he asked aloud, looking around him for an answer. The ancient woman sleeping next to him drooled on her shawl. Across the aisle a toddler played with his mother's phone.

Aldous Gangee did not recognize his reflection in the bus

window. He touched the pale face in the glass, his cumbersome hands noting the smooth chin. It looked very small.

T.A. Berkeley coaxed the beard into his shoulder bag as the bus approached Coriander College. It slipped easily between his notebooks and settled to the bottom with the pens and fragments of paper. Aldous Gangee had no cause to examine T.A. Berkeley's departure and only nodded absently when he passed.

Bathed in the bathroom's yellow light T.A. Berkeley studied his reflection. There was no question that he looked young. In the past he'd taken pride in that aspect of his appearance but today he felt his features dwarfing him. He rubbed his soft jawline then reached into his shoulder bag. The beard had curled deep into one corner.

There was no elastic band to attach the beard to his face so T.A. Berkeley simply closed his mouth tightly and pressed it with both hands to his cheeks. He immediately felt the wiry tentacles bury themselves into his pores to join with his follicles. The beard writhed for a moment and it made T.A. Berkeley shudder. He wanted to pull it off but as he raised his hand, the beard wrapped around his fingers and T.A. Berkeley noticed himself again in the mirror. He looked contemplative. Darwin had a beard like this. T.A. Berkeley began to regret all the sleep he'd had the night before. Bags under his eyes would be becoming above this scholarly chin.

“There's something about you today Mr. Berkeley,” his graduate aid Zali said as he approached her in the hall. She squinted.

“Something good?” he asked.

“I don't know but you've got gum in your beard,” Zali reached a hand out, parting the long whiskers with her fingers. She pulled at the pink glob until T.A. Berkeley's eyes began to water.

“Your hurting me Zali,” T.A. Berkeley said through a clenched jaw.

“Grow up,” she said bringing both hands together to yank harder at the sticky mess.

“We'll have to cut it,” T.A. Berkeley said meekly.

“Just a minute, I've almost got it,” Zali said. T.A. Berkeley heard a tearing sound rumble through his ears as the gum wrenched free.

“Gross,” Zali said peeling at the mess left clinging to her hands.

The usually cold conference room felt pleasant to T.A. Berkeley as he mindlessly adjusted the notes in front of him. He twisted the beard around his thumb. He yawned. Talbot Gretchenberry, the head of the department eyed him suspiciously from across the table.

“Big day today, huh?” whispered Reba Winchester slipping into the chair next to T.A. Berkeley. She patted him on the head. “You're a shoo-in,” she said smiling.

Once the conference room was full of tenured staff, T.A. Berkeley stood and addressed the group. “Sirs and

Madams,” he said, “you're no doubt familiar with my work. I believe my paper on the multitude bacteria exchanged during the professorial mating ritual speaks for itself.” T.A. Berkeley winked at Reba Winchester. The head of the department conceded the speech's dignified air.

When the meeting closed Talbot Gretchenberry approached T.A. Berkeley in the hall outside the conference room. His corpulent jowls hung over the collar of his shirt.

“Somethings come over you,” he said scornfully, pointing his finger.

T.A. Berkeley stroked his beard. He smiled. Bits of paper dislodged from his chin and fell to the floor.

“Yeah, your wife,” T.A. Berkeley said. Reba Winchester stifled her laughter.

Talbot Gretchenberry stomped away harumphing. T.A. Berkeley didn't notice the beard drop from his face or see it sliding noiselessly after the vexed department head. Neither did Reba Winchester. They were too busy crossing their eyes, sticking out their tongues and thrusting their thumbs toward the ground. T.A. Berkeley had never felt compelled to join Reba Winchester in this ritual but today, as Talbot Gretchenberry turned his back, it felt right. “I am a changed man,” he thought happily, “people may even begin to call me sagacious.”

When Talbot Gretchenberry reached his office he threw his hands over his head and fell into the worn leather chair

behind his desk. He'd never had a problem with T.A. Berkeley before. He had even drawn comparisons to his own son, Picador. But T.A. Berkeley was nothing like Picador now and Talbot Gretchenberry found himself entertaining a cautious distrust for him. A distrust that was justified by their meeting in the hall. He knew Reba Winchester was a terrible influence. He'd often thought of forbidding T.A. Berkeley from seeing her and if it had been Picador he certainly would have.

Talbot Gretchenberry fumed until he was red in the face. He held his breath and pounded his fists. Had he not been so feeble he would have rolled up his sleeves, called T.A. Berkeley into his office and wrestled him to the ground. But he *was* feeble and the tantrum exhausted him.

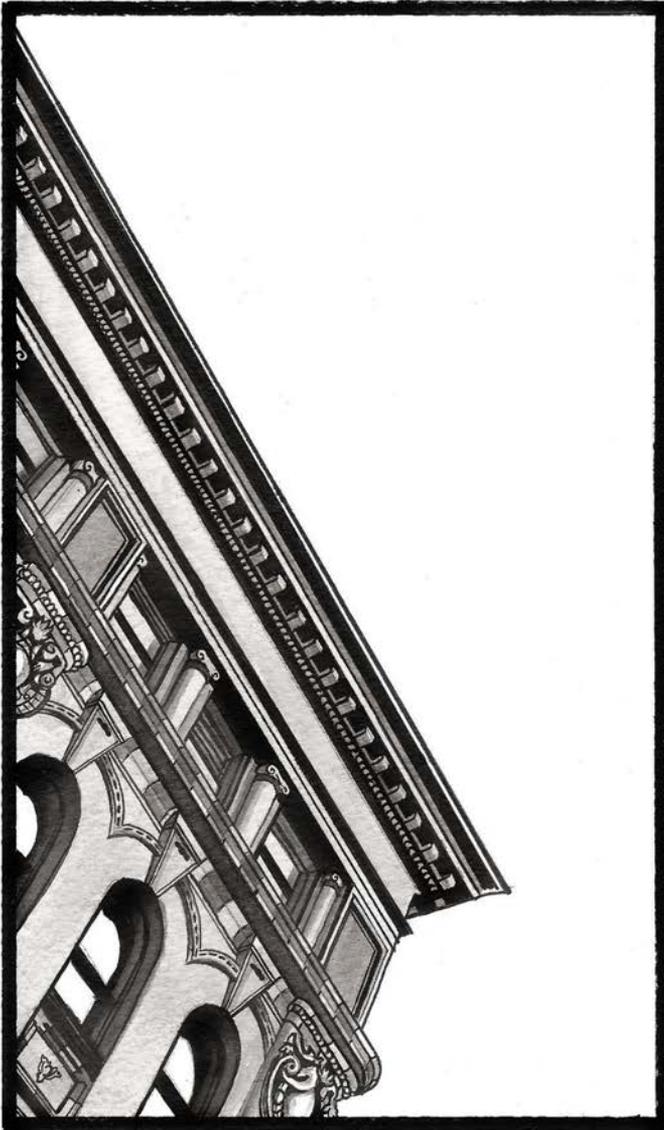
The beard waited until Talbot Gretchenberry fell asleep slouched in his chair, sucking air noisily through his open mouth. It snaked up the department head's leg and over his belly until it rested just under his sagging chin. It's offshoots caressed the oily varicose flesh. Talbot Gretchenberry cooed.

When he awoke, Talbot Gretchenberry felt the itch of hair on his chin and imagined himself Rip Van Winkle. He wondered what he'd slept through, hoped he'd at least missed some afternoon class but the clock on the wall assured him that he hadn't.

Standing before his fundamentals class, Talbot Gretchenberry licked his lips jovially. The beard tickled

his tongue. He snickered with the students as he confused homeostatic processes with homeopathic remedies. When a woman in the front row asked about the effects of radiation on cell structure, his voice boomed and echoed his reply into the hallway.

T.A. Berkeley watched Talbot Gretchenberry wrap up his lecture. He scrutinized the department head's hairy chin. When T.A. Berkeley asked the professor about the recent acquisition of his sumptuous beard, Talbot Gretchenberry speechlessly pulled at the tangle of hair that masked his pale, definitionless features. He stared until his eyes watered and groaned audibly until T.A. Berkeley looked away.



The Chronicles Of Tim Pt VIII - Patchwork

~ Mike Wiley

Tim had just received the news that Geryon did not want to rip him limb from limb for his recent exploits. On the contrary, the beast required Tim's assistance in egg frying matters. This welcome revelation did not occur before Tim had made a promise to Geryon's daughter Sahara that he would meet her in her room at some riddling time that he had yet to solve. He had a lot of work to do and no idea in how much time he had to do it. Now Geryon and Tim were alone in the kitchen standing over several frying pans splattered with eggs in various degrees of doneness.

"Tim," Geryon continued, "I require eggs. I require them everyday and I require that they be cooked properly. Before you came to our home, I had not had a decently prepared meal for many millennia - or so it now seems to me. Perhaps you do not understand why I require eggs. Perhaps you have even walked about the halls asking yourself, 'What is it with the eggs? Eggs this and eggs that! The old fool must be mad!'"

"Well, actually I..."

"Shut up, Tim. You will know when it is okay to speak."

Tim placed his hands into the pockets of his robe and stared at the floor. Egg shells littered the black and white checkerboard linoleum.

Geryon turned from Tim and, reaching both clawed hands across the pile of dirty pans and plates on the stove, he swept the entire mess across the room. Like a city bus tearing through the room, a terrible clatter ensued. Tim jumped back. Most of the dishes crashed against the far wall and shattered into hundreds of pieces while the fry pans, after ricocheting off the wall, fell unharmed in the sink. Tim imagined himself having to pick through the broken plates and wash those pans at a later time.

While the broken shards were still settling in the sink, Tim looked up from the floor, just long enough to be sure there would be no further outbursts potentially directed at him. Geryon still had his back turned to him. When it appeared as though he was in the clear for the moment, Tim directed his attention back to the eggshells on the floor. He wondered where the all eggs came from. There were no roosting barns that he had discovered and there certainly wasn't a grocery store.

All was quiet and still until this:

“I make them, Tim,” Geryon said.

Tim did not respond. How could he? Did he just hear what he thought he heard? A trick of the mind, the ears! Though his heart and mind raced with a dozen reactions, a thousand questions, he had been told to shut his mouth. The eggs! Did Geryon

say he makes the eggs?

“Yes, the eggs, Tim. I make the eggs. They are my own. And before you come to the conclusion on your own, yes, I can read your thoughts. Now that we have theodine back in full supply, I am again capable of reading all your stupid thoughts. Whether I want to or not.”

Tim could hold his tongue no longer. If what Geryon said was true, it didn't really seem there was a point anyway - there were so many thoughts now. A torrent of new information had just been unleashed upon him. He shuddered both inside and out. Where to begin? The eggs? The mind-reading? Why did he have to teach Geryon how to cook eggs if the monster could just read his mind? The substance of these thoughts at once formed and seemed solid, then almost instantaneously dissipated before his mind's eye. Like the broken plates, there were too many pieces to put together. His body began to revolt. At that moment a small rebellion began to take place inside Tim's body.

The pyloric sphincter that divides the lower region of the stomach from the small intestine suddenly wrenched shut. His midsection began to rumble. With no other outlet for these physical anxieties, this caused a certain amount of swelling to occur which, in turn, pressed heavily upon Tim's diaphragm. His head reeled. The whole of that inner beast turned precisely two degrees inside the cavity of his body and a well of gasses transformed into the

belch that would rise, slowly at first, up the esophagus and directly to the back of his throat, manifesting all his present thoughts.

“Look... whaaaaaaaaa?” he burped. The room was spinning. The floor shook not just a little.

Geryon could see that Tim was fading, would possibly pass out. He pulled a chair from the kitchen table and placed it behind Tim just in time to catch the man. Tim fell into the seat.

“Stress burps,” Tim said.

“What?”

“I get stress burps sometimes. That was the biggest one ever. I feel better now.”

“Okay.”

“Now, what the hell? Why don’t we start from the beginning?”

Geryon paced back and forth across the kitchen in front of Tim.

“Why don’t we start with the reason I called you here in the first place?” Geryon said. “I need you to teach me to cook eggs. Forget where they come from for the moment. Forget about mind-reading. We can dance that three-legged salsa later.”

“But...” Tim started.

“I know, I know. If I can read your mind, then I could just learn to... yada yada yada. You see, Tim, for starters, I can only read your active thoughts as

you are having them. I can't just probe your feeble mind and unlock all its secrets. Like I'd want to do that anyway. And as for the rest of it, I have read the egg-cooking books." Geryon gestured towards a small library of egg-related material on the wall.

Some sixty or seventy books adorned a shelf with various clever titles such as *Egg-zactly What You Needed to Know About Modern Ova Preparation* and *Can You Beat That? A History of Famous Egg-ovators*. There was even a series of books shaped like eggs titled *Egg-zact Measurements: Getting a Yoke Around One Dozen Kitchen Problems*.

"This is a craft that cannot be stolen and it is extremely difficult to teach," Geryon continued. "You do not cook eggs from the brain, Tim. You cook them from the heart."

Tim was speechless. It was true that he was never formally taught to cook an egg. Indeed, he had never even tried before he came to the castle. The meals his wife had made in his former life had been prepared not with hands and kitchen utensils, but with love. That knowledge, that Love, had been passed on to him subconsciously. And now, all those years of unappreciated meals will not have been consumed in vain.

Geryon was staring longingly at the egg-related literature on the wall. Some of these books were the last he had ever acquired. When the cookbooks had thoroughly failed him in every way

possible, the old man had lost interest in reading altogether. If an idea as simple and practical as food preparation couldn't be conveyed through a book, how much more so the difficulties in communing over subjects as grand as philosophy, art, betrayal, justice, religion, politics or ethics?

No, the spoiled seed had been planted and Geryon had long ago closed the last book he would ever read. Not for pleasure or purpose could he imagine picking one up again.

It was now time for Tim to share what was in his heart with the beast.

Tim now had more on his plate than he could handle. On top of teaching this heartless monster to love again, he had to solve the riddle that Sahara posed. If he could even do that much, he still had to find a way to make it up to her for his behavior during the night, but that would have to be worked on later. At present, he had to buy some time. He would have to give Geryon a task. Anything to keep him occupied for, well, a good deal of time.

The strength had returned to Tim's legs and at once he rose to his feet. Geryon was lost in self-defeat, the egg books a sort of memorial to the death of his creative spirit. Tim watched Geryon for a moment and realized the spell these books cast over him. An idea occurred. That was it, he thought. The books! They had to go at once.

If Tim could convince Geryon that the first step to truly understanding his own egg-cooking path

was to forget everything he thought he knew about it before, then the books obviously had to go. They were a burdening reminder of perpetual failure. That ought to get Geryon out of his hair for a while.

“You’ve got to destroy those,” Tim said.

Geryon shook himself from the trance. He turned to Tim.

“What? The books? Why would I get rid of them?”

“If you want me to teach you anything about frying up those eggs, you’re going to have to trust me. The books only serve to taunt you and hold you back from reaching your cooking potential. Get rid of them.”

“Alright,” Geryon said. “I guess they’re not serving anyone any purpose here on that wall. Next to the lake is a debris pile. You can take them around back and burn them.”

Tim was not shaken by this potential setback. He was prepared for the possibility that Geryon would want him to do the work.

“Oh, no,” he said. “This is as much a spiritual act as it is a material one. You’ve got to do it yourself, old man.”

Geryon ruffled his scales.

“What did you call me...” he began.

“And,” Tim continued, “you’ve got to take

them far out into the woods, otherwise they will continue to haunt your psyche.” Knowing now that the beast could read his thoughts, Tim had to stay one step ahead. He couldn’t give Geryon the opportunity to divine his true intentions.

“Haunt my what...?” Geryon stuttered.

“You must take them far out into the woods alone. And if I, or James, or anyone at all were to help you, well, I’m afraid the process would not be authentic. This is something you have to do for yourself. I wish I could help you, I really do.”

Geryon shrugged and walked over towards the shelves containing the books. He looked up. Tall though he was, they went a good four or five feet out of his reach.

“Well,” said Geryon, still looking up, “at least help an ‘old man’ get them down from the wall here?”

When there came no reply, Geryon turned around to find that he was alone in the kitchen.

Tim was quietly racing down the corridors of the castle, glad to be free from the awkward company of Geryon. He needed to find a clock somewhere on the premise and in order to do this he needed to find James.

There were a good many questions he had for James concerning their last encounter outside the

Nevercaves - the one where James punched Tim in the face sending him on an all-out psychedelic journey - but those would have to be put on hold for the time being. There were more important matters at hand. If anyone knew everything there was to know about the mysteries of this castle, it was James. He would certainly be able to help solve the riddle of the clock. Tim had to find out when the small hand pointed west and the big hand pointed north. There must be some equivalent of an atomic clock in this world in which he now dwelled.

With a fresh batch of theodine on hand, James could be anywhere. He could be any number of anywheres. Tim ran through the dining hall and the billiards room. He took the grand staircase up a floor and swept through every hall he could access. There was no sign of him. If Tim had known where the man took up his residence, he would have checked there, but it was unclear whether James slept like a normal person anyway. It was quite possible that he did no such thing. Parts of him were obviously prone to intoxication and exhaustion, but the primary James, the one who commanded the rest, never seemed to tire.

Tim continued in this fashion, running through the halls, poking his head in a door here, an alcove there, ascending to another floor to repeat the search. Nothing seemed familiar. The endless maze of rooms seemed to go on and on. The decor of one passage bled seamlessly into another and the awful portraits seemed to repeat every dozen or so. They

were the same Geryon-like beasts he had encountered early in his stay at the estate. All the creatures wore the same aristocratically smug expression, poised in the same red velvet throne. They varied only in personal detail. Where one adorned himself in jewels and crowns, another was a bit more modest, wearing only a red, satin cape. A few had gray and white beards, lending an air of dignified aristocracy. One thing was certain to Tim, however. None of them was Geryon himself.

This revelation occurred just as Tim was nearing the dead end of a hallway on the top-most floor. He was running out of steam and decided to take a rest at the window sill there. He had stopped to examine several of the portraits here and there along the way. If none of the paintings were of Geryon, then who were these man-beasts? Former kings of the castle no doubt. Relatives perhaps? And would a likeness of Geryon one day join the ranks of these forgotten caricatures?

Tim pulled himself up into the window's ledge to catch his breath. He looked out across the rear of the estate just in time to see the tiny figure of Geryon waddling away from the castle with a small wheelbarrow loaded with the cook books. The beast rounded the west side of the lake, entered a trail leading that direction, and disappeared into the forest.

Tim was all too glad to see him go. It meant that Geryon had taken his advice and was off to

relieve himself of the burden of those books.

The sun was in full shine outside, a strange contrast to the gloom of the interior where Tim now sat some eighteen or twenty stories up. As soon as he had stopped moving, the sweat began to break through his pores and went to work cooling down his body. The poorly ventilated building trapped a good deal of heat as high up as he was and Tim noticed that he was soaking through his robes. Out over the grounds, a slight breeze tugged the treetops this way and that, making for a rather peaceful scene, Tim thought. The lake, too, rippled slightly with the gusts of wind and the deep, dark waters seemed to be calling him down for a refreshing splash.

Tim's thoughts rattled the walls of his mind. He wandered back through the trails of the grove that had brought him to this place. The old trailer park lay before him, strewn with trash and lovely as it had ever been. There was a cooler of beer next to the dirty couch he used to recline on. He wondered how many aquafurr hunts he had missed out on by now. Was his wife or any of the old cronies still alive? He had been put under the impression that the world he came from would have long gone to rot by now.

It was here in this state of nostalgia that weariness overcame him and he zoned out, staring deep into the center of the lake.

“Why don't you cool off in the lake?”

Tim shook himself awake. The voice was behind him. But whose cold voice had snuck up on

him all the way at the farthest reaches of the castle?

When Tim turned to scan the halls, there was nobody there. He looked left and right but could see no one.

“In here, dummy,” the voice said again.

Along the wall opposite the ledge Tim sat on there was the same familiar series of portraits. Old, Geryon-like beasts in any number of idiotic poses. Tim ran his eyes along each one of the still likenesses until he came to one painting that was markedly different from the rest. Inside this painting sat the very real, very animate, James, sitting back looking relaxed on a red throne.

“James! What are you doing in there?” Tim said.

“Oh, this is where I come for peace and quiet I suppose. Can’t even get any of that up here though. People come along and sit in windowsills and disturb the view.”

“Well I’m not sorry for you at this moment. Now that I have discovered you, I need your help.”

“I figured as much,” said James. “What is it you want?”

“I need to know what time it is.”

“Oh? Is that all?”

“I think so,” said Tim. “I mean, I think I’m looking for a special kind of time, like some kind of

special clock around here that is either on the floor or the ceiling?”

James leaned forward just a little bit in the giant red chair.

“Whatever would make you think that there would be a clock in such a ridiculous place?” he said. “Didn’t I tell you that time means nothing in this place? You’ve been frying too many eggs for the master and you should cool off that over-cooked brain of yours. Take my advice, kid. Go cool off in the lake. It’ll do you some good.”

“But I don’t have time for...” Tim began.

“How do you know you don’t have time if you don’t even know what time it is?” James was growing red in the face and the volume of his voice steadily increased as he spoke. “Let me guess. You think you need to know what time it is so you can be somewhere else at another particular time. Yes? Perhaps. So not only do you not know what time it is now, you do not know what time it is that you are supposed to be somewhere! You may have all the time in the universe, or you may very well have missed the thing altogether. You have no idea. And yet I have watched you frantically searching for me all over this castle as though you’ve got but a few minutes to accomplish some task.”

James was out of his seat now. He was leaning half way out of the portrait on the wall, like a person climbing out a window. Tim hopped down from his perch, prepared for a confrontation.

“You people and time!” the rant continued. “Time this and time that. Like that marker of efficiency ever got you anywhere.” James had climbed completely out of the painting now and was standing close enough to Tim that small strands of saliva were spattering Tim’s cheek as James became increasingly excitable. He was using his first and second fingers to make air quotes every time he used the word ‘time’. “All that *time* ever did for your people was mark the relentless cadence of wars and self-annihilation. Everyone thought they were so clever, as though twenty-six billion years of evolution was just going to hand them the green light to a utopia.”

“I thought the universe was only around fourteen billion years old...”

“It was when you left it Tim! Seems as though you’ve been away for a while then. Do you want to know what you’ve missed in all that *time* you’ve been away, Tim? Nothing all that exciting really. Would it matter at all if I told you that they blew themselves up? Or if I said that supplies simply ran out, that there simply wasn’t enough space, food or water to sustain the egocentricity of them all? Or what if I told you that evolution had something else in mind? Maybe the whole thing had climaxed long before your time there and the people you knew were already in a state of de-evolution, far enough down the road back to perdition that nothing was to be done about it. It wouldn’t really matter which of these stories I told you, because the point is that

there is nothing left. You couldn't go back to it if you wanted to. That's what *time* did to your people. It annihilated them. They're the better for it anyhow."

Tim, having stood face to face with James this long, enduring the awful remarks on the history of the human race, could take no more. He took one step back, in order to be able to reach out his arms and step forward once more, intercepting James by the throat with both hands. James went back a few paces, laughing aloud the whole time. He was hysterical. The eyes bulged farther and farther out of his head as Tim's grasp tightened around James' neck. The two men went around in circles with James hardly resisting. The laughing went on and on, increasing in intensity all the while and spit flying in all directions from the strangled man's mouth. Tim was cursing and squeezing, trying to ever harder to cease James' mania.

It was Tim who began to lose steam while the victim continued to do nothing. Tim's grip slowly began to relax and the anger subsided. James freed himself from the embrace and took a few steps away from Tim who was bent over his knees trying to catch his breath.

James walked over to the window and looked out across the grounds. With his eyes transfixed somewhere out beyond, he said to Tim, "why don't you go for a little dip in the lake, Tim? You seem tense. You really should cool yourself off."

Contributor Bios

Brendan James Sigvardsson Cooney is 26 years old and currently works as a bartender. He grew up just outside of New York City in the small village of Malverne. His formal education lies in architecture and design, although, he has a strong passion for illustration. He enjoys working with traditional methods in mediums such as graphite, charcoal, Ink, acrylic paints, and water colors. He's an explorer of all creative avenues and has even worked as a tattoo artists' apprentice. Recently married he eat, sleeps and works in New York City.

Anika Ledlow eats super-white tuna nigiri. She resides (mainly) in Portland (Oregon) where she studies Russian, Poetry, Russian Poetry and the like.

Pete McArdle waits breathlessly by his land-line phone, waiting for the call from Random House, or perhaps George Lucas, re: his (Pete's) amazing entre into the world of letters. Pete, however, is hopelessly old, he can barely hear the phone ring and writes in 12-point Courier New because it reminds him of his Smith-Corona. Fact is, Pete simply enjoys writing weird sh---, ahem, stories, and then likes to imagine (usually while soaping up in the shower), the wan chagrined faces of readers as they encounter his literary stylings.

Daniel Bagley would like to encourage you to send him jokes, poems, stories, and hate mail at

dbagley3@gmail.com. Daniel is involved in things you don't even know about: intrigues that make your buildings seem frail. He would like to thank himself for writing this type of stuff about himself. Also, he will be getting hungry soon, and would like to know if someone can write him something edible and free range.

Stephen Schwegler is the author of *Perhaps.*, the co-author of *Screw the Universe* and one time head of livestock at [Jersey Devil Press](#). His work has been published by *Short, Fast, and Deadly*, *Stanley the Whale* and *Curbside Splendor Publishing* among others. There's a high probability that he's sitting on his couch right this very minute not being the least bit productive.

James Lipton is not THAT James Lipton. This James Lipton is totally different. This James Lipton is someone who has sex with celebrities on television and has weird hair. When you play *Fuck, Marry, Kill*, this James Lipton is always your answer. Always.

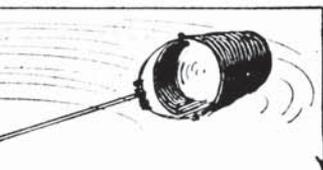
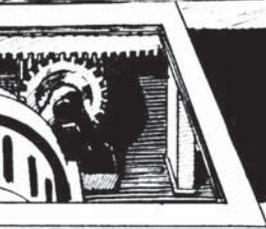
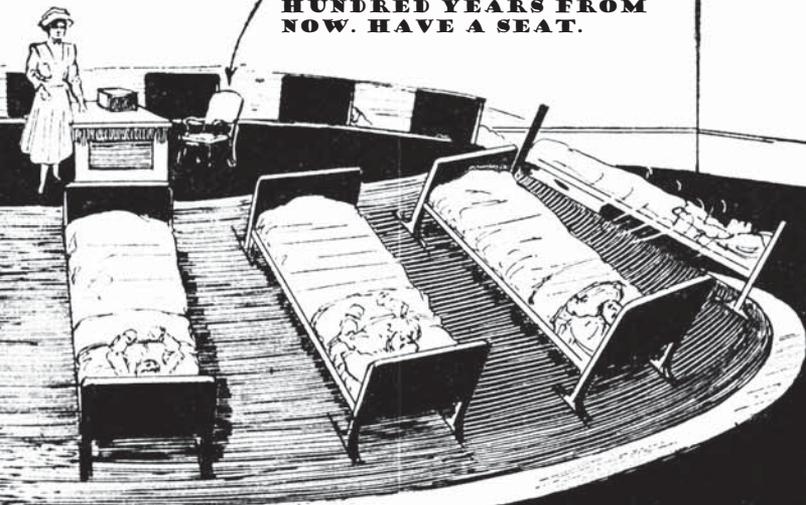
Mike Wiley is an active author and musician. He graduated from the University of Oregon in 2006 with a bachelor in philosophy before moving to New York in 2008 with his wife where he consistently stays two steps behind the game. Drop him a line at rosebombsexplode@gmail.com to say whadup!

Cat Baldwin is an artist and illustrator residing Brooklyn with her talented husband and their two weird cats. Her artworks include by are not limited to: illustration, watercolor and digital graphics and can be seen at <http://catbee.com>. She doesn't like long walks on the beach very much. However, after having vacationed in Mexico for a week she thinks they are the most reliable way to see boobs.

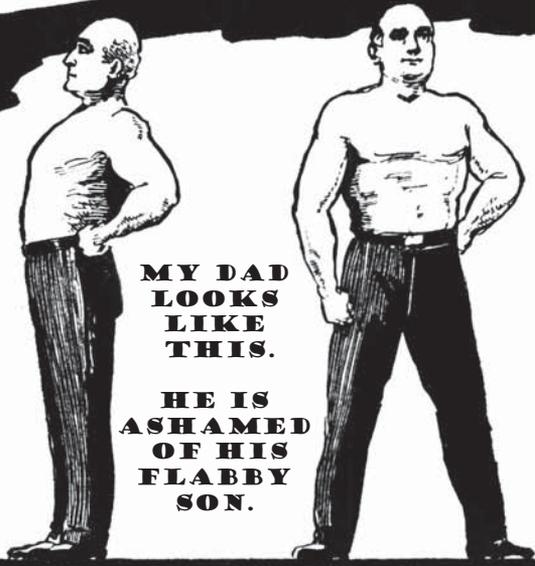
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